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Something to Think About -- Has Technology Changed You?

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Scott, Virginia. *Google. Corporations That Changed the World.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008. 9780313351273. 168 pages. \$45.00.

Reviewed by **Jerry Spiller** (Information Specialist, Michael Pincus Language Resource Center, College of Charleston) <spillerj@cofc.edu>

After its inception as a research project of **Stanford** graduate students **Larry Page** and **Sergey Brin**, **Google** quickly rose to dominance over its competitors in Internet search. Educational consultant **Virginia Scott** relates the history and philosophy of the company in *Google*, part of the *Corporations That Changed the World* series from **Greenwood Press**. The hardback edition of the 168 page work was released in October of 2008.

Scott begins *Google* with an

introduction to founders **Page** and **Brin**, and tells the story of how their collaborative project on information retrieval in the burgeoning Internet expanded into an incorporated search company that quickly became the leader in its field. **Scott** gives a brief overview of the World Wide Web of the 1990s, including major search engines of the time. She notes that it was **Google's** commitment to returning only the most relevant results, ranked by popularity, in a simple interface that clearly separated search results

from paid advertisements that led to the company's nearly unbridled success. After the reader is presented in the early chapters with how **Google** got to the top, later chapters focus on **Google's** growth into other services and its corporate philosophy, including its uniquely open-ended work environment and commitment to philanthropic interests such as renewable energy, climate change and the improvement of local public services around the world.

The book is not overly technical in its approach to technology topics, nor are its investigations into the operations of the corporation very complex. Insets giving background on relevant topics help the general reader, from "What is a Terabyte?" to expositions of "Angel Investors" as opposed to other types of investors, such as venture capitalists. Endnotes accompany each chapter, and an appendix points the reader to further resources on various topics. Despite a short chapter on controversies surrounding **Google**, the overall tone of the book is light and uncritical. In fact, many of the endnote references come from **Google** itself, resources such as the "Corporate Philosophy" or "Top 10 Reasons to Work at Google" posted on the **Google** site.

Considering its light tone and easy reading, **Scott's Google** would seem to be most at home in a middle or perhaps high school library, or in the hands of the reader needing only a quick and simple overview of the corporation whose approach to information retrieval, as the *Corporations That Changed the World* series posits, changed the way we live. 🐼

Something to Think About — Has Technology Changed You?

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library) <masse36e@erau.edu>

Sitting at my work computer, I think of my days without this higher technology. Starting to work at the **University of Florida** in 1963, there were no computers, no **Xerox** machines, no electric typewriters, no palm pilots, very few electric machines and nothing electronic. Our world was simpler, but very labor intensive. We were known by the work we did and what skills we used to complete those tasks. If you did binding, for instance, everyone knew that you retrieved materials from the periodical shelves, checked for paging, issues, indexes and completeness, made our slips either by hand or on the standard typewriter, tied the bundles for each binding, attached slips and boxed them for the bindery. Today, we have computer programs that create the slips for us and produce written reports that we circulate to our staff so they can assist patrons looking for the material. Technology hasn't found a way to collect the materials, attach the slips and box the materials, but the binderies use computer software to put the materials together and electronically sew or glue the materials into a "perfect" binding. Circulation has changed drastically over the years. There are no checkout cards any more that are filled out by hand. Our barcodes scanned by a machine will check the material out to the patron and we slide the book over demagnetizing heads to allow that patron to take the book from the building. When it comes back, we re-magnetize

the material so that it will be safe again. My goodness, I can even remember a "twixing" machine that checked other libraries for materials our patrons wanted to use. The stuff was sent through the mails to our desk and we contacted our patrons to pick up their information. Sometimes this process took a week, sometimes a month to six weeks. Now, much of the material is sent electronically through a computer in a number of hours or a single day, and we have new systems that can scan the material and send it electronically. Reference is changing incredibly fast through electronic resources (CDs and databases). We still use print and microform sources, but the amount of information a reference person needs to do their job is amazing.

How have these changes in technology modified your personality and ultimately your identity to others? I have noticed in myself and others that there is less diversity in our knowledge of other library jobs and more dependence on our co-workers for answers to some basic problems. That makes us more unidirectional and less able to see a "big" picture. This, I believe, has created an isolation of the individual worker, greater dependence on others, and a frustration of impatience when we have to wait on the help we need. Sure, my job is a little easier from the use of computers and recorded archive of materials, with faster contact of external sources (namely vendors and publishers), but I have a great

deal more to do, and must press myself to be con-

stantly aware of more radical influences on my work and time. I actually look forward to the loss of electricity sometimes, to remind us that we can still do the jobs manually. I try not to become so dependent on the technologies, and yet, that is what we are doing. I no longer feel defined by my job or skills. In a way, I feel lost in the midst of the technology. I insist on doing human and humane things with my job, so that I don't lose my identity altogether. I'm old fashioned and have some trepidation around new technology, but I plow on, using the new resources to accomplish my job faster. I'm just not sure it's better. To that end, I feel guilty about using the new technology, but I am able to accomplish my job with some new methods and possibly more thoroughness. How about you? How has technology changed you and your attitudes in your job? It is "something" we should think about! 🐼



A similar article titled "Has the Advent of Technology Changed Your Identity?" was published in the March 2009 issue of *Associates: an e-journal* located at http://associates.ucr.edu/journal/?page_id=262.