



Inside the Giant Machine: An Amazon.com Story - Optimized for Kindle on Android Devices

S. Kalpanik , Pamela Traphagen (Editor) , Neha Talreja (Translator)

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On Dec. 14, 2009, customers ordered over 9.5 million items worldwide on Amazon, which is a record-breaking 110 items per second. How large a machine do you need to process and ship this kind of volume? How efficiently do you need operate it? And what kind of people do you need to keep it going?

The author, a former Technologist from Amazon.com writing under a pen name, gives us a vivid, sometime brutal inside scoop on Amazon.com's giant machinery, describing its cold and calculating culture in detail.

The story begins in Silicon Valley where we go through author's experiences in the fast moving world of a Hi-Tech start up. Soon thereafter, the author's start-up is acquired and he finds himself looking for a job.

He finds one in Seattle, a medley of lush green hills surrounded by snow capped mountains and sparkling blue waters. Amazon.com--an Internet company based in Seattle which has taken the stock markets by storm, and has been transforming itself from an online retailer to an eCommerce platform, led by a CEO who is not afraid to act goofy.

It begins as a story of a technologist leaving behind his beloved Silicon Valley for Seattle. It unfolds into a moving story capturing Seattle's beauty, its interesting people and culture; and the inside scoop on the dot-com world - both the excitement and joy of innovation, and also the dark side of a culture driven by metrics, including "Cruelty curve," a quota for letting go of a certain number of people every year, a gene pool improving methodology by putting the weakest 10% on a chopping block.

Inside the Giant Machine: An Amazon.com Story - Optimized for Kindle on Android Devices Details

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From Reader Review Inside the Giant Machine: An Amazon.com Story - Optimized for Kindle on Android Devices for online ebook

Rich Meyer says

Exceedingly mediocre. The only interesting bits were the description of Amazon's warehousing operation and the postscript about the OSHA interventions in Pennsylvania. One wonders about the integrity of an employee (and a company without fail-safes) that allows a young girl to "hack" into her father's personnel file without setting off any alarms. There's no big anti-Amazon expose here ... just a lot of whining and a lot of wingeing about apparent culture shock in Seattle. Complete waste of time and money.

Nate Benson says

Great read, really funny. If you're interested in Amazon, you definitely learn from this book. Since it's about this guy who works for them, you get to see some great behind-the-scenes action of what really went on/goes on. The guy got some laughs out of me too, like his daughter's names - ridiculous, but I guess it works for anonymity. xD I thought it was an interesting read, and since it's so short, you've really got nothing to lose if you want to chance it. Great information and funny commentary, so I don't think it really gets better than that.

Valentin Chiroasca says

I feel in Dhaka not Washington so I've stopped using Kindle.

Darko Doko says

I normally give 5 star to every book that I just can not put aside while reading. This is one of those books that you read in a breath of time, but the reason why I gave 4 star is that title might be misleading. The book is really well written and it's really interesting but it is not that much about Amazon. Nevertheless I enjoyed it.

Michelle says

I really liked this book, and this one is probably my favorite edition. It was such a fun read - the author's really witty and takes what might otherwise be a boring biography of Amazon into a complete story about the company's growth and how his own life was altered by that. It's about Amazon changing as a company, but it's also about the author's transformation in response to that. This book was great because you're bound to learn something new about Amazon, and you also get the opportunity to reflect on the author's life and how it relates to your own. Really a great combination of information and inspiration. I highly recommend it!

Patrice Sartor says

1.5 Stars.

This tale of the author's time at Amazon seems to me an example of a negative aspect of the proliferation of self-publishing. I feel this would be better served as a series of blog posts instead of a book. Maybe they even were on a blog at some point. *shrug*

Kalpanik explains how and why he left a high-powered job in Silicon Valley to join Amazon, in rainy Seattle. He mentions his family here and there. He attempts to exude charisma, wit, and cleverness, and he failed for me on all counts. His metaphors were eye-rolling at best. His reflections on the growth of his daughters felt awkward. I didn't connect with him as a character (or person), and scenes like the one where he danced with a stranger only distanced me further, instead of drawing me in.

