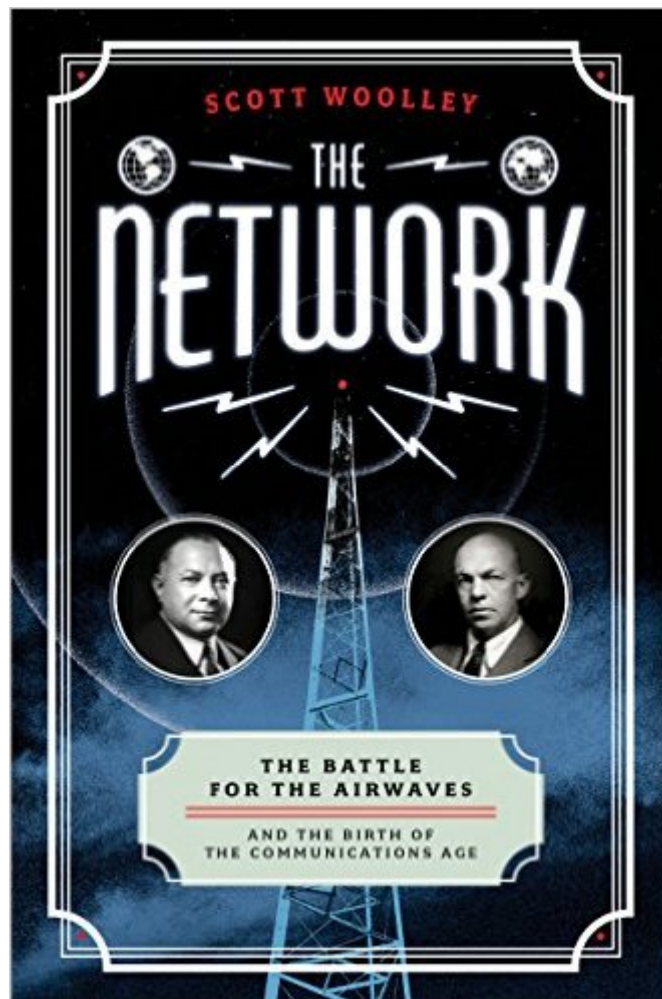


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The Network: The Battle For The Airwaves And The Birth Of The Communications Age



Synopsis

The astonishing story of America's airwaves, the two friends—one a media mogul, the other a famous inventor—who made them available to us, and the government which figured out how to put a price on air. This is the origin story of the airwaves—the foundational technology of the communications age—as told through the forty-year friendship of an entrepreneurial industrialist and a brilliant inventor. David Sarnoff, the head of RCA and equal parts Steve Jobs, Jack Welch, and William Randolph Hearst, was the greatest supporter of his friend Edwin Armstrong, developer of the first amplifier, the modern radio transmitter, and FM radio. Sarnoff was convinced that Armstrong's inventions had the power to change the way societies communicated with each other forever. He would become a visionary captain of the media industry, even predicting the advent of the Internet. In the mid-1930s, however, when Armstrong suspected Sarnoff of orchestrating a cadre of government officials to seize control of the FM airwaves, he committed suicide. Sarnoff had a very different view of who his friend's enemies were. Many corrupt politicians and corporations saw in Armstrong's inventions the opportunity to commodify our most ubiquitous natural resource—the air. This early alliance between high tech and business set the precedent for countless legal and industrial battles over broadband and licensing bandwidth, many of which continue to influence policy and debate today.

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Customer Reviews

Great topic and an engrossing narrative! Hey, I'm an electrical engineer, so I like this kind of stuff. I appreciate the author's hard work in creating a fascinating narrative describing the early history of wireless communication. I would have given this book five stars except for a few shortcomings that I think are fixable. I shall list those here: (1) Obviously the author is not an electrical engineer. This is evident by the strange, puzzling descriptions he gives of technical concepts. For example, this head scratcher is from location 187 of the Kindle edition: "[Armstrong] built a device that made it easy for a radio transmitter to summon the invisible waves." My best guess here is that this refers to some sort of electronic oscillator, but I honestly can't tell for sure. Clear, concise, correct high-level descriptions of the various technical concepts mentioned -- descriptions that use standard terms correctly and are reasonably comprehensible to the lay public -- ARE possible. The author ought to work with a sympathetic electrical engineer to get the phrasing right. (2) The non-chronological presentation is a great way to keep the reader's interest: First, a scene with tension and conflict is presented; then (with the reader's interest piqued and before the resolution is presented) the history leading up to that scene is presented. But in the early chapters, in particular, this gets confusing at times. On a re-read, everything seems to make sense. But it would be better if things were clear the first time through, so some rewriting might be needed to effect this. (3) The book has a lot of typos and other editorial errors.

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