



A STUDY GUIDE TO  
*PROGRAM OR BE PROGRAMMED: TEN COM-  
MANDMENTS FOR A DIGITAL AGE*

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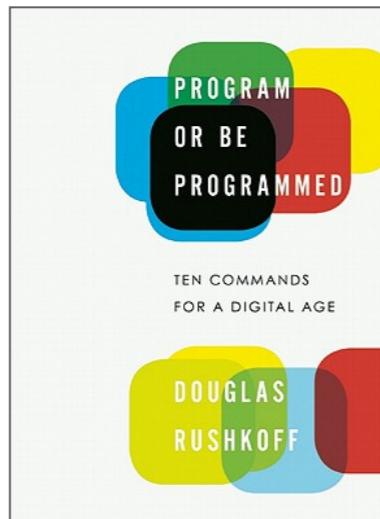


A Study Guide for Douglas Rushkoff's

# PROGRAM OR BE PROGRAMMED

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The following study guide aims to provoke further thoughts and extend the conversation surrounding Douglas Rushkoff's book *Program or Be Programmed: Ten Commands for a Digital Age*. It has been created for a wide variety of readers—from high school to adults—and purposes—from book clubs to study groups.



Rushkoff proposes 10 commands that are each based on one of the “biases” of digital media. In computer programming a “command” is a directive to a computer to perform a specific task. But Rushkoff’s commands are not directives for human behavior as much as a code of ethics that, like the 10 commandments of Judaism in what was a new text-based age, help us navigate a new age of computer mediation and abstraction.



Rushkoff, Douglas, dir. *Program or Be Programmed*. 2010. Film. 31 Jan 2013

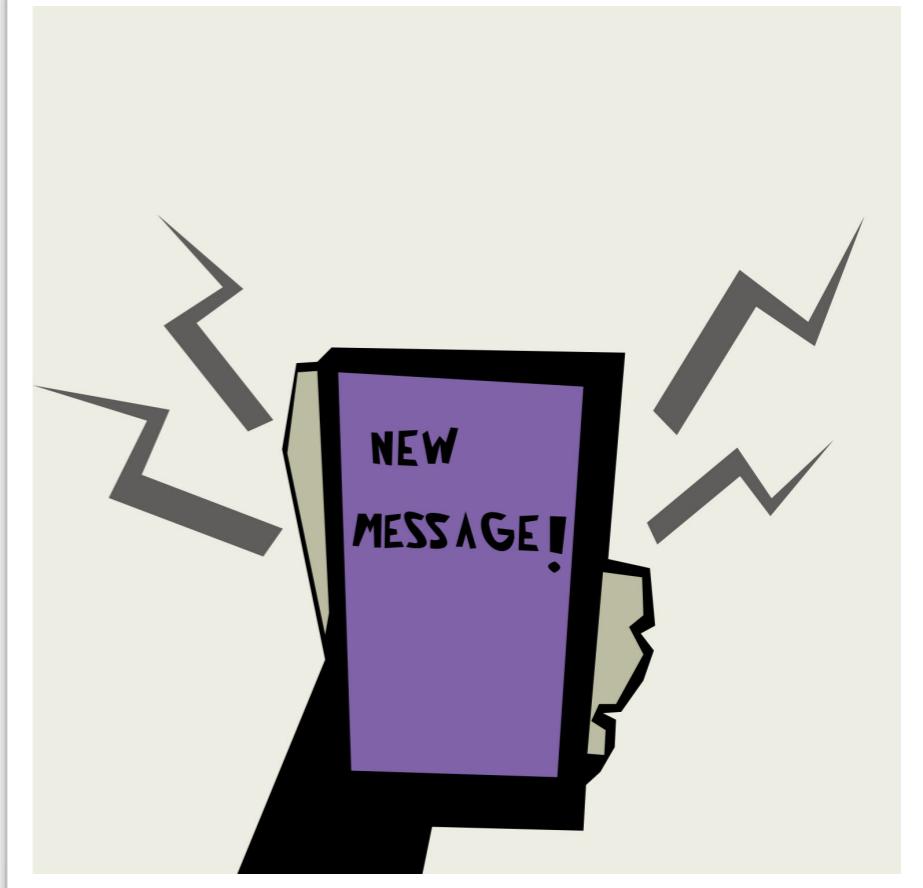
Digital technologies continue to increase the capabilities of mankind. These technologies, however, come with biases. If we aren't aware of these biases, we'll find ourselves at the mercy of the technology *designed to serve us*. While there's still time, we must take matters into our own hands and learn to program!

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# I. TIME

## DO NOT BE "ALWAYS ON".

We live in a world dictated by time. However, to our digital devices, time is an unknown concept. This situation has caused us to become more concerned with the newest information rather than the most relevant. In order to remain effective, efficient humans, we must apply the concept of time to our digital devices. We hold the power to decide when we interact digitally. Being conscious of this notion will result in the quality and effectiveness of the information we produce and share electronically. By allowing ourselves to be "turned off," we are actually becoming more connected than being "always on."



