

“Demonstrates the world-changing power of the **Net Generation.
If you want to understand their impact, read this book.”**
—Eric Schmidt, Chairman and CEO, Google

grown up digital



DON TAPSCOTT

bestselling author of **growing up digital** and **wikinomics**

Business Leaders Praise

Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World

By Don Tapscott

“Once again, Don Tapscott has captured a piece of the zeitgeist. *Grown Up Digital* demonstrates the world-changing power of the Net Generation and the way they are rethinking everything, from education to home life to citizen participation. If you want to understand their impact, read this book.”

—Eric Schmidt, CEO, Google

“A decade ago Don Tapscott recognized that the kids growing up online were different, and that speaking digital as a first language was the key competitive skill of our age. Now that generation has grown up and Tapscott has followed them into the workplace and the world, where those skills are playing out in surprising ways. This is a rich and data-packed atlas of that generation.”

—Chris Anderson, Editor in Chief, *Wired*

“To be sustainable, a knowledge economy needs highly educated, skilled workers. More than manpower, we need workers with mindpower. The no. 1 challenge we face as leaders in business, government, education, and the community is educating and engaging our kids. Tapscott makes a well-reasoned, persuasive case for how to harness the Net Gen. Every educator and manager should read this book.”

—Jim Goodnight, CEO, SAS

“No one knows the digital generation and its impact on society better than Don Tapscott. *Grown Up Digital* is a fresh look at a global phenomenon that has been brewing for over 15 years. As a demographer, marketer, and social observer, Don brings the net generation to life and equips the reader with practical advice on how to cope with a world gone digital.”

—Brian Fetherstonhaugh, Chairman & CEO, OgilvyOne Worldwide

“Only those who understand the new paradigms as described in the latest book by Don Tapscott will not be displaced as individuals or businesses in the world of tomorrow.”

—Klaus Schwab, Founder & Executive Chairman,
World Economic Forum

“Don Tapscott is always relevant, always fresh. His new book, *Grown Up Digital*, adds depth and insight to an important issue impacting talent and leadership in the hyper-connected world of today, and tomorrow.”

—Kevin Kelly, CEO, Heidrick & Struggles

“Don Tapscott delivers insights. As usually is the case, these insights reflect the world around us in ways we possibly should see but perhaps don't. As a business leader and as a father of young adults, I see *Grown Up Digital* as a collection of insights that contain tremendous value to understanding how this generation will impact the world and our future.”

—Michael McCain, CEO, Maple Leaf Foods

“Don Tapscott offers compelling insight into how the Net Generation is changing the nature of work, culture, and government and what that means for anyone who wants to engage them. *Grown Up Digital* is both a comprehensive guide to understanding the world of Web 2.0 and to unleashing the power of Talent 2.0.” —Tammy Johns, SVP, Global Workforce Strategy, Manpower Inc.

“Understanding the expectations and motivations of the next generation is a critical challenge for all businesses. Don Tapscott’s latest book is fascinating and entertaining for parents and educators, but it is a must-read for business leaders who have much to gain from understanding this important and different demographic.”

—Gordon Nixon, President & CEO, RBC Financial Group

“Don’s book is like the firm nudge with a cold steel pointer from a teacher who catches you looking out the window. Tapscott explains that success is not about the control and authority we grant ourselves to “empower people”—it’s all about genuine understanding and creating an environment where people can and will choose to motivate themselves.”

—Bill McEwan, President & CEO, Sobeys Inc.

“For anyone leading a talent-based organization, *Grown Up Digital* is an essential read. The Net Generation is transforming the way we work, learn, play, and communicate and redefining how organizations recruit, train, motivate, collaborate, and innovate. A revolution in how we live and work is upon us. This generation is the one to watch and learn from.”

