



Hard Drive: Bill Gates and the Making of the Microsoft Empire

By James Wallace, Jim Erickson

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The true story behind the rise of a tyrannical genius, how he transformed an industry, and why everyone is out to get him.

In this fascinating exposé, two investigative reporters trace the hugely successful career of Microsoft founder Bill Gates. Part entrepreneur, part *enfant terrible*, Gates has become the most powerful -- and feared -- player in the computer industry, and arguably the richest man in America. In *Hard Drive*, investigative reporters Wallace and Erickson follow Gates from his days as an unkempt thirteen-year-old computer hacker to his present-day status as a ruthless billionaire CEO. More than simply a "revenge of the nerds" story though, this is a balanced analysis of a business triumph, and a stunningly driven personality. The authors have spoken to everyone who knows anything about Bill Gates and Microsoft -- from childhood friends to employees and business rivals who reveal the heights, and limits, of his wizardry. From Gates's singular accomplishments to his equally extraordinary brattiness, arrogance, and hostility (the atmosphere is so intense at Microsoft that stressed-out programmers have been known to ease the tension of their eighty-hour workweeks by exploding homemade bombs), this is a uniquely revealing glimpse of the person who has emerged as the undisputed king of a notoriously brutal industry.

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Editorial Review

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Hard Drive charts Gates's missteps as well as his successes: the failure of OS/2 and the embarrassing delays in bringing Windows to the marketplace; the highly publicized split with IBM, which then forged an alliance with Apple to battle Microsoft; the public relations fallout over various exploits of Gates; and the investigations by the Federal Trade Commission. Wallace and Erickson also examine the combative, often abrasive side of Gates's personality that has alienated many of Microsoft's rivals and even employees, and led to his being labeled "The Silicon Bully" by *Business Month Magazine*. They report:

In the early 80's, Microsoft's Multiplan lost out to Lotus 1-2-3 in the marketplace. According to one Microsoft programmer, a few of the key people working on DOS 2.0 had a saying at the time that "DOS isn't done until Lotus won't run." They managed to code a few hidden bugs into DOS 2.0 that caused Lotus 1-2-3 to breakdown when it was loaded. "There were as few as three or four people who knew this was being done," the employee said. He felt the highly competitive Gates was the ringleader.

The first two female executives hired at Microsoft in 1985 were recruited to meet federal affirmative action guidelines so that the company could qualify for a lucrative Air Force contract. One source says, "They would say, 'Well, let's hire two women because we can pay them half as much as we will have to pay a man, and we can give them all this other crap work to do because they are women.' That's directly out of Bill's mouth...." Gates treated one of these executives so badly that she asked to be transferred away from him.

Microsoft managers used the company's e-mail system to secretly spy on employee work habits. Only those employees who worked weekends could collect bonuses. In time word got out and some employees logged into their e-mail on weekends with a modem from home so it would appear they had come in.

From Publishers Weekly

In a biting biography and computer-industry expose, two Seattle Post-Intelligencer journalists here relate in dramatic detail how a moody, computer-dazzled prep-school whiz kid, a Harvard dropout at age 19, formed his own company, now Microsoft Inc., with a few friends. They developed and marketed in aggressive style a series of personal-computer software applications and operating systems, the phenomenal sales of which by some accounts have made 37-year-old William H. Gates Jr. the richest person in America. Alternately cooperating and competing with industry giants Apple, Xerox and IBM, "Chairman Bill" worked 20-hour days in Levis and loafers and relaxed by driving his Mercedes at speeds up to 150 mph, as Microsoft set industry standards in desktop-computer languages and programs. Driven and hard-driving, Gates has engendered admiration, envy, imitation, complaints of unfairness and an FTC investigation. \$60,000 ad/promo; author tour.

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From Library Journal

Seattle Post-Intelligencer reporters Wallace and Erickson present an in-depth portrait of Gates, the 35-year-old chairman and co-founder of Microsoft, from his early years as a young computer genius to his current status of billionaire. Throughout the work, the authors include recollections of Gates's business associates, friends, and former employees. They tell Microsoft's story from its founding in 1975 through developments in early 1992. Wallace and Erickson also chronicle the Federal Trade Commission's recent investigation of Microsoft for possible antitrust violations. The authors present a history of developments in the computer

and software industry and the relationships among notable companies, including IBM, Microsoft, and Apple. Daniel Ichbiah and Susan L. Knepper's *The Making of Microsoft* (LJ 11/1/91) covers the same material, but *Hard Drive* provides a more detailed portrait of the complex Gates as well as a closer look at the organization of Microsoft. Highly recommended.

- Lucy Heckman, *St. John's Univ. Lib., Jamaica, N.Y.*

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