### Questions for Discussion

- When is it socially inappropriate to be online?
- Why do we sometimes aimlessly surf the web?
- What does Rushkoff say about the nature of computer programming that causes digital technology to be biased away from continuous time? And what are some examples of the asynchronous (asynchronous means "not at the same time") bias of digital technology?
- What prevents people from claiming their own time in the face of digital distraction? How are these interruptions and distractions any different from those that plagued us before we had cell phones in our hands or pagers on our hips?
- While the chapter focuses on the early, more asynchronous styles of communication on early networks, even newer technology such as streaming video and Facetime applications bring us onto each other's screens in something like real time, or what we refer to as "synchronous" time. Do these new forms of digital communication negate the basic premise of digital non-nowness? Or do they simply hide a greater imposition on what we think of as time?

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# I. TIME

## DO NOT BE "ALWAYS ON".



### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Live for 24 hours without being online. Keep a journal about your experience. Report in your journal about how often you missed being online or absent-mindedly went online, forgetting you were not going to go online for 24 hours? Discuss in your journal how you felt about giving up email, Facebook, Words with Friends, or other activities you may engage in with others or alone online. Reflect on your experience with the group.

The First Commandment in Rushkoff's *Program or Be Programmed* is "do not be always on." He proposes that networked digital technology is biased away from continuous time, depending instead on command intervals to parse existence. As the speed and availability of networked connections grow, we become more and more attached to the constant stream of information that is always running, updating to our phones, laptops and inboxes. In this chapter, Rushkoff explores how this tendency to be "always on" changes our ability to engage with the world around us. He reminds us that paying attention to the digital distractions is still a choice and that we don't have to surrender our time to technology that has no use for it.

**"do not be  
always on"**  
— Rushkoff

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### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [The 10,000 Year Clock](#)
- [Rushkoff's PDF Study Guide](#)
- [Turkle, Sherry. \*Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology & Less from Each Other\*. Cambridge, MA.: Basic Books, 2011.](#)
- [The National Day Of Unplugging](#)
- [Solnit, Rebecca. 2004. \*River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West\*. Penguin Books.](#)

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

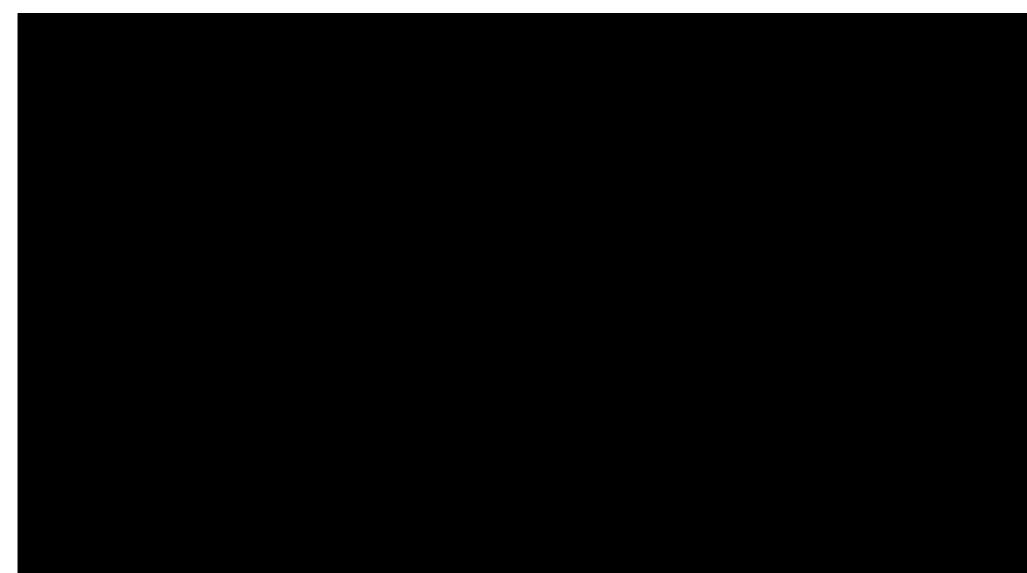
## II. PLACE

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### LIVE IN PERSON.

The digital world provides the opportunity for interaction between groups of people who may not be physically near each other. This is an incredible development in technology, which has many proven benefits for bringing people together and allowing crowdsourcing of information.

However, there are aspects of physical interaction that cannot be simulated through the use of digital medium. Eye contact, physical touch, facial expression, and gestures are often lost in translation into the digital world. In-person interaction should always be option number one. There is no substitute. Digital media should be used only the former is not a viable option.



A Year in the Life. 2011. Film. 31 Jan 2013.

“Digital media is biased away from the local, and toward dislocation.”

—Douglas Rushkoff

#### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Search the internet for information about of a favorite local business. What kind of information do you find? Evaluate their online presence: website, social media, maps. Discuss how small businesses can compete with the giants like Amazon.com. Does digital technology favor certain kinds of local businesses? What would you prefer not to purchase online?

Search the internet to see if your local community has a “shop local” movement? What is the messaging the campaign uses to educate the public about the need to “relocalize” itself?

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:  
**II. PLACE**  
LIVE IN PERSON.



In Chapter 2, Rushkoff asserts that digital media are biased away from the local, toward dislocation, declaring we should “live in person.” All media have a bias toward distance, as carrying a message from one place to another is what media are for. It just so happens that this bias toward dislocation breaks down the systems of local business, community and communication, leaving people disconnected from the local and engaged with national brands and ubiquitous corporations. By recognizing media’s bias toward dislocation and learning to live in person, we can reclaim power by reclaiming the local.

