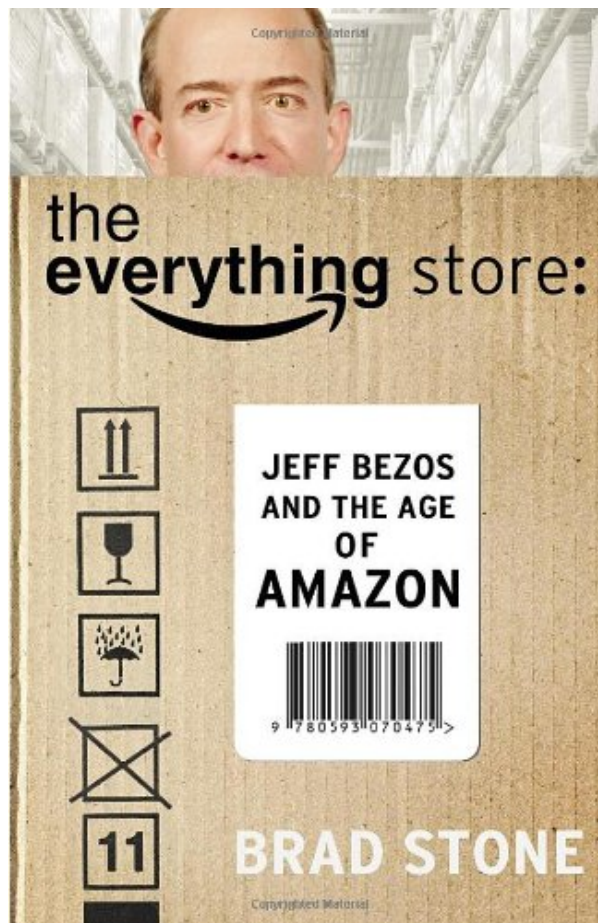
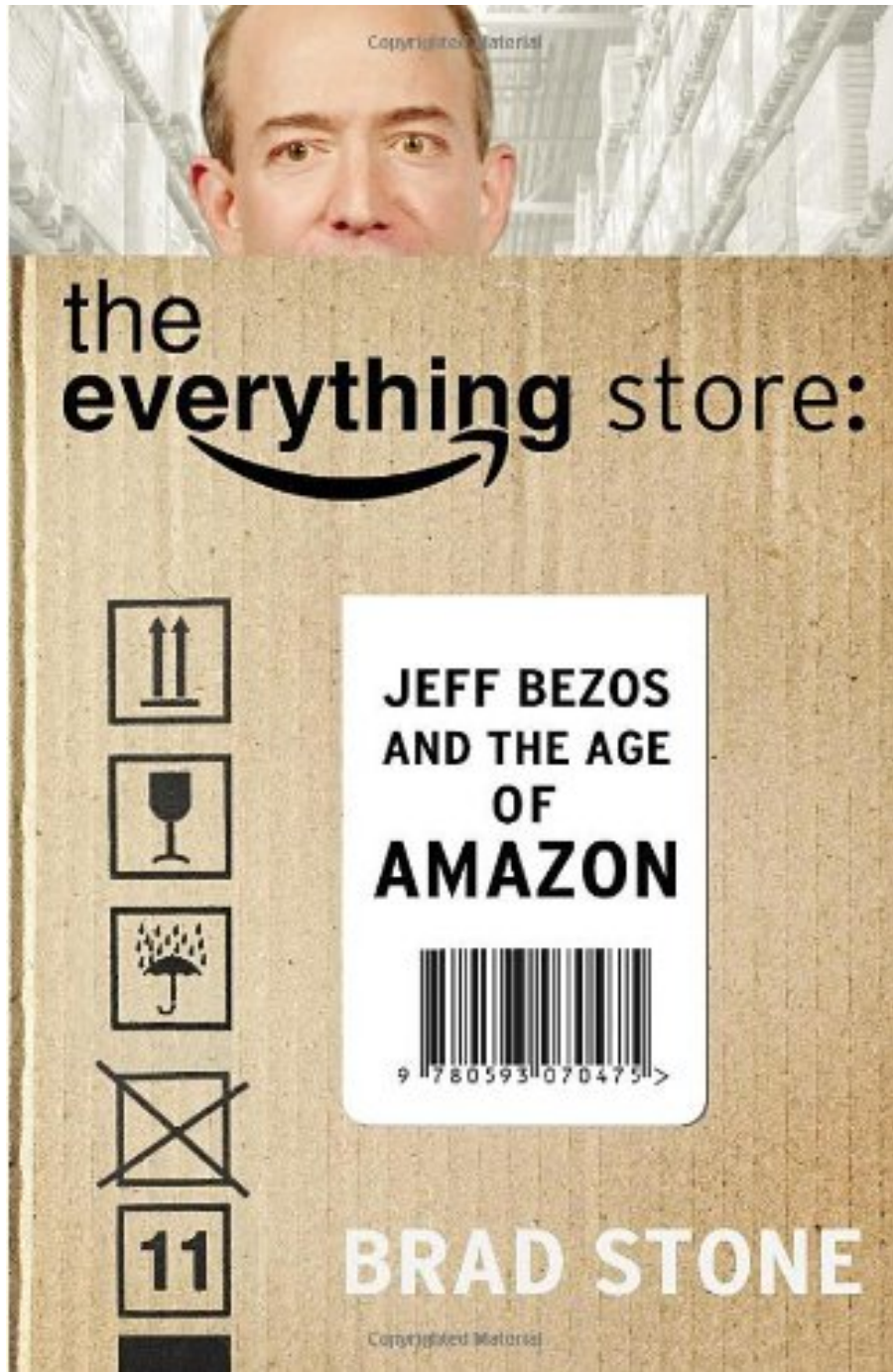