—Bill Green, Chairman & CEO, Accenture

“Today’s workforce is no longer one size that fits all, which leaves employers across all industries in a serious state of peril. Employers need to recognize and adapt to the rapidly changing world of work, channeling the motivations that different generations bring to their workforce. Don Tapscott has not only grasped the subject, but he is uniquely positioned to offer real advice on how to address these changes.”

—Jeffrey A. Joerres, Chairman & CEO, Manpower Inc.

“Don Tapscott nails it. *Grown Up Digital* provides a guided tour of how the pioneering Net Generation is changing the way we all live, work, and play in a global creative economy. A must-read.”

—Richard Florida, author, *Who’s Your City?* and *The Rise of the Creative Class*

“Don Tapscott delivers an insightful and practical book for anyone seeking to better understand, appreciate, and unlock the full potential of today’s youth. Backed by comprehensive research, *Grown Up Digital* debunks popular myths and reveals the norms and motivations of a generation poised to transform business, education, government, and society.”

—James Quigley, CEO, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu

“Don captures learnings and statistics about the Net Generation that are on target. Net Geners are coming into the world and workplace now. Moreover, as a parent, I read with recognition yet found it amazing that some of the things I’ve experienced were captured on a page. Don’s realizations in *Grown Up Digital* are highly relevant and must be brought to a broader audience.”

—Ann Purr, Second Vice President,
Information Management, LOMA

“In *Grown Up Digital*, Tapscott tells us how the Net Generation is creating our future and why their opinions count. He uniquely shows how to harvest the big contributions this generation has to offer.”

—Fred Smith, President & CEO, FedEx

“No one has been a more informed commentator on the transformative impact of the digital age than Don Tapscott. *Grown Up Digital* reveals the impact that youthful empowered employees, customers, and citizens are having and will have on our daily lives. It is profound.”

—Brad Anderson, CEO, Best Buy

“In *Grown Up Digital*, Don Tapscott portrays eloquently and in rich color the massive impact that The Net Generation—those born between 1977 and 1997, 80 million in the U.S. alone—will have on the future of society and the economy. He accomplishes this with his usual acumen, deftness, depth, and good humor.”

—Bill Dimma, former senior executive and
director of 55 companies over 45 years

“Don Tapscott provides an exciting road map to surviving and thriving in the Connected Era.”

—Michael Dell, CEO, Dell

“Ignore the deep insights in *Grown Up Digital* and you risk becoming an irrelevant leader for next generation employees. Tapscott’s optimism for youth is infectious and inspirational.”

—Kal Patel, Executive Vice President,
Emerging Business, Best Buy

“*Grown Up Digital* is the first guide to the land of the Net Generation that should be read both by visitors and residents alike. Tapscott’s latest work follows *Growing Up Digital* with lockstep obedience and shows all signs of being as prescient and relevant.”

—Nicholas Negroponte, Founder & Chairman,
One Laptop Per Child

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments/xi

PART ONE: MEET THE NET GEN

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 The Net Generation Comes of Age	9
CHAPTER 2 A Generation Bathed in Bits	39
CHAPTER 3 The Eight Net Gen Norms: Characteristics of a Generation	73
CHAPTER 4 The Net Generation Brain	97

PART TWO: TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER 5 The Net Generation as Learners: Rethinking Education	121
CHAPTER 6 The Net Generation in the Workforce: Rethinking Talent and Management	149
CHAPTER 7 The Net Generation as Consumers: N-Fluence Networks and the Prosumer Revolution	185
CHAPTER 8 The Net Generation and the Family: No Place Like the New Home	219

PART THREE: TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

CHAPTER 9 The Net Generation and Democracy: Obama, Social Networks, and Citizen Engagement	243
CHAPTER 10 Making the World a Better Place—at Ground Level	269
CHAPTER 11 In Defense of the Future	289

Appendix/313

Notes/319

Bibliography/345

Index/361

INTRODUCTION

It's amazing to think how far the kids have come in the dozen or so years since I wrote *Growing Up Digital*. The inspiration for that book came from watching my two children use complex technologies like computers, video games, and VCRs with seemingly no effort. By 1993, my son Alex, then 7, played sophisticated games, typed class assignments on a Mac, and sent an e-mail to Santa Claus at Christmas. That same year, my 10-year-old daughter Nicole figured out how to communicate with friends on computer chat lines. She was always pushing the envelope on technology in our home, even more so than her brother. When the first browser, Mosaic, brought the World Wide Web onto the scene, they took to it like ducks to water, becoming more proficient surfers than either me or my wife Ana. When a new technology came into the house, we would often turn to the kids to figure it out.