#### Questions for Discussion

- Even though it gives exposure to a worldwide market, in what ways does the internet work against local business?
- What are some ways the internet can be a benefit to local business, local activism or local culture?
- One result of the “delocalizing” nature of the Internet is the use of long-distance technologies when local and face-to-face interaction is possible. (Have you ever used an Instant Messaging Client to message a roommate, even though she was working on her computer in the same room?) What are two more examples of delocalization as a result of a networked existence?
- Beyond the way we sometimes employ technologies for the gee whiz factor, or for convenience, do we sometimes utilize distancing as a “feature” rather than a “bug?” In other words, when do we like the fact that the person we’re communicating with is far away?

#### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [Ed Shane. \*Disconnected America: The Consequences of Mass Media in a Narcissistic World\* \(New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000\)](#)
- Great data on how people use the net. [Pew Internet Reports](#).
- TED TALKS : Sheikha Al Mayassa, “[Globalizing the local, localizing the global.](#)”



RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

## III. CHOICE

YOU MAY ALWAYS CHOOSE  
NONE OF THE ABOVE.

Machines by design split up everything into qualifiers of true or false, yes or no, 1's or 0's. In order for us as human beings to more efficiently make use of our technology, we've learned to sideline the grey areas between "yes" and "no" in favor of mechanical ultimatums. People mistake fields that ask the user questions for the application trying to promote a unique user experience, when in fact those questions are used to force us into certain categories created by the programmer of that application. Tagging is a new method of choice that truly offers the user a choice.

It all comes down to yes or no when digital technology is concerned. In Chapter 3, Rushkoff explains that digital technology is built on a binary system that articulates the flow of electricity, where no flow means "off" and flow means "on." Off and on equates to "no-yes," "0-1." This binary system forces humans into making choices that are narrow and finite (one or the other, this or that) without any space around them for possibilities). Our reliance on digital technology allows the computers we thought we controlled to make minute choices about how we experience the world in ways we are not even aware of—and meanwhile we try to cram the human experience into the searchable confines of a database. Rushkoff points out that maybe our best choice is not to choose anything at all.

- 
- YES
  - NO
  - NEITHER

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

## III. CHOICE

# YOU MAY ALWAYS CHOOSE NONE OF THE ABOVE.

**"you may always  
choose none of  
the above"**

– Rushkoff

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### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Login to your Amazon.com account. Search for a product that you have never bought before from Amazon. If you have a Facebook account, go to it. Do you see an ad for that product on your Facebook page? What do you think has happened? Discuss ways to minimize the computer choosing for you in cases like this.

#### Questions for Discussion

- We are used to seeing “aggregated” (content pulled together from various other sources) content based on our own purchase history, but how do you feel about content created based on our own purchase history? What does this mean for culture?
- What happens to content that doesn’t fit into any easy categories and demographics?
- Why is the bias of digital technology so heavy toward choice, rather than ambiguity? What are the human results of making so many digital decisions? Why would ambiguity be valued?
- Rushkoff points out that this world of constant choice is a benefit for marketers and those who would use these decision points as pressure points to force sales. How exactly does this work, and what is an example of marketers using forced choice as a sales force?
- Despite being biased toward top-down control, databases have the potential to be open-ended, bottom-up systems if we choose to use them in such a way. How would freeing the database help free us from forced choices?

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE



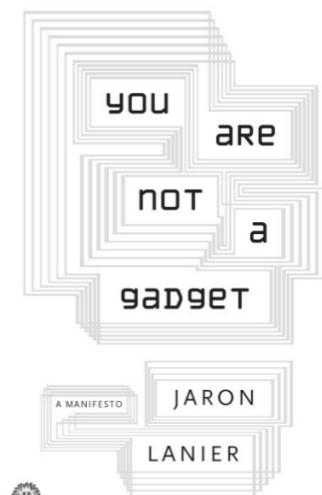
[NPR: Netflix Moves Back in Content Production with Cards](#)



[Listen to the story](#)



[Lanier, Jaron. \*You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto\* \(New York: Knopf, 2010\)](#)



RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

## IV. COMPLEXITY

### YOU ARE NEVER COMPLETELY RIGHT.

Our machines are designed to make us function quicker and more efficiently. In doing so, access to information has become democratized. Not as much effort or expertise is required to find the information that we are searching for. In a few clicks we have access to short bits of summarized information that suffices as an answer to our question, rather than the whole, complete, complexity of the answer. We have access to facts, and points of information, rather than an actual knowledge and understanding of a subject.

**"you are never completely right"**  
– Rushkoff

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The combination of the first three biases exposes the problem Rushkoff points out in Chapter 4. Because our digital technology reduces our world into an abstraction to be processed, it is "biased" toward a reduction in complexity. Digital technology seeks to level the playing field and holds all human knowledge at the same distance, only one level deep through any Internet search. This reductive nature of digital technology leads us to cherry-pick what we want to know, when we want to know it, and ways to forget the information as soon as we have no use for it. It leads us to develop skills based on accessing this information, rather than using it. And more than anything, it leads us to think we understand the complex world around us when we are only reading part of the map.



Google Search App: Martin Van Buren. 2012. Film. 31 Jan 2013.

Never again will we not know the answer. Every answer to every question is available for someone to find on the internet. Applications like Google and Wikipedia make information available in a matter of seconds. But are we really learning anything, or are we just becoming dependent on our devices (and the people making them)?

