



# AOL.com

*Kara Swisher*

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## **AOL.com** Kara Swisher

In 1996, Kara Swisher, then a reporter at The Washington Post, was granted unprecedented access to one of the hottest and most closely watched companies in the world, America Online, Inc. In **aol.com**, Swisher has written a book that captures the secrets of how AOL beat the competition and became the world's biggest online company. Swisher also reveals the company's behind-the-scenes dealings with Microsoft cofounders Bill Gates and Paul Allen, CompuServe, Prodigy, Netscape, and the Christian Right.

Throughout its existence, AOL has repeatedly been written off by the media and the high-tech world. Bill Gates threatened to buy it or bury it. Deep-pocketed competitors such as CompuServe and Prodigy thought little of their smaller rival. And AOL made matters worse by committing a series of public-relations and technical blunders that became front page news and enraged its subscribers.

But the company--a "cyber-cockroach"--refused to die. Now, with over eleven million subscribers, AOL is the undisputed leader in the online world, vitally positioned at the nexus of big business, high tech, advertising, and new media. In telling the story of AOL, Swisher also conveys the fascinating history of the online business, which has its origins in the dreams of an eccentric and little-known entrepreneur named Bill Von Meister, whose grand ideas and big spending spawned the fledgling company that would become AOL. But it fell to a young marketing executive named Steve Case to build AOL while fending off an onslaught of wealthier competitors and suitors. Ultimately, as Swisher vividly illustrates, AOL gained supremacy because Case possessed the best vision for his company, establishing AOL as a vibrant virtual community rather than an online shopping center or business tool. Included in that community is an array of enthusiasts, activists, and deviants who at times clash in battles over freedom of expression and family values, a flash point best illustrated here by AOL's fight against the Communications Decency Act.

Re-creating all of the major moments in AOL's frenzied history, **aol.com** is a fascinating and important inside story about the birth of a new medium, the enterprising innovators who are leading it, and the way it is changing our culture.

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