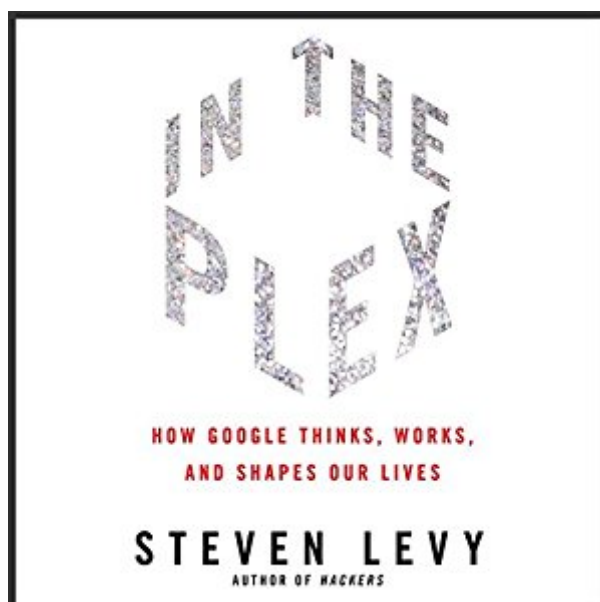


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In The Plex: How Google Thinks, Works, And Shapes Our Lives



Synopsis

Few companies in history have ever been as successful and as admired as Google, the company that has transformed the Internet and become an indispensable part of our lives. How has Google done it? Veteran technology reporter Steven Levy was granted unprecedented access to the company, and in this revelatory book he takes listeners inside Google headquarters - the Googleplex - to explain how Google works. While they were still students at Stanford, Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin revolutionized Internet search. They followed this brilliant innovation with another, as two of Google's earliest employees found a way to do what no one else had: make billions of dollars from Internet advertising. With this cash cow (until Google's IPO, nobody other than Google management had any idea how lucrative the company's ad business was), Google was able to expand dramatically and take on other transformative projects: more efficient data centers, open-source cell phones, free Internet video (YouTube), cloud computing, digitizing books, and much more. The key to Google's success in all these businesses, Levy reveals, is its engineering mind-set and adoption of such Internet values as speed, openness, experimentation, and risk taking. After it's unapologetically elitist approach to hiring, Google pampers its engineers with free food and dry cleaning, on-site doctors and masseuses, and gives them all the resources they need to succeed. Even today, with a workforce of more than 23,000, Larry Page signs off on every hire. But has Google lost its innovative edge? It stumbled badly in China. And now, with its newest initiative, social networking, Google is chasing a successful competitor for the first time. Some employees are leaving the company for smaller, nimbler start-ups. Can the company that famously decided not to be "evil" still compete? No other book has turned Google inside out as Levy does with *In the Plex*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Among recent great books describing the business and impact of information technology, *In the Plex* is one of the best. As impactful as *Pulse: The New Science of Harnessing Internet Buzz to Track Threats and Opportunities*, and with story-telling as engaging as *Idea Man: A Memoir* by the Cofounder of Microsoft this book will be on the shortlist of 2011 "must reads" in the business of technology. One of my favorite writers, Steven Levy of *Wired*, gained what may be unprecedented access to the employees and upper management of Google in order to explore the history, the work environment, key management decisions of one of the most innovative and culturally-influential companies of all time. Google manages this with 24,000 employees who see Google as the perfect employer for them. Levy describes Google as a place for the "unspeakably brainy", a kind of "geek never-never land" - just the right kind of environment to maximize innovativeness. Among the perks is the requirement for every engineer to spend a share of their time on personal projects. And as daunting as it sounds, Levy says Co-founder Larry Page actually still signs off on every single hire. The co-founders Sergey Brin and Page literally started Google from a garage. (The name was a misspelling of the mathematical term for 10 to the 100th power - Googol. But the name stuck.) Their big idea: efficient searches and how to make money at it by selling keywords.

If you'd ask me, which technology journalist should write a book about Google, then Steven Levy would be high on my list. Steven's been around for a long time and wrote the excellent "Hackers" and the not so excellent "The Perfect Thing." He is able to write about technology in an engaging way, making "In the Plex" an insightful book about how Google works... and how it doesn't work. The book is roughly organized around products (or projects). Since the book is about Google, it must start with the world of search and how Google was founded in Stanford. How the two Googler founders were free-thinking Montessori idealists with an huge interest and background in technology stumbled on the idea of ranking based on 'citations' and creating the world changing search -- google.com. It provides interesting stories about how advanced the Google search actually is and how it tried to learn from all the data it collects. The second chapter takes Google from the start-up to a profitable company with Google Ads. The uncool product that became a cool product by changing the perspective from "boring ads" to an interesting technological problem. How

to make ads useful? Introducing the auction, removing any middle-man and just do it based on data and algorithms was the trick Google used to ruin the existing markets of ads... or should I say, take it over. The Google Ads did lead to profit, which in turn lead to growth and...To chapter 3 and an IPO. Google was funded based on VC money and they will expect to go public, so they can get their investment back. But Google didn't want to do that the traditional way... no... it had to be different. Nerdier, Googlier. They wanted to also disrupt the financial world, but that financial world didn't take Google too serious.

If you want a good history of Google's early years, this is the book for you. The author, a Google booster, had unparalleled access to current and former Google employees and presents more information about the history and development of the company than has reached print before. If you're interested in the causes of Google's recent stumbles, though, the author's hagiographic approach gets in the way of understanding. Here are a half dozen "evil" approaches from the "don't be evil" company that simply are not adequately explained.(1) Google went into the China market and self-censored itself based on what it understood the Chinese autocrats wanted it to do. It didn't get out of China until the Chinese government launched a sophisticated hack that not only broke into and stole Google's top secret code, it stole the gmail contact lists of Chinese dissidents. Why didn't Google recognize the slippery slope of the rationalizations that allowed it to participate in this charade, especially co-founder Sergey Brin, who had escaped from a similar regime?(2) Google was initially in favor of the positive public good of "net neutrality" when it was trying to break into the field, but suddenly it's no longer in favor of such neutrality for wireless. Why the about-face?(3) In its book scan project Google initially took the legal position that what it was doing was fair use, and the author makes clear that the legal community thought it would win on this point. (p. 362). Yet ultimately Google bought into a suggestion from the Writers Guild of America that Google should become the designated internet bookstore for copyrighted books that are out of print and that it should create a registry to determine who should be paid for the books.

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