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# IV. COMPLEXITY

## YOU ARE NEVER COMPLETELY RIGHT.

### Questions for Discussion

- While there are obvious benefits to having aggregated personalized content, what are the cultural implications of filtering out what does not fit your profile?
- What does Rushkoff mean by a “data-point?” How have data-points been used in political debates? Is this a new phenomenon? What makes it seem different now?
- Reflect on how, in your life, exposure to unexpected people, places, events and ideas have shaped who you are. What are the ways the bias of digital culture filters out these unexpected and complex encounters?
- What are some of the effects of this digital oversimplification on education? What are the effects on skilled labor and the experience of discovery?

### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Conduct a google search for the word “bass.” Try searching other words that have more than one meaning. Compare the results with your group. In recent years, Google has changed its search “algorithms” (mathematical formulae common to computing) to include personalized results based on geography, searcher history, and social networks. Open up your personal search history on Google <<https://history.google.com/history/>> and think about how and why your search profile returned certain results. Try searching the same words after turning off personalized search: <<http://support.google.com/websearch/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=2410479>>. Play with other search filters such as time and location.

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [Shirky, Clay. \*Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations\* \(New York: Penguin Press, 2008\). Online Alternative \(excerpt\)](#)
- [TED TALKS \*The Filter Bubble\* by Eli Pariser](#)

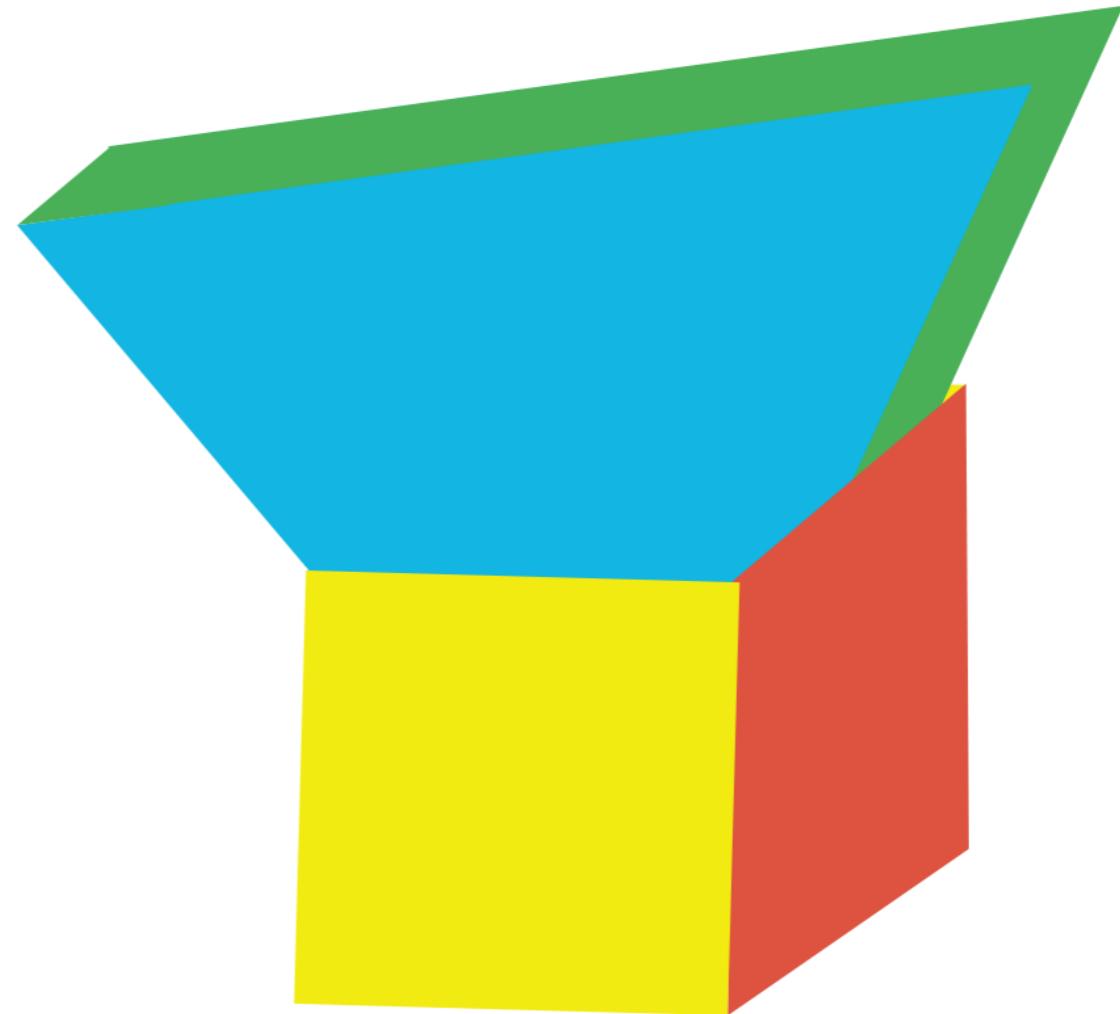


RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# V. SCALE

## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.

