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World War 3.0: Microsoft And Its Enemies



Synopsis

The Internet Revolution, like all great industrial changes, has made the world's elephantine media companies tremble that their competitors-whether small and nimble mice or fellow elephants-will get to new terrain first and seize its commanding heights. In a climate in which fear and insecurity are considered healthy emotions, corporate violence becomes commonplace. In the blink of an eye-or the time it has taken slogans such as "The Internet changes everything" to go from hyperbole to banality-"creative destruction" has wracked the global economy on an epic scale. No one has been more powerful or felt more fear or reacted more violently than Bill Gates and Microsoft. Afraid that any number of competitors might outflank them-whether Netscape or Sony or AOL Time Warner or Sun or AT&T or Linux-based companies that champion the open-source movement or some college student hacking in his dorm room-Microsoft has waged holy war on all foes, leveraging its imposing strengths. In *World War 3.0*, Ken Auletta chronicles this fierce conflict from the vantage of its most important theater of operations: the devastating second front opened up against Bill Gates's empire by the United States government. The book's narrative spine is *United States v. Microsoft*, the government's massive civil suit against Microsoft for allegedly stifling competition and innovation on a broad scale. With his superb writerly gifts and extraordinary access to all the principal parties, Ken Auletta crafts this landmark confrontation into a tight, character- and incident-filled courtroom drama featuring the best legal minds of our time, including David Boies and Judge Richard Posner. And with the wisdom gleaned from covering the converging media, software, and communications industries for *The New Yorker* for the better part of a decade, Auletta uses this pivotal battle to shape a magisterial reckoning with the larger war and the agendas, personalities, and prospects of its many combatants. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

[Disclosure: I am a Microsoft employee] I found this book to be very balanced (though far from always flattering to Microsoft). Both sides take their licks at the hands of Mr. Auletta. Though I was paying moderately close attention during the course of the trial, this book pulls the events into perspective and shows how each side was approaching the case. As to the timing of this book release, the war is not yet over...but we do have a decent amount of perspective from the case since the trial and settlement negotiations were substantially complete in April 2000. The best part of the book is Chapter 21. Here, is much new material on what it was that Microsoft and the US government were able to agree to in a negotiated settlement. We get a picture of Microsoft, not agreeing that we broke the law, but willing to compromise and agree to behavioral remedies that would have given competitors assurances of access to Windows technology and freedom from retaliation. But Joel Klein failed in bringing the States into the negotiation process and was unable to form a concensus opinion about what it was the government(s) wanted from the case. And so an opportunity to close this conflict was missed....at an expense of millions of tax dollars, perhaps 100 million expense to MS, and helping to precipitate the stock market downslide of technology stocks in the spring of 2000 (thanks, Joel Klein and Janet Reno!).

Just finished the book and really enjoyed it. Auletta had so much material to synthesize into his viewpoint that at times I found the reading laborious (Warden reading MSFT's arguments in court, etc.). After I was done I was struck by the absence of any discussion of "reality distortion fields." Everyone has heard that Steve Jobs "RDFs" people, and I found myself seeing the fingerprints of RDFing everywhere (Bill Gates' intransigence early on, Judge Jackson thinking Microsoft's general counsel was dumb, etc.). After I finished I was gratified, but I found myself wanting to read an article on "Reality Distortion Fields in WW 3.0". As I can't email Auletta, I thought I'd throw this idea up here in case he reads his reviews.

Just when we were waiting for Microsoft to meekly split itself based on the outcome of the first landmark court decision, it looks like the software giant is racking up the points in what may be the most exciting appeals case in US history. World War 3.0 couldn't have come at a better time. This book goes into background about Internet browsers, the internet itself and computer operating

systems, a key point in the anti-trust lawsuit. And it does an equally thorough job of informing the reader about US anti-trust law. These details are essential to understanding the case against Microsoft, and they are presented here in a way that is detailed yet completely comprehensible. This would be dry reading indeed if there were not also vivid descriptions of the players; Bill Gates, brilliant, visionary, self-absorbed and completely ill-equipped to play the high-stakes game of personality; the prosecutor, who has gotten himself the case of a lifetime and Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, traditional and sober judge. What is surprising is how much Judge Jackson reveals in this book, as judges are notoriously close-mouthed. The appeals process is now underway and it ain't over till it's over. If you want to be informed on a case that will literally affect the future of technology, it's well worth reading *World War 3.0*.

...and you don't really have to be a geek to read this one. As a matter of fact, this book is also a very entertaining one, even if you're not a programmer or a computer scientist. Mr Auletta enjoyed an almost total access to court documents, and he even managed to get Judge Jackson to agree to be interviewed by him before he rendered his judgement, and later on his decision on what became the most important legal dispute of the last century. He raises some very important questions, a few of them being crucial, like: How do you distinguish between business hardball and illegal coercive methods? Is Microsoft a monopoly? If so, the law treats the company differently. But the most crucial of all questions is: Was there consumer harm? I guess these are the questions that leave much room for interpretation and controversy. It would appear that Microsoft did not milk customers by charging steep prices, although one might argue that this was because they sacrificed price to create an applications barrier to entry that would perpetuate their monopoly. The concepts of Sherman and Clayton acts have not changed, but what has changed over the years is that the courts insist more on evidence of consumer harm and are inclined to allow the marketplace to correct imbalances rather than the government. And by now, at the end of 2005 it would appear that the marketplace has rendered its judgement. Among many other things, the Microsoft stock has moved sideways for the last four, five years. All in all, "*World War 3.0*" is a very good account of this extraordinary trial, written in plain english, perfectly integrating the legal and the business drama at the core issues of this case. Besides, Mr Auletta offers memorable portraits of the main protagonists, ranging from Mr Gates and some of his lawyers to Judge Jackson, Mr Boies and Mr Klein. I liked the part where Mr Gates is portrayed as being more a businessman (although a brilliant one) rather than a seer, since Microsoft has always been famous for popularizing the inventions of others rather than innovating. Many economists and businessmen think Microsoft is a great

marketing company, but not a great technology one. After all, Mr Gates himself has many a time acknowledged that Microsoft's great successes - DOS, the graphical user interface, Windows - have all been clones. Among many business, technology and legal issues or concepts analyzed in this book, one of the parts I liked the most is when the author likens Mr Gates to Bing Crosby, who throughout his career borrowed a tune here and a tune there, got his marketing machine running, thus turning those tunes to instant hits. Few other critics could have put it better!

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