I thought they were prodigies. Then I noticed that all their friends were just as talented. So to find out what was going on, the company I founded, now called nGenera, launched a project to study the impact of the Internet on youth in an effort to understand this unique generation. I initially assembled a team to interview 300 young people aged 20 or under, and I spent a lot of time trying to understand my own kids and their friends, especially regarding how they interacted with technology and how that might be changing the ways in which they learned, played, communicated, and even thought. In the end, Niki and Alex

weren't just subjects of my research, they became partners of sorts—even though they were still children.

THE FIRST GENERATION TO COME OF AGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

I came to the conclusion that the defining characteristic of an entire generation was that they were the first to be “growing up digital.” In the book of the same title, written between 1996 and 1997, I named them the Net Generation. “The baby boom has an echo and it's even louder than the original,” I wrote. They outnumbered the boomer adults, I noted, and they were different from any other generation because they were the first to grow up surrounded by digital media. “Today's kids are so bathed in bits that they think it's all part of the natural landscape.”

They related to technology in a different way than we boomers did. “To them the digital technology is no more intimidating than a VCR or toaster,” I said. “For the first time in history, children are more comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents with an innovation central to society. And it is through the use of the digital media that the Net Generation will develop and superimpose its culture on the rest of society. Boomers, stand back. Already these kids are learning, playing, communicating, working, and creating communities very differently than their parents. They are a force for social transformation.”

When I wrote those words, the Web had only just arrived. Technology was relatively primitive. We were still using a low-speed dial-up connection to the Internet. Although I was always first on my block to get the fastest connection possible, it was so slow you had time to get a cup of coffee while you were waiting for information to pop up. If my kids had to deal with a slow connection like that today, they'd go crazy.

It was a different world in 1997, digitally speaking. There was no Google, no Facebook, no Twitter, and no BlackBerrys. YouTube didn't exist; you had to watch a music video on TV. I could, nonetheless, see the potential of this incredible new technology, so I speculated on the impact of the new media on youth.

People listened. *Growing Up Digital* was, for a while, the bestselling nonfiction book on Amazon.com and won the first ever Amazon.com bestseller award in the nonfiction category. It was translated into two dozen languages, and I shared the conclusions I had set forth in the book with literally hundreds of audiences around the world and with many millions of people through radio, television, and the print media. Many educators, as well as business and government leaders, told us that the book changed the way they manage their organizations and how they relate to youth.

Flash forward a decade—to the high-speed, interactive world that grown-up Net Geners live in. The speed of delivery on the Internet is far faster, as high-speed broadband Internet access is now common. What’s more, you can tap into a world of knowledge from far more places—from your BlackBerry, for example, or your mobile phone, which can surf the Internet, capture GPS coordinates, take photos, and swap text messages. Just about every kid has an iPod and a personal profile on social networking sites such as Facebook, which lets Net Geners monitor their friends’ every twitch—all the time.

The Net Generation has *come of age*. In 2008, the eldest of the generation turned 31. The youngest turned 11. Around the world the generation is flooding into the workplace, marketplace, and every niche of society. They are bringing their demographic muscle, media smarts, purchasing power, new models of collaborating and parenting, entrepreneurship, and political power into the world.