Digital technologies have the tendency to create abstractions of real, tangible entities. A mom and pop store that relies on personal relationships with customers and its local connections, isn't going to be as successful in an abstract form. It doesn't scale. Those who can scale now have to compete with those who are the standard in their respective profession. The Internet takes away power from the small businesses and gives it to the mega-corporation. As more abstraction occurs, and abstractions of abstractions start to feel real, we will become disconnected with the here and the now.



### Questions for Discussion

**“one size does not fit all”**

– Rushkoff

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- What are “vertical” and “horizontal” integration mentioned by Rushkoff in this chapter? And how do they differ from the new requirement of “scaling up?”
- While abstraction allows us to use such important tools as language and math, it also makes us more dependent on centralized standards, such as the presentation of online identity and the categories and genres of cultural objects. What does this dependency do to the power structure of contemporary society, especially in the worlds of business and politics?
- According to Rushkoff, how can the German philosopher Walter Benjamin’s ideas help us navigate and appreciate our abstract world?

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# V. SCALE

## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.

In Chapter 5, Rushkoff explains that the Internet, and the digital technologies that support it, are biased toward scalability. More than just a business buzz word, scalability is the requirement of any business operating in our digital century. The constant need for businesses to “scale up,” usurp competitors’ territory, and develop new markets to tap has fueled the modern evolution of business and, as Rushkoff explains, bring our recent financial troubles into a clear, new light. Due to the constant need for growth and development, business must rely on another bias of the medium—abstraction. Abstraction here means activities or products with no tangible quality, like a virtual sword in War of Warcraft or a dollar in your account in PayPal. By further abstracting how business is done (from face-to-face interaction to databases and algorithms), we can either choose to engage the digital economy on a more human scale or get lost and left behind by the demanding “scalability” of the status quo.

### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Look at this list of the companies Google has purchased in the last 12 years: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_mergers\\_and\\_acquisitions\\_by\\_Google](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mergers_and_acquisitions_by_Google). What kind of companies is Google interested in and why? Why does a search engine need to “scale up” into offering authoring tools, social networks and content distribution?

Look at the way you may be saving your data. See if you are using the Cloud for backing up your documents, music, photos and other media objects. See if you have a back-up plan for preserving these objects if something happens to your Cloud accessibility.

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE ARTICLES

- Tim O'Reilly and John Batelle's "[Web Cubed](#)"
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media.* (Boston: Belknap Press, 2008)
- Apple vs. Google vs. Facebook vs. Amazon  
[The Lines Between Software and Hardware Continue to Blur](#)

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# VI. IDENTITY

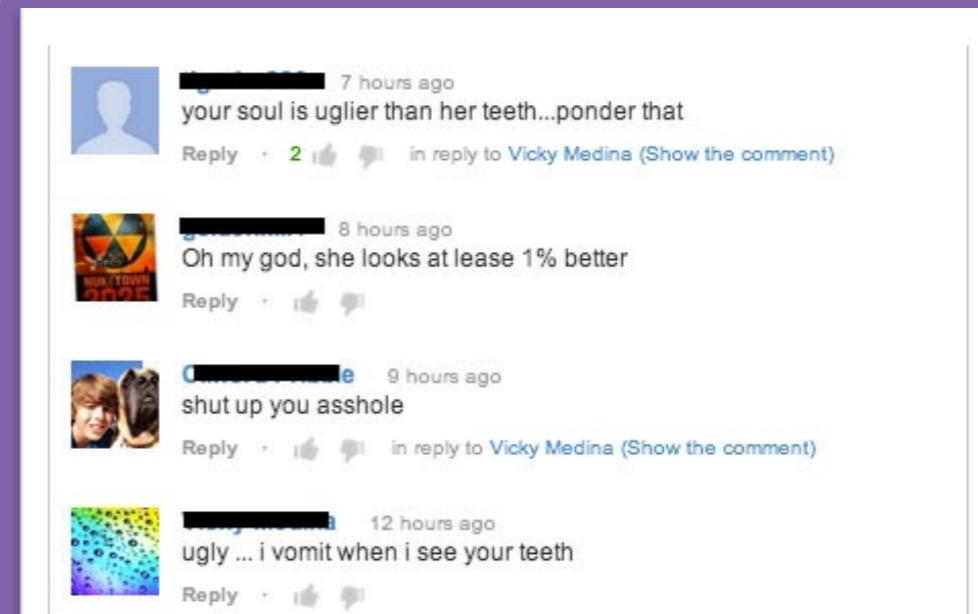
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## BE YOURSELF.

**“be yourself”**  
– Rushkoff

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The anonymity of the digital world can be a dangerous thing. It leaves people disconnected with the real-life consequences of their online actions. We all have a certain reputation to uphold and our actions serve to promote that reputation. We need to identify online as our true selves, just as we do in real life in order to hold ourselves accountable for our actions. Furthermore, if everyone on the internet identifies themselves as a real person, they will seem less like strangers and more like members of a community.



### Questions for Discussion

- Considering that only 7 % of human communication is verbal, and we strip away the other 93 percent of nonverbal, tonal and physical communication by interacting through digital technologies, what are some of the societal side effects we can expect?
- What key difference between the generations that have “adapted” to digital technologies and those that have grown up “native” with digital technologies does Rushkoff point out, and why is it relevant to identity?
- Respond to this proposal: No one should ever post anything anonymously online unless under threat of physical or legal persecution. And even then, the ideal behavior would be for everyone to post their similar sentiments and thus make persecution impossible.

