



The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture

By Andrew Keen

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Amateur hour has arrived, and the audience is running the show

In a hard-hitting and provocative polemic, Silicon Valley insider and pundit Andrew Keen exposes the grave consequences of today's new participatory Web 2.0 and reveals how it threatens our values, economy, and ultimately the very innovation and creativity that forms the fabric of American achievement.

Our most valued cultural institutions, Keen warns—our professional newspapers, magazines, music, and movies—are being overtaken by an avalanche of amateur, user-generated free content. Advertising revenue is being siphoned off by free classified ads on sites like Craigslist; television networks are under attack from free user-generated programming on YouTube and the like; file-sharing and digital piracy have devastated the multibillion-dollar music business and threaten to undermine our movie industry. Worse, Keen claims, our “cut-and-paste” online culture—in which intellectual property is freely swapped, downloaded, remashed, and aggregated—threatens over 200 years of copyright protection and intellectual property rights, robbing artists, authors, journalists, musicians, editors, and producers of the fruits of their creative labors.

In today's self-broadcasting culture, where amateurism is celebrated and anyone with an opinion, however ill-informed, can publish a blog, post a video on YouTube, or change an entry on Wikipedia, the distinction between trained expert and uninformed amateur becomes dangerously blurred. When anonymous bloggers and videographers, unconstrained by professional standards or editorial filters, can alter the public debate and manipulate public opinion, truth becomes a commodity to be bought, sold, packaged, and reinvented.

The very anonymity that the Web 2.0 offers calls into question the reliability of the information we receive and creates an environment in which sexual predators and identity thieves can roam free. While no Luddite—Keen pioneered several Internet startups himself—he urges us to consider the consequences of blindly supporting a culture that endorses plagiarism and piracy and that fundamentally weakens traditional media and creative institutions.

Offering concrete solutions on how we can rein in the free-wheeling, narcissistic atmosphere that pervades the Web, THE CULT OF THE AMATEUR is a wake-up call to each and every one of us.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Keen's relentless "polemic" is on target about how a sea of amateur content threatens to swamp the most vital information and how blogs often reinforce one's own views rather than expand horizons. But his jeremiad about the death of "our cultural standards and moral values" heads swiftly downhill. Keen became somewhat notorious for a 2006 *Weekly Standard* essay equating Web 2.0 with Marxism; like Karl Marx, he offers a convincing overall critique but runs into trouble with the details. Readers will nod in recognition at Keen's general arguments—sure, the Web is full of "user-generated nonsense"—but many will frown at his specific examples, which pretty uniformly miss the point. It's simply not a given, as Keen assumes, that Britannica is superior to Wikipedia, or that record-store clerks offer sounder advice than online friends with similar musical tastes, or that YouTube contains only "one or two blogs or songs or videos with real value." And Keen's fears that genuine talent will go unnourished are overstated: writers penned novels before there were publishers and copyright law; bands recorded songs before they had major-label deals. In its last third, the book runs off the rails completely, blaming Web 2.0 for online poker, child pornography, identity theft and betraying "Judeo-Christian ethics." (*June*)

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Review

What the experts are saying about Andrew Keen's thought-provoking polemic

"My initial reaction to the book was: 'Geez, I have a lot of things to think about now.' For people immersed in the social communities of Web 2.0, this is bound to be a thought-provoking and sobering book. While I don't agree with everything Keen says, there is page after page of really interesting insight and research. I look forward to the much-needed debate about the problems that Keen articulates—which can't be lightly dismissed."

—Larry Sanger, co-founder, Wikipedia and founder, Citizendium

"Marvelous and provocative . . . I think this is a powerful stop and breathe book in the midst of the obsessions and abstraction of folks seeking comfort in Web 2.0. Beautifully written too."

—Chris Schroeder, former CEO, *WashingtonPost/Newsweek* online and CEO, Health Central Network

"Important . . . will spur some very constructive debate. This is a book that can produce positive changes to the current inertia of web 2.0."

—Martin Green, vice president of community, CNET

"For anyone who thinks that technology alone will make for a better democracy, Andrew Keen will make them think twice."

—Andrew Rasiej, founder, Personal Democracy Forum

"Very engaging, and quite controversial and provocative. He doesn't hold back any punches."

—Dan Farber, editor-in-chief, ZDNet

"Andrew Keen is a brilliant, witty, classically-educated technoscold—and thank goodness. The world needs an intellectual Goliath to slay Web 2.0's army of Davids."

—Jonathan Last, online editor, *The Weekly Standard*

About the Author

ANDREW KEEN is a Silicon Valley entrepreneur whose writings on culture, media, and technology have appeared in *The Weekly Standard*, *Fast Company*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Listener*, and *Jazziz*. As the Founder, President and CEO of Audiocafe.com, he has been featured in *Esquire*, *Industry Standard*, and many other magazines and newspapers. He is the host of the acclaimed Internet show *AfterTV* and frequently appears on radio and television. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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