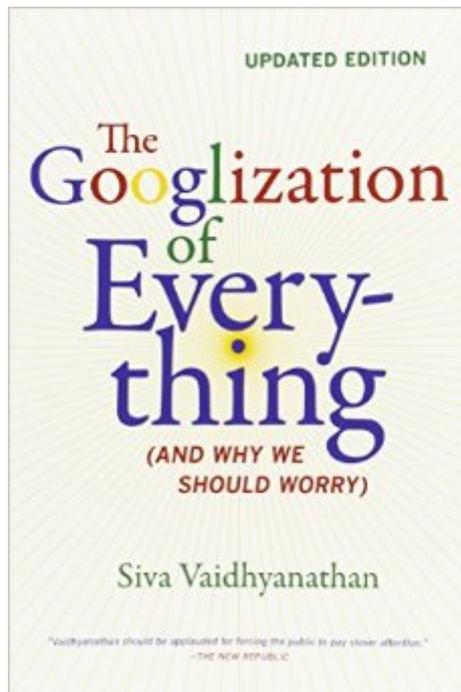


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The Googlization Of Everything: (And Why We Should Worry)



Synopsis

In the beginning, the World Wide Web was exciting and open to the point of anarchy, a vast and intimidating repository of unindexed confusion. Into this creative chaos came Google with its dazzling mission: To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible; and its much-quoted motto, "Don't be evil." In this provocative book, Siva Vaidhyanathan examines the ways we have used and embraced Google; and the growing resistance to its expansion across the globe. He exposes the dark side of our Google fantasies, raising red flags about issues of intellectual property and the much-touted Google Book Search. He assesses Google's global impact, particularly in China, and explains the insidious effect of Googlization on the way we think. Finally, Vaidhyanathan proposes the construction of an Internet ecosystem designed to benefit the whole world and keep one brilliant and powerful company from falling into the "evil" it pledged to avoid.

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Customer Reviews

The Googlization of Everything offers a crisp vision for what kind of information society we should be building. That one might not agree with it is a feature -- this is a book that doesn't state the obvious. Rather, it pushes us to rethink what we take for granted, noticing the medium in which we swim, instead of just moving right along. The book is an impressive synthesis of the current thinking on and around Google -- much of it applicable to any contemporary dot-com with runaway success. One of Siva's objections to the "googlization" of the online knowledge space is that while institutions

like libraries and universities typically plan to be around in a hundred years, companies like Google do not necessarily have, or plan for, such staying power. This is a nicely contestable sentiment -- that, as a corporate entity, Google is inherently shorter lived than, say, the University of Virginia, or at least its values are less consistent over time. It sets up a deeper question of what mix of institutions ought to contribute to the world and serve as gateways to our accumulated knowledge, and with what ethos (ethoi?). In the last section, Siva proposes a Human Knowledge Project. The name is derived from the Human Genome Project. It is intended to be a "global information ecosystem," essentially a Google by and for the public sphere: "The Human Knowledge Project should [be] open, public, global, multilingual, and focused. It should be sensitive to the particular needs of communities of potential knowledge users around the world, yet it should be committed to building a global system that can erase the gaps in knowledge that currently exist between a child growing up in a poor village in South Africa and another growing up in a wealthy city in Canada.

Google's been in the news a lot the past week. Concerned about the quality of their search results, they're imposing new penalties on "content farms" and certain firms, including JC Penney and Overstock.com. Accusations are flying fast and furious; the "antichrist of Silicon Valley" has flatly told the Googlers to "stop cheating." As the debate heats up and accelerates in internet time, it's a pleasure to turn to Siva Vaidhyanathan's *The Googlization of Everything*, a carefully considered take on the company composed over the past five years. After this week is over, no one is going to really care whether Google properly punished JC Penney for scheming its way to the top non-paid search slot for "grommet top curtains." But our culture will be influenced in ways large and small by Google's years of dominance, whatever happens in coming years. I don't have time to write a full review now, but I do want to highlight some key concepts in *Googlization*, since they will have lasting relevance for studies of technology, law, and media for years to come. Cryptopicon Dan Solove helped shift the privacy conversation from "Orwell to Kafka" in a number of works over the past decade. Other scholars of surveillance have first used, and then criticized, the concept of the "Panopticon" as a master metaphor for the conformity-inducing pressures of ubiquitous monitoring. Vaidhyanathan observes that monitoring is now so ubiquitous, most people have given up trying to conform. As he observes, [T]he forces at work in Europe, North America, and much of the rest of the world are the opposite of a Panopticon: they involve not the subjection of the individual to the gaze of a single, centralized authority, but the surveillance of the individual, potentially by all, always by many.

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