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# VI. IDENTITY

## BE YOURSELF.

Rushkoff tells us that he has always been made himself available online without hiding his identity in any way, and this display of identity online has come with happiness and heartache. In Chapter Six, Rushkoff looks at the Internet's bias toward anonymity and the

effect that bias has on our personal lives and our social interactions. These days, we operate in a virtual world, free from our bodies, but not from identity. Because of this reality, we have a unique ability to reshape our identity to anything we please, and also operate anonymously and outside the restrictions of civil society. With the ability to reshape ourselves, we also have the potential to reshape how our society works—but only if we realize the power we hold.

### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Go online to your Facebook profile page (if you have one), and list the biases the social network has in shaping one's personal identity for public presentation. How does the data on a profile page both help and hinder real connection with others? If you could design your own social network page, how would you present your identity?

Search for the famous cartoon that reads “on the internet no one knows you are a dog.” What is meant by this caption? How true is it really? Have you ever read about people passing for someone else? Have you ever posed as someone or something else online? What were the repercussions?

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [Sherry Turkle on \*Digital Nation\*](#)
- [Turkle, Sherry. \*Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.\* \(New York: Basic Books, 2011\)](#)
- [Internet Society: Online Identity](#)

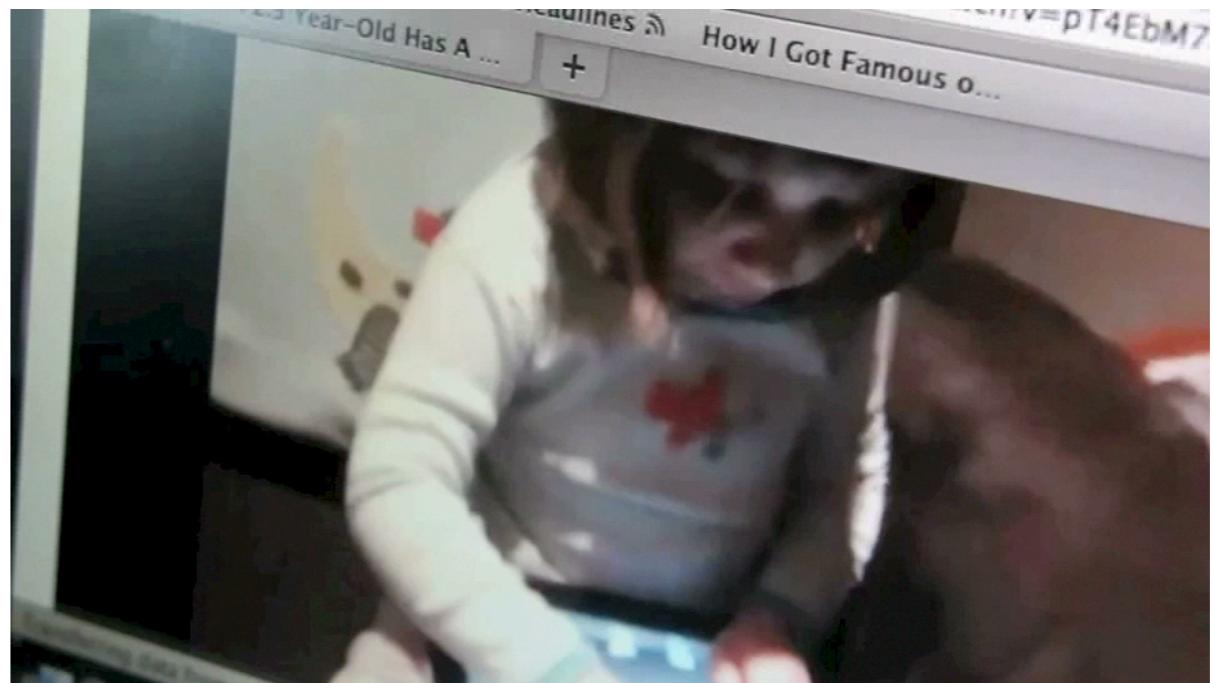
RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

## VII. SOCIAL

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### DO NOT SELL YOUR FRIENDS.

Digital media has forever favored the social. No matter what phases the internet goes through, there is one thing that remains constant: the desire to remain socially connected. Today's internet is compromised, running rampant with people and business looking for any and all opportunities for monetary gain, rather than social contact. Today we run the risk of losing sight of the true potential of the internet and the integrity of the content it once held.



Rushkoff, Douglas, dir. Program or Be Programmed. 2010. Film. 31 Jan 2013.

**“do not sell  
your friends”**

– Rushkoff

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In Chapter 7, Rushkoff uncovers one of the Internet's first and most powerful biases. The Internet is for being social. It's biased toward contact. With the boom of social networks and trending topics, marketers have co-opted the Internet's ability to connect readily to friends, family members, even strangers. But peer-to-peer communication has always been the Internet's strength. So no matter how many followers a brand has, the real power comes in the connections those followers from with one another. It's those peer-to-peer connections that we turn to when we need real advice or consolation, or any other intangible feeling a true friend can offer. But as we continue to count our friends instead of really contact them, we are changing their nature of friendship. Perhaps even robbing ourselves of what real human friendships uniquely offer.