THE EVERYTHING STORE: JEFF BEZOS AND THE AGE OF AMAZON FROM BANTAM PRESS



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Review

Winner of the 2013 Financial Times and Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year Award

SELECTED AS A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR BY THE WASHINGTON POST, FORBES, THE NEW REPUBLIC, THE ECONOMIST, BLOOMBERG, AND GIZMODO, AND AS ONE OF THE TOP 10 INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM BOOKS OF 2013 BY NIEMAN REPORTS

"Mr. Stone tells this story with authority and verve, and lots of well-informed reporting.... A dynamic portrait of the driven and demanding Mr. Bezos." -- Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*

"Engrossing.... Stone's long tenure covering both Bezos and Amazon gives his retelling a sureness that keeps the story moving swiftly." -- *New York Times Book Review*

"Jeff Bezos is one of the most visionary, focused, and tenacious innovators of our era, and like Steve Jobs he transforms and invents industries. Brad Stone captures his passion and brilliance in this well-reported and compelling narrative." -- Walter Isaacson, author of *Steve Jobs*

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"*The Everything Store* is a revelatory read for everyone--those selling and those sold to--who wants to understand the dynamics of the new digital economy. If you've ever one-clicked a purchase, you must read this book." -- Steven Levy, author of *Hackers* and *In the Plex*

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The definitive story of Amazon.com, one of the most successful companies in the world, and of its driven, brilliant founder, Jeff Bezos.

Amazon.com started off delivering books through the mail. But its visionary founder, Jeff Bezos, wasn't content with being a bookseller. He wanted Amazon to become the everything store, offering limitless selection and seductive convenience at disruptively low prices. To do so, he developed a corporate culture of relentless ambition and secrecy that's never been cracked. Until now. Brad Stone enjoyed unprecedented access to current and former Amazon employees and Bezos family members, giving readers the first in-depth, fly-on-the-wall account of life at Amazon. Compared to tech's other elite innovators--Jobs, Gates, Zuckerberg--Bezos is a private man. But he stands out for his restless pursuit of new markets, leading Amazon into risky new ventures like the Kindle and cloud computing, and transforming retail in the same way Henry Ford revolutionized manufacturing.

THE EVERYTHING STORE will be the revealing, definitive biography of the company that placed one of the first and largest bets on the Internet and forever changed the way we shop and read.

