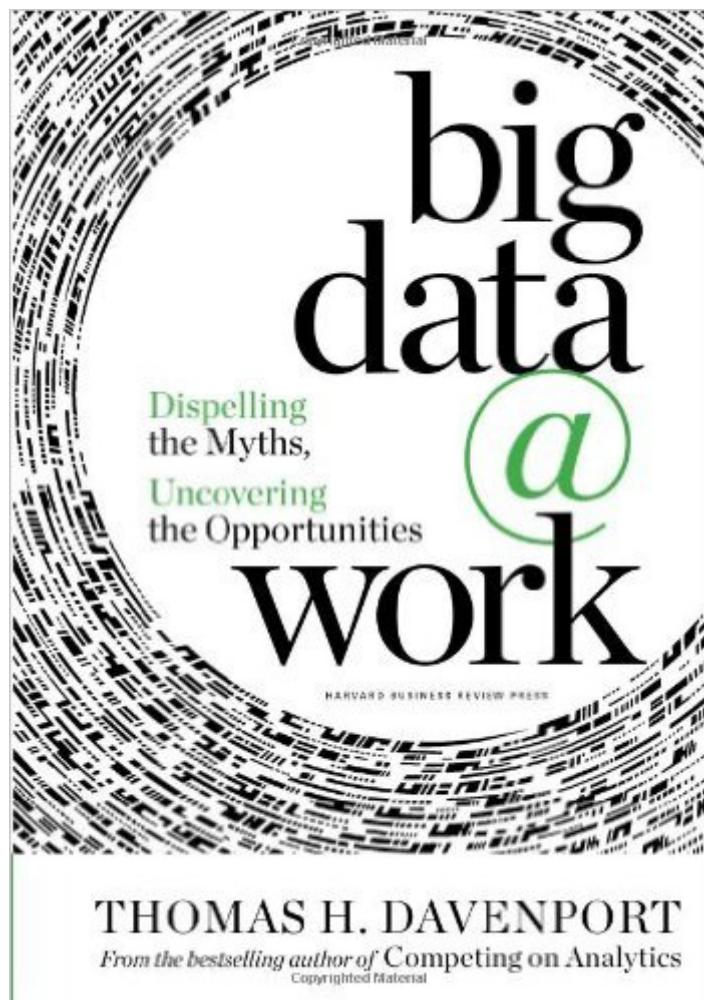


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Big Data At Work: Dispelling The Myths, Uncovering The Opportunities



THOMAS H. DAVENPORT

From the bestselling author of Competing on Analytics

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Synopsis

Go ahead, be skeptical about big data. The author was at first. When the term "big data" first came on the scene, bestselling author Tom Davenport (Competing on Analytics, Analytics at Work) thought it was just another example of technology hype. But his research in the years that followed changed his mind. Now, in clear, conversational language, Davenport explains what big data means and why everyone in business needs to know about it. *Big Data at Work* covers all the bases: what big data means from a technical, consumer, and management perspective; what its opportunities and costs are; where it can have real business impact; and which aspects of this hot topic have been oversold. This book will help you understand: Why big data is important to you and your organization; What technology you need to manage it; How big data could change your job, your company, and your industry; How to hire, rent, or develop the kinds of people who make big data work; The key success factors in implementing any big data project; How big data is leading to a new approach to managing analytics. With dozens of company examples, including UPS, GE, United Healthcare, Citigroup, and many others, this book will help you seize all opportunities from improving decisions, products, and services to strengthening customer relationships. It will show you how to put big data to work in your own organization so that you too can harness the power of this ever-evolving new resource.

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Customer Reviews

This slim volume provides an adequate, breezy introduction to big data. On the plus, it's a light book, easy to read, easy to digest. The tone is warm and friendly, and the book is quite a pleasure to read. If you just need an overview, and if you are willing to acknowledge that what you are reading barely scratches the surface of the topic -- and that is a legitimate purpose for a book -- then this is perfect. If you want a first, "get your feet wet" kind of book, this is perfect. I think you'd have a hard time finding an easier, more entertaining introduction to the field. In chapter one, we soon encounter the line, "These aren't real facts about the dazzling nature of data volumes and types today -- I made them up -- but they're probably not that far off." Then in chapter five we get "My focus here is not on how Hadoop functions in detail, or whether Pig or Hive is the better scripting language (alas, such expertise is beyond my technological pay grade anyway)". That's a decent indicator of where this book falls on the breezy, indicator scale. If you have a technical background, you will not like this book. It is mostly accurate, most of the time. That is not to say that it is incorrect, so much as incomplete. It defines scripting languages as "Programming languages that work well with big data (e.g., Python, Pig, Hive)". Yes, you can use scripting languages to deal with large data. You can also use compiled languages like C#. Cobol has been doing this kind of work for decades. Scripting languages can be used for things beyond data crunching -- a chat client or a game for example. So, here we get a kind of rounding of the corners -- a simplification for sake of clarity.

Big data, at least today, requires some educated faith. ROI is difficult to define in advance--particularly when it involves new products and services or faster decisions, according to Thomas Davenport in this book. Nonetheless, some businesses are getting significant benefits from employing data scientists to work on Big Data, so it definitely seems to be something worth investigating. Although the idea of Big Data is not precisely defined, the characteristics of Big Data described by the author include unstructured formats, volume of greater than 100 terabytes, existing in a constant flow rather than a static pool, analysed by machine learning rather than hypothesis, and intended for data-based products rather than internal decision support. These are trends rather than absolutes, as Big Data includes more conventional types of data as well. The key to deriving maximum advantage from Big Data seems to involve employing the smartest data scientists to analyse the data. Good data scientists are likely to be rare and expensive, given the ideal traits described by the author:^{*} Understanding of big data technology architectures and coding^{*} Improvisation, evidence-based decision making and action orientation^{*} Strong communication and relationship skills, particularly in dealing with senior management^{*} High level skills in statistics, visual analytics, machine learning, and analysis of unstructured data^{*} Good

business sense and focus on commercial value. The book assiduously avoids using technical language, and as a result the book avoids answering some of the questions raised in readers' minds.

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