(view spoiler)

In the end, I finished it, but only out of an obligation.

Ron says

Uhg. This was the most disappointing book I've read on my Kindle. Not even a full-length book, but longer than an amazon short. Reads like a series of blog posts, with very little insight into the workings of the company.

Not recommended.

Dennis Willingham says

I saw this offered as a free kindle book and picked it up. Very short, quick read. Interesting, a technocrat's view from the inside. The frustration he experiences over the best presented ideas winning out over better technical solutions is a common problem when non-experts have to make decisions on matters they don't really understand but know they need to do. I've worked in a number of technology companies and I don't think Amazon's review process, as he described it, is a whole lot more draconian than most. In every company I've worked for, if you were in the bottom 25% on your review, you needed to find a new job, fast.

Peter Heinrich says

Here's a hodge podge of reflective observations, Amazon.com corporate history, and strange personal anecdotes, many approaching TMI territory. As long-form casual writing, this book is uneven and its style distracting. As an exposé or true history of Amazon.com, its corporate culture, well-known CEO, or his metrics-driven management, this book is little better than that story you heard about the guy who wrote that

blog—you know, he was on NPR, talking about that thing—and feels about as authoritative.

I don't have a problem with Kalpanik's insights or personal impressions (full disclosure: I work for Amazon.com); I'm just not sure what to do with them. They don't rise to the level of investigative journalism, but neither are they a compelling memoir, even though I can relate to a lot of the details. What better illustrates this than my glacial progress through this slim volume? It took a long time to read because Kalpanik couldn't hold my interest.

This was a CreateSpace (self-published) book, and perfectly makes the case for old-school publishing. Sure, publishers may sometimes stand in the way of a refreshing outlook or stifle the little guy's unique creativity, but that would have saved me some time in this case.

Cliff Hays says

A few of the sections were interesting (the ones that actually talked about the inner workings of Amazon). The author had a tendency to digress into strange memoir-like tangents. Not bad if you're into that sort of thing, but I am not.

David says

Weak sauce. Poorly written, jumped around a lot, and didn't actually provide much insight into working at Amazon.

Nate Benson says

I thought it was great, and this edition is by far the best. I thought it was just about Amazon, going back through the company's history, but it was actually made a lot more interesting by having the author's thoughts about it all in there. It's cool to see it from the perspective of someone who watched it happen rather than what the media decides to report. Great sense of humor, this guy, too - his daughters' names made me literally laugh out loud! It's a great read, definitely worth a shot if you're interested in learning about Amazon. The behind-the-scenes information you get from this is very illuminating.

Katie says

While Kalpanik is obviously a mathematical genius, his talents don't extend to writing. Readers hoping to learn the down and dirty about Amazon will be disappointed, as the only two revelations are the difficulty of being hired at the company and that the CEO is a jerk. A real revelation would have been to learn that there's a CEO that ISN'T a jerk. There is an article written about the horrible working conditions in the warehouse in PA, but this isn't written by Kalpanik.

This book reads more like an outline that glosses over the interesting parts. Not recommended.

Michelle says

I loved this! Inside the Giant Machine is so well written - very witty and humorous, I was laughing half the time! It's just as much about the author's transition through the process as it is about Amazon's transformation into the huge company it is today. It was insightful and inspiring all at the same time. I thoroughly enjoyed this!

Tom Schulte says

This a real mess of a book: a discursive mismatch of Seattle culture clash for the Asian outsider, Silicon Valley longing, and buyer's remorse over an Amazon career.

Kalpanik does seem to have some convincing facts that Amazon is a modern day sweatshop, at least for warehouse workers and is even a soulless metrics-driven slog of working for The Man at Keeping-The-People-Down, Inc. even for white collar personnel.