- Sales Rank: #8002970 in Books
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.45" h x 1.26" w x 6.34" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover

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I did like this book

By S. Kaphan

I wasn't really planning on reviewing this book, because I was mentioned in it several times and it didn't seem appropriate. But several other people who were also mentioned in the book have already posted reviews, and in fact, MacKenzie Bezos, in her well known 1-star review, suggested that other "characters" might "step out of books" and "speak for themselves".

I was at Amazon for the first 5 years of its existence, so I also have firsthand experience of those times at the company, and I have been a fairly close observer since I left. By and large I found Mr. Stone's treatment of that which I know firsthand to be accurate -- at least as accurate as it is possible to be at this great a remove, and with no contemporaneous documentation of the early chaotic days or access to certain of the principals. Relying on people's memories of nearly twenty-year-old events is of necessity somewhat perilous. Of course there are a few minor errors here and there, but I don't have firsthand knowledge of important mistakes much less anything that appears to be intentionally misleading. But there are a few minor glitches. In my case, I can testify that I did not, in fact, have a bushy beard at age 17 when I worked at the Whole Earth Truck Store & Catalog in Menlo Park. It was a publisher and seller of books and other things, not a lending library. It was in a storefront and was no longer a mobile service operating out of a truck by the time I worked there (p. 32). But I do not think this is a reason to disregard the entire book; it's just some not terribly relevant detail the author got a bit wrong in a way that doesn't change the story materially. MacKenzie listed one error, which didn't seem especially awful or material to me, and then referred only vaguely to "way too many inaccuracies". Without a more explicit list of mistakes it is hard to know what to make of that. Breaking news: a new 372 page book has some errors!

Since Mr. Stone did not have access to Jeff Bezos for this book, but had to rely on previous interviews and the accounts of others, it would be surprising if there weren't a few mistakes regarding his thought processes. As part of my agreement to be interviewed for this book, I was allowed to read a draft of the chapter which covered the time I was there, and I offered a number of corrections, some of which Mr. Stone was able to verify and incorporate. To the extent I am quoted, my quotes are, while not complete, fair and in context. I don't love or agree with everything that Mr. Stone wrote about me -- especially his broader conclusions regarding the circumstances of my departure from the company -- but I do think it was fair and reasonable. I am aware of at least one other interviewee who was also given a chance to check over the chapter in which his story was discussed. I obviously can't know this, but I suspect that if Mr. Stone had been granted access to Jeff Bezos, that he would have extended a similar courtesy. I have a pretty high degree of confidence that Mr. Stone made a significant effort, and did what was in his power, to make the book accurate.

The irony is, of course, that by reviewing the book as MacKenzie Bezos did, she has brought an immense

amount more attention to it -- there are dozens of articles referring to her review via Google News this morning -- and its sales rank has shot up considerably. The book is not a fawning hagiography, but it is also hardly a completely negative account either. It describes not only Amazon's ultra-hardball business practices, but the better aspects of their services and products as well. To the extent of my knowledge it is a pretty realistic account, though necessarily incomplete. Of course Mr. Stone has his own point of view, and of course he does what nearly all biographers do, which is to impute thoughts and emotions to the people he writes about. It would be mighty dull reading without that, but I think readers are generally smart enough to understand that when they read biographies, especially unauthorized biographies, the author has to recreate some kind of persona to make the subject appear life-like. That doesn't make it fiction. This was written as a business book for a popular audience anyway, not as an academic treatise, so expecting every "Bezos thought..." to be footnoted, or couched in hypothetical language, is not realistic.

Especially in comparison to the sad collection of awful books that have been written on this subject, this one is much more detailed, more interesting, and a lot more deeply reported. Sure, there is plenty more that could be written about, and maybe someday somebody will. If and when that happens, I can only hope it is also "unauthorized" and not sanitized by a corporate PR department, and that some real investigative journalism is done, like Mr. Stone did here.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

The Mercenary Missionary

By T. Graczewski

Full disclosure: I'm a big Amazon fan. I've been writing reviews on the site for over a decade. I'm a highly satisfied shareholder and avid Prime customer. I also happen to believe that Jeff Bezos is among the most visionary and accomplished entrepreneurs and chief executives of modern times. In "The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon," veteran business reporter Brad Stone delivers an incisive, balanced, and fast-paced peak inside the secretive and amazingly innovative \$150 billion tech behemoth.

