



Does It Matter?: Information Technology and the Corrosion of Competitive Advantage

By *Nicholas G. Carr*

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Does It Matter?: Information Technology and the Corrosion of Competitive Advantage By Nicholas G. Carr

Over the last decade, and even since the bursting of the technology bubble, pundits, consultants, and thought leaders have argued that information technology provides the edge necessary for business success. IT expert Nicholas G. Carr offers a radically different view in this eloquent and explosive book. As IT's power and presence have grown, he argues, its strategic relevance has actually decreased. IT has been transformed from a source of advantage into a commoditized "cost of doing business"--with huge implications for business management. Expanding on Carr's seminal Harvard Business Review article that generated a storm of controversy, *Does IT Matter?* provides a truly compelling--and unsettling--account of IT's changing business role and its leveling influence on competition. Through astute analysis of historical and contemporary examples, Carr shows that the evolution of IT closely parallels that of earlier technologies such as railroads and electric power. He goes on to lay out a new agenda for IT management, stressing cost control and risk management over innovation and investment. And he examines the broader implications for business strategy and organization as well as for the technology industry. A frame-changing statement on one of the most important business phenomena of our time, *Does IT Matter?* marks a crucial milepost in the debate about IT's future. An acclaimed business writer and thinker, Nicholas G. Carr is a former executive editor of the Harvard Business Review.

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Editorial Review

Review

"...lays out the simple truths...of information technology in a lucid way, with cogent examples and clear analysis." -- *New York Times*, May 6, 2004

"Carr's work is thorough ... IT thinking rarely gets a contribution of this caliber. Read it." -- *eWeek*, May 24th, 2004

"Does IT Matter? engages the imagination and the emotions, a rare combination in a business book." -- *Boston Globe*, May 2, 2004

"Does IT Matter? will give executives and managers a way to sift through the next wave of tech hype." -- *BusinessWeek*, May 24th, 2004

"His argument is simple, powerful and yet also subtle." -- *The Economist*, April 2004

"cooly written [and] intellectually engaging" -- *Financial Times*, May 2004

From the Author

In May 2003, I published the article "IT Doesn't Matter" in the Harvard Business Review. Called "the rhetorical equivalent of a 50 megaton smart bomb," the article challenged the conventional wisdom that information technology has become increasingly important as a strategic weapon in business. In fact, I argued, IT is becoming less important as it becomes more powerful and more widespread. Some of the leading figures in the tech industry attacked the article, with Microsoft's Steve Ballmer dismissing it as "hogwash." But the debate over my ideas has only intensified.

In *Does IT Matter? Information Technology and the Corrosion of Competitive Advantage*, I offer a deeper analysis of IT's role in business, examining the characteristics of hardware and software that guide their evolution. Through a series of examples, I show how IT innovations rapidly become part of the shared business infrastructure, neutralizing their ability to provide competitive advantage. I also lay out a new framework for assessing IT investments based not only on their return on investment but also on competitive responses. Managers will come away from the book with a coherent perspective that will help them derive real value from the enormous sums they spend on IT.

I also examine IT's influence on other sources of advantage. Again taking issue with the common wisdom, I show that many of the current assumptions about process automation, outsourcing, and virtual business are simplistic and dangerous. Companies that act on them are more likely to destroy advantage than create it.

Given the economy's reliance on IT, these are subjects important to everyone. I have therefore written the book in straightforward prose, avoiding the jargon that makes the current writing on computer systems obscure. I think anyone who buys, sells, or uses IT – or invests in companies that do – will find the book invigorating and useful. I hope you'll agree.

- Nicholas G. Carr

About the Author

Nicholas G. Carr is a former Executive Editor and Editor-at-Large for Harvard Business Review.

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