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

## VII. SOCIAL DO NOT SELL YOUR FRIENDS.

New media theorist Howard Rheingold argues:

"People act and learn together for a rich mixture of reasons. The current story that most of us tell ourselves about how humans get things done is focused on the well-known flavors of self-interest, which make for great drama — survival, power, wealth, sex, glory. People also do things together for fun, for the love of a challenge, and because we sometimes enjoy working together to make something beneficial to everybody. If I had to reduce the essence of Homo sapiens to five words, 'people do complicated things together' would do. Online social networks can be powerful amplifiers of collective action precisely because they augment and extend the power of ever complexifying human sociality. To be sure, gossip, conflict, slander, fraud, greed and bigotry are part of human sociality, and those parts of human behavior can be amplified, too. But altruism, fun, community and curiosity are also parts of human sociality — and I propose that the Web is in existence proof that these capabilities can be amplified, as well. Indeed, our species' social inventiveness is central to what it is to be human."

### Questions for Discussion

- What is it about the history of the Internet makes it biased toward contact?
- What is the "monetization of friendship," and how does it occur in the Internet's social spaces?

- What do you think of this comment ? What may push the quality of social networks to one side or the other of Rheingold's two possibilities? What is your experience of Facebook? Do you find your relationships made more complex by their existence online? Are you online relationships deepening for you?

### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Look at two popular photo sharing apps (Instagram, Path, Photoset, Twitter or Flickr). Examine their product and terms of service, and then compare how the two applications handle the sharing of photos online. What are the privacy settings? Can your photos be used commercially? Do you own the rights to your photos? How does tagging other people in photos work? Is it possible to "sell your friends?"

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- Howard Rheingold, ["Participative Pedagogy for a Literacy of Literacies"](#)
- [CNNMoney: How to protect your Instagram photos](#)

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

## VIII. FACT TELL THE TRUTH.

“The easiest way to sell stuff in the digital age is to make good stuff.”

—Douglas Rushkoff

In Chapter 8, Rushkoff explores how our ideas spread socially, replicating like genes replicate our physical features. Ever since the feudal system overpowered the bazaar, stories about kings and brands became more important than the facts of everyday life. But in the digital landscape, we operate in something much more like the bazaar, where the truths about everyday life are again the most important stories to tell. And when the media space is biased toward truth telling, the easiest way to accomplish anything is to tell the truth.

Among our society facts are highly valued. The internet provides the perfect opportunity for the crowdsourcing of information. Each person can share what bit of truth they have come to learn and on to that knowledge others will add, thus gradually making more things common knowledge, and increasing the capabilities of humans. With digital media, facts are easily distinguishable from myths. We learn to seek out the facts and dismiss what is false. In order to successfully communicate your message through digital media, it should be based on fact.



RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# VIII. FACT

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## TELL THE TRUTH.

**“tell the truth”**  
– Rushkoff

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### Questions for Discussion

- What is a “meme,” and how is it like one of our own genes?
- While analog media are “read only,” digital media are “read-write,” allowing for a deep interaction between the user and the producer. What effect does this transition have on our communication, and how does it put us back in the bazaar?
- According to Rushkoff, we live in a realm where a person’s value is dependent on the strength of their facts. What does the author mean by this, and what is one example of this concept from recent news events?
- What is your opinion of WikiLeaks? Does the factual bias of the net favor their efforts to release and spread the truth? Are we, as a society, ready for such levels of honesty? Are we learning anything we didn’t already know? If not, then what’s the big deal?

### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Read the following wikipedia article about how to be an editor on a wikipedia article [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing\\_to\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Contributing_to_Wikipedia), and try to find how the “truth” of an entry is determined. What is the difference between verifiability and truth?

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [Postman, Neil. \*Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology\* \(New York: Vintage, 1993\)](#)
- [Wikileaks](#)

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# IX. OPENNESS

## SHARE, DON'T STEAL.

The internet was created with the idea of sharing in mind. The sharing and collaborating of knowledge has led to advancements including Firefox, Linux, and Wikipedia. Sharing our ideas allows us to be more creative and to be more successful at creating. What we need to be aware of is the invisible line that divides what constitutes sharing and what is stealing. That line is ethics. What goes on the internet should be free; it should be shared and allowed to turn into something better. Ideas should not be stolen and then used for personal or monetary gain.

### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Examine the licensing options for Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org/choose/>. How does this system of copyright amplify the sharing of information, while protecting intellectual property?

Read “The Hacker Manifesto” (1986) <<http://www.phrack.org/issues.html?issue=7&id=3&mode=txt>> How do the sentiments of this document differ from Rushkoff’s? How are they similar? Now look up the word “Hackathon” and “hackivist.” What is it, and how has the notion of shared information morphed in the last 25 years?

### BEFORE & AFTER



Dreamboy, . 2012. PxleyesWeb. 31 Jan 2013.

BEFORE: This image was taken and then was essentially donated by the photographer to a creative commons website for others to use.

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RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# IX. OPENNESS

## SHARE, DON'T STEAL.

**"share,  
don't steal"**  
— Rushkoff

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The Internet was designed to run on a shared architecture and, thus, developed a bias toward openness. But Rushkoff does not believe this means the floodgates should be open to repurposing and stealing everyone's content. Because we operate in a digital world innately biased toward openness, we sometimes forget where the line is drawn—or to draw the line at all. In this chapter, Rushkoff looks to address the problem of digital piracy and the commodification of content by showing how the laws and regulations we use to govern the open Internet were developed for a closed, controlled, analog world. Unlike the marketplace for fixed goods, our digital space is also a product of shared cost structures, something our financial institutions engineered out of our currencies a long time ago.