As a Silicon Valley technology executive who has long admired what Jeff Bezos has done up in Seattle, this book delivered two critical insights I found especially noteworthy.

First, nothing can compensate for a founder/CEO of genius with a commanding ownership share in the enterprise. The more I live and the more learn, the more I realize that individuals really, really matter, particularly when they are in a position to make sweeping decisions. Like Steve Jobs at Apple or Larry Ellison at Oracle or Henry Ford, truly amazing things happen only when lightning strikes: when visionary entrepreneurs are also strong enough to hold on to their business creations and guide them forward, often pushing the kind of bold gambles and innovative risks that classically trained CEOs beholden to Wall Street analysts simply would never ponder.

Nowhere is this more evident than with Amazon's improbable rise from the ashes of the Dotcom bubble in the 2000s. The early story of Amazon's rise in the mid-90s is familiar and, frankly, not terribly interesting in my opinion. A few daring and naïve young men and women in a garage pursuing a crazy dream that nobody thinks can work. It's been told a thousand times. What makes Amazon so impressive is how the company survived and then thrived in the later years when many in the industry had written the company off for dead or irrelevancy. If Amazon had had a founder like eBay's Pierre Omyidar, who quickly hired a seasoned executive like Meg Whitman to take over leadership of his highflying startup, I'm quite certain that the Amazon we know today would not exist. In fact, I'm nearly certain it would be gone, gobbled up by Walmart or some other retailer. Amazon Web Services, Kindle, Prime; each of these strategic initiatives were risky multi-billion dollar bets that would takes years to pay off, and yet Bezos bet big on each despite much hand-wringing from his board of directors and top lieutenants. As Stone writes, "Amazon had grown

from a beleaguered dot-com survivor battered by the vicissitudes in the stock market into a diversified company whose products and principles had an impact on local communities, national economies, and the marketplace of ideas.” In short, Amazon is the Amazon we know today only because of Jeff Bezos. He has a vision, an irrepressible will, and an iron grip on strategic decision making.

The second key insight has to do with that Bezosian vision, which Stone demonstrates is a relatively simple philosophy. “We don’t have a single big advantage,” Bezos has said, “so we have to weave a rope of many small advantages.” What is so remarkable is how tenaciously Bezos adheres to those principles and makes the most out of those small advantages, even when conventional business school wisdom suggests they are being foolish or reckless. At the core of the philosophy is long-term, customer centric thinking. Here’s how Bezos describes it: “We are genuinely customer-centric, we are genuinely long-term oriented and we genuinely like to invent. Most companies are not those things. They are focused on the competitor, rather than the customer. They want to work on things that will pay dividends in two or three years, and if they don’t work in two or three years they will move on to something else. And they prefer to be close-followers rather than inventors, because it’s safer. So if you want to capture the truth about Amazon, that is why we are different.” Again, only a company with a visionary founder with general management acumen and a commanding ownership stake in the enterprise can ensure that a company sticks to those kinds of principles in the face of mounting losses and withering criticism from Wall Street analysts.

Closely associated to this “long-term-customer-first” mentality is Amazon’s relentless focus on lowering prices. Stone suggests that a 2001 meeting between Bezos and Costco founder Jim Sinegal was pivotal. Sinegal told Bezos: “There are two kinds of retailers: there are those folks who work to figure how to charge more, and there are companies that work to figure how to charge less.” For Bezos it was an epiphany – and a roadmap. Amazon was “going to be the second, full-stop.” The focus on “customer first” and low prices has allowed Amazon to emerge as a world class, truly unique retailer that blends the best of “Walmart AND Nordstrom’s.”

