[PDF] Dealers Of Lightning: Xerox PARC And The Dawn Of The Computer Age

Michael A. Hiltzik - pdf download free book

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Description:

Throughout the '70s and '80s, Xerox Corporation provided unlimited funding to a renegade think tank called the Palo Alto Research Center (PARC). Occupying a ramshackle building adjacent to Stanford University, PARC's occupants would prove to be the greatest gathering of computer talent ever assembled: it conceptualized the very notion of the desktop computer, long before IBM launched its PC, and it laid the foundation for Microsoft Windows with a prototype graphical user interface of icons and layered screens. Even the technology that makes it possible for these words to appear on the screen can trace its roots to Xerox's eccentric band of innovators. But despite PARC's many industry-altering breakthroughs, Xerox failed ever to grasp the financial potential of such achievements. And while Xerox's inability to capitalize upon some of the world's most important

technological advancements makes for an interesting enough story, *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Michael Hiltzik focuses instead on the inventions and the inventors themselves. We meet fiery ringleader Bob Taylor, a preacher's son from Texas known as much for his ego as for his uncanny leadership; we trace the term "personal computer" back to Alan Kay, a visionary who dreamed of a machine small enough to tuck under the arm; and we learn how PARC's farsighted principles led to collaborative brilliance. Hiltzik's consummate account of this burgeoning era won't improve Xerox's stake in the computer industry by much, but it should at least give credit where credit is due. Recommended. *--Rob McDonald*

From Publishers Weekly Anyone who uses a personal computer is familiar with technologies pioneered by Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), which started operation in 1970. The received wisdom is that Xerox muffed the chance to dominate the personal computer era by allowing revolutionary technologies developed at PARC to be snatched up by strangers and rivals (most famously, Apple, which took the mouse and the graphical user interface from PARC). L.A. Times reporter Hiltzik argues that the received wisdom is wrong. He expertly situates the story of which products actually made it to market for Xerox (e.g., the laser printer) and which technologies Xerox leaked away (WYSIWYG word processing, hypertext, Ethernet and TCP/IP, to name a few) in a broader analysis of the role of basic science research in business. He praises Xerox execs for understanding the difference between basic research and product development and for exempting PARC from the stultifying effect of having to do the latter. Among the many facts of life on the cutting edge that Hiltzik makes abundantly clear is that very bad decisions are often made for very good business reasons. While granting that Xerox could certainly have better exploited the new technologies issuing from PARC, he emphasizes that the company brought together "a group of superlatively creative minds at the very moment when they could exert maximal influence on a burgeoning technology, and financed their work with unexampled generosity." This is a top-notch business page-turner. Unburdened by any gee-whiz jaw-dropping, yet fully appreciative of the power of creative minds, it is informed by a sure understanding of the complex relationship between business and technology. Major ad/promo.

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