### Questions for Discussion

- What about the Internet's bias toward openness makes it a particularly sticky battleground for content rights lawyers? What is so different about digital property from physical property?
- What is "Fair Use" and what provoked its development? What has been some of the arguments in the debate surrounding it?
- How do Digital Rights Management strategies work? Why do some of them make the situation worse instead of better?
- Instead of being biased toward hoarding like existing currencies, local and peer-to-peer currencies depend on what factors to ensure a more open flow of capital? Why would they work, or not, today?

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [Lessig, Larry. \*Free Culture\* \(excerpt\)](#)
- [Internet Archive](#)

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# X. PURPOSE

## PROGRAM OR BE PROGRAMMED.

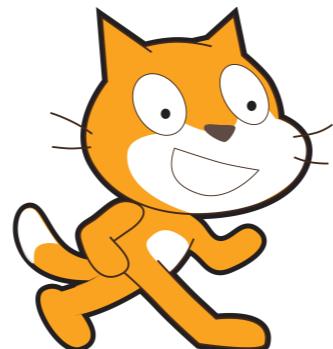
The “user friendly” programs we use everyday make our work with computers easy; however, they come with a cost: we as a society are becoming further removed from the code that actually creates the applications we’re using. We just accept the programs that exist, and are content to attempt to master how to use them. We are at the mercy of the programmers and any potential agendas they may have. Familiarizing ourselves with how to program will allow us to innovate and create technology that serves the specific needs of many individuals, not just those of the elite who know how to program.

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### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Make a game using the Scratch programming software: <http://scratch.mit.edu>. It is easy, fun and a great way to start on using computational thinking.



### TRY AN ACTIVITY

Make a simple blog post using (wordpress.com or blogger.com). Go to the “dashboard” once you have finished and look at your “post.” Notice that you can toggle between “visual” and “text.” Look at your post in both options. What information is located in the text mode that is not in the visual mode? Play with eliminating items in the text mode and see what your post looks like in the visual mode when you do. Are you able to fix any problems that you have caused after changing your code?

RUSHKOFF'S PRINCIPLE OF:

# X. PURPOSE

## PROGRAM OR BE PROGRAMMED.

In the final chapter of Program or Be Programmed, Rushkoff proposes our best solution for taking advantage of all the biases of digital technology—to become programmers ourselves. As popular understandings of technologies have always been one step behind the technologies themselves, we have become complacent users rather than agents of our own computing activities. This situation allows those with the ability to create through programming to maintain control, simply by designing the technology for or against their natural biases, leaving us to either fall in line or struggle

against the natural flow. By taking the reigns as programmers ourselves, we can occupy the highest leverage point in a digital society. We can shape the world any way we see fit.

**“program or be programmed”**  
— Rushkoff

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### Questions for Discussion

- How is digital technology like speech, text and the printing press? In what ways have users lagged one leap behind technological advances?
- What are the four stages of interaction Rushkoff points out in his example of the gamer, and what is the relationship between user and program at each stage?
- After reflecting on the book, what for you is the real promise of digital media, and what might we do to come to realize it?

### EXPLORE FURTHER WITH THESE LINKS

- [Kelly, Kevin. \*What Technology Wants\*. \(New York: Viking, 2010\)](#)
- [Exploring Computational Thinking](#)
- [Lynda.com](#) helps anyone learn software, creative, and business skills to achieve their personal and professional goals.
- [Code Academy](#): Learn to code interactively, for free
- [Scratch](#) is a programming language that makes it easy to create your own interactive stories, animations, games, music, and art and share your creations on the web.
- [LOGOS - programming for elementary school](#)  
<http://www.terrapinlogo.com/>  
<http://softronix.com/>

# DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF

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## WRITER, MEDIA THEORIST, TEACHER.



As a graduate of Princeton in 1983, with a master in fine arts from the California Art Institute, Douglas Rushkoff started to garner some attention in the 1990s. He was a writer taking part in the cyberpunk movement that combined the areas of thought from technology, society and culture. Rushkoff's recurring themes include helping people understand the biases of the technology they are consuming, innovating media to become more interactive, and questioning the impact of media on society. In 1994, Rushkoff's ideas of the "media virus" and "social contagion" became accepted concepts, and Rushkoff went on to write three award-winning documentaries for PBS and do commentary on NPR. He is currently a technology and media coordinator for CNN.

"About." [Rushkoff.com](http://Rushkoff.com). N.p. Web. 31 Jan 2013.

"Douglas Rushkoff." [Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org). N.p. Web. 31 Jan 2013.

# CREDITS

This study guide is provided as a service by #nextchapter. We have received permission from Douglas Rushkoff to use his material in creating it. We want to thank the following students and faculty from the Creative Media & Digital Culture Program at Washington State University Vancouver:

- Jennifer Hansen, student, iBook Designer & Content Specialist
- Will Luers, Faculty, Study Guide Content
- Setareh Alizadeh, Student, iBook Editor
- Dr. Dene Grigar & Jack Burkman, Faculty, iBook Editors

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