These core values have shaped the culture at Amazon. The first, “frugality,” is starkly different from competitors like Google, famous for their free lunches and massages. “We try not to spend money on things that don’t matter to customers. Frugality breeds resourcefulness, self-sufficiency and invention. There are no extra points for headcount, budget pie or fixed expense.” To this day, senior Amazon executives flight coach and Stone notes that Bezos, one of the richest men in the world, still uses his coffee card at Amazon that allows him to get his 10th drink free. Next, Amazon prides itself on a no-holds-barred approach to getting things done, where teamwork is critical, yet all executives are exhorted to “Have Backbone.” “Disagree and Commit: Leaders are obligated to respectfully challenge decisions when they disagree, even when doing so is uncomfortable or exhausting. Leaders have conviction and are tenacious. They do not compromise for the sake of social cohesion. Once a decision is determined, they commit wholly.” In Bezos’ own words: “The reason we are here is to get stuff done; that is the top priority. That is the DNA of Amazon. If you can’t excel and put everything into it, this might not be the place for you.”

The drive for delivering lower costs has also developed a bare knuckles style of market competition. Stone suggests that Amazon is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to deliver on that low price promise, often throwing its weight around in a way that would even make the flinty executives in Bentonville blush. Once a new and threatening competitor like Zappos was identified, Bezos was prepared to go nuclear to ensure that either Zappos caved and sold out or they would be put out of business. “They have an absolute willingness to torch the landscape around them to emerge the winner,” one vanquished rival is quoted as saying.

The story of Kindle is illustrative as well. Bezos witnessed how quickly Apple destroyed Amazon’s music business with the launch of iPod and iTunes. He was determined not to see the same thing happen to their

core books business. His heavy handed approach with the major book publishers was reminiscent of Steve Jobs browbeating the major music labels. Bezos picked an eBook price of \$9.99 despite the howls of publishers and the absence of any market research to back up the decision. He picked \$9.99 straight from the gut, much as Jobs did with \$0.99 per song. The price ensured that Amazon would lose money and generated a near revolt from their publisher partners. Bezos simply didn't care; he stuck to his guns even in the face of a major lawsuit.

One of the few disappointing aspects of this book for me was how little attention Stone devoted to Bezos' private life, especially his marriage and family. Bezos married before founding Amazon and his wife, MacKenzie, was an early and important employee. Twenty-five years later they are still married and have four children. Yet none of this is discussed in the book. We learn in the book's final pages that MacKenzie still often drives Jeff to work in a Honda mini-van after dropping their kids off at school, giving the corporate titan a peck-on-the-cheek before depositing him at the gates of his empire. It's an intriguing glimpse into the human side of Bezos that the author did not pursue for one reason or another.

In closing, "The Everything Store" is an eye-opening account into an iconic and innovative corporation, which Stone calls "...relentlessly innovative and disruptive, as well as calculating and ruthless." Indeed, Amazon is something of a Jekyll and Hyde. Or to use Randy Komisar's terms from his 2001 book "The Monk and the Riddle," Amazon is both a "missionary" (a company with a mission beyond making money) and a "mercenary" (a company dedicated to competing and winning). "The Everything Store" is a good biography of a company; but only a lukewarm biography of Jeff Bezos the man, even though Amazon is, in many ways, the corporate manifestation of its brilliant founder and chief executive.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting, surface-level read about the complexity and mindset behind Amazon

By Kevin

As somebody who has been familiar with Amazon since they began (tech in Seattle is a small world), Amazon has always been in my peripherals so I was already somewhat familiar with Amazon's stigma, especially in this city, as well as what a lot of people have had to say about Amazon. This book only really scratches the surface of the mindset of Jeff and his executive team throughout the course of Amazon's history, but if you can take an objective viewpoint and read between the lines of the book you can get a pretty revealing idea of how Amazon operates and their philosophy behind a lot of what they do. There is a lot to get out of this book that other things are severely lacking (looking at you, New York Times).

Like other people have mentioned, this book paints Jeff in a little bit of a strange light, only focusing on his ruthless approach to business and e-commerce and spending little time talking about the fact that he is indeed human and has a wide range of emotions and isn't actually Darth Vader incarnate.

All in all, I enjoyed the book thoroughly. The pacing is quick, but not thin, and the author spends just enough time explaining situations to provide context without risking crafting a dense editorial. The language is smart, but not aloof, and the progression of the writing makes it easy to continue reading for long stretches of time unlike a lot of other books like this one.

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