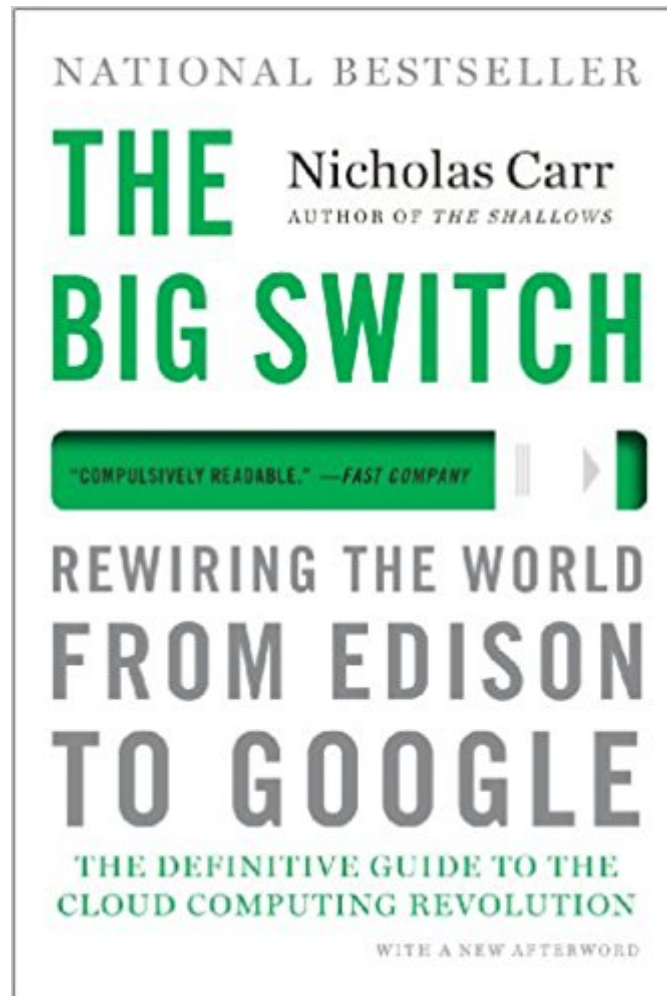




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# The Big Switch: Rewiring The World, From Edison To Google



## Synopsis

â œMagisterial. . . . Draws an elegant and illuminating parallel between the late-19th-century electrification of America and todayâ™s computing world.â •â •Salon Hailed as â œthe most influential book so far on the cloud computing movementâ • (Christian Science Monitor), The Big Switch makes a simple and profound statement: Computing is turning into a utility, and the effects of this transition will ultimately change society as completely as the advent of cheap electricity did. In a new chapter for this edition that brings the story up-to-date, Nicholas Carr revisits the dramatic new world being conjured from the circuits of the â œWorld Wide Computer.â •

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nicholas Carr's latest book The Big Switch is not the book that many would expect, in fact its better. Carr, who made his fame by making the assertion that IT doesn't Matter and then asking the question Does IT matter? deals with this subject for about 10% of the book. The remainder concentrates on Carr's looking forward to business, society, politics and the world we are creating. It's a welcome switch as it enables Carr to discuss broader issues rather than hammering on a narrow point. The net score of three stars is based on the following logic. This book gets four stars as it's a good anthological review of broader issues that have been in the marketplace for some time. It loses one star because that is all it is, a discussion, without analysis, ideas, alternatives or business applications the book discusses rather than raises issues for the future. Ostensibly the big switch is between today's corporate computing which has islands of individual automation to what

Carr calls the world wide computer - basically the programmable internet. Carr's attempt to coin a new phrase - world wide computer, is one of the things that does not work in this book. It feels contrived and while the internet is undergoing fundamental change, the attempt at rebranding is an unnecessary distraction. Overall, this is a good book and should be considered as part of the overall future of economics and business genre rather than a discussion of IT or technology. Carr is an editor at heart and that shows through in this book. 80% of the book is reviews and discussions of the works of other people. I counted at least 30 other books and authors that I have read and Carr uses to support his basic argument.

Save your money. This book contains nothing but an extended defense of a Utopian vision of the IT future first published in Carr's HBR article. Limited understanding of underlying IT technologies, haziness and lack of concrete detailed examples (obscurantism) are typical marks of Carr's style. Carr used focus on IT shortcomings as a smokescreen to propose a new utopia: users are mastering complex IT packages and perform all functions previously provided by IT staff, while "in the cloud" software service providers fill the rest. This is pretty fine humor, the caricature reminding me mainframe model, but not much more. His analogies are extremely superficial and are completely unconvincing (Google actually can greatly benefit from owning an electrical generation plant or two :-). Complexity of IT systems has no precedents in human history. That means that analogies with railways and electrical grid are deeply and irrevocably flawed. They do not capture the key characteristics of the IT technology: its unsurpassed complexity and Lego type flexibility. IT became a real nerve system of the modern organizations. Not the muscle system or legs :-). Carr's approach to IT is completely anti-historic. Promoting his "everything in the cloud" Utopia as the most important transformation of IT ever, he forgot (or simply does not know) that IT already experienced several dramatic transformations due to new technologies which emerged in 60th, 70th and 90th. Each of those transformations was more dramatic and important than neo-mainframe revolution which he tried to sell as "bright future of IT" and a panacea from all IT ills. For example, first mainframes replaced "prehistoric" computers.

This is a very worthwhile easy to absorb book. The author is thoughtful, well-spoken, with good notes and currency as of 2007. The one major flaw in the book is the uncritical comparison of cloud computing with electricity as a utility. That analogy fails when one recognizes that the current electrical system wastes 50% of the power going down-stream, and has become so unreliable that NSA among others is building its own private electrical power plant--with a nuclear core, one

wonders? While the author is fully aware of the dangers to privacy and liberty, and below I recap a few of his excellent points, he disappoints in not recognizing that localized resilience and human scale are the core of humanity and community, and that what we really need right now, which John Chambers strangely does not appear willing to offer, is a solar-powered server-router that gives every individual Application Oriented Network control at the point of creation (along with anonymous banking and Grug distributed search), while also creating local pods that can operate independently of the cloud while also blocking Google perverted new programmable search, wherer what you see is not what's in your best interests, but rather what the highest bidder paid to force into your view. The author cites one source as saying that Google computation can do a task at one tenth of the cost. To learn more, find my review, "Google 2.0: The Calculating Predator" and follow the bread crumbs. The author touches on software as a service, and I am reminded of the IBM interst in "Services Science.

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