THE DARK SIDE

But there are plenty of concerns and criticisms of this generation that are voiced by everyone from parents to frustrated employers. Many academics, journalists, and pundits present skeptical, negative, even cynical views of the Net Generation. The top 10 issues are:

- *They’re dumber than we were at their age.* You hear different variations of this popular theme. They don’t know anything, writes Mark Bauerlein in *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*. According to Bauerlein, Net Geners are a “portrait of vigorous, indiscriminate ignorance.”¹ All these gadgets can even give some people, including Net Geners, symptoms that look like attention deficit disorder, psychiatrist Edward Hallowell suggests in his book *CrazyBusy*. The result: a shallow, distracted generation that can’t focus on anything. Then there’s the full frontal attack that comes from novelist Robert Bly: “Today we are lying to ourselves about the renaissance the computer will bring. It will bring nothing. What it means is that the neo-cortex is finally eating itself.”² They don’t read and are poor communicators. All this time online is reflected in the schools and universities where they perform badly on tests.
- *They’re screenagers, Net addicted, losing their social skills, and they have no time for sports or healthy activities.* Time spent online could have been devoted to sports and face-to-face conversation; the result is a generation of awkward, fat people. And when they get addicted to video games, some say, the results can be worse. Mothers Against Videogame Addiction and Violence (MAVAV), for example, describes video games as “the world’s fastest growing addiction and the most reckless endangerment of children today—comparable to drug and alcohol abuse.”

- *They have no shame.* “It is pretty routine these days for girls to post provocative pictures of themselves online,” warns M. Gigi Durham, the thoughtful author of *The Lolita Effect*.³ Young people, unaware that it may come back to haunt them, merrily give out all sorts of personal information online, whether it’s to a college recruiter, a future employer, or to a manipulative marketer, cyberbully, or predator. Parents, educators, and employers are amazed when they see what kinds of digital displays of affection are posted online for the entire world to see. Kids don’t understand what the problem is!
- *Because their parents have coddled them, they are adrift in the world and afraid to choose a path.* That’s why so many of them move home after college. They really can’t cope with the independence. Parents are often delighted, but the neighbors raise their eyebrows. Why aren’t they setting off on their own? Are they going to be coddled all their lives by helicopter parents who hover over their university professors and even their employers? According to William Damon, author of *The Path to Purpose*, “Youth are so afraid of commitment that many of them may never marry, and they’re so uncertain about picking a career that they may wind up living at home forever.”⁴ Seminars like *Spoiled Rotten: Today’s Children and How to Change Them*, by former telecommunications salesman Fred Gosman, advise parents to impose stricter codes of discipline.
- *They steal.* They violate intellectual property rights, downloading music, swapping songs, and sharing anything they can on peer-to-peer networks with no respect for the rights of the creators or owners. “When you go online and download songs without permission, you are stealing,” the Recording Industry Association of America says on its Web site. It should be a criminal offense, the recording industry says. That’s why they feel justified in suing children. The ease with which the Net Gen uses the Internet has also made them masters of plagiarism.
- *They’re bullying friends online.* Witness the eight teens, six of them girls, who beat up a teenager in April 2008 and put it on YouTube. Here is the explanation from Glenn Beck, the controversial TV host: “Teens are living in virtual reality and a voyeuristic culture of violence and humiliation, and it’s all for fame and fortune.”
- *They’re violent.* Just look at the two youths who committed mass murder in 1999 at Columbine High School near Denver, Colorado. “Absent the combination of extremely violent video games and these boys’ incredibly deep involvement, use of, and addiction to these games, and the boys’ basic personalities, these murders and this massacre would not have occurred,” claims a lawsuit against computer makers lodged by the victims. According to MAVAV, the video game industry promotes “hatred, racism, sexism, and the most disturbing trend: clans and guilds, an underground video game phenomenon which closely resembles gangs.”
- *They have no work ethic and will be bad employees.* William Damon, in *The Path to Purpose*, says that students today are drifting aimlessly, with no clue as to what they want to do or become in the future.⁵ They are “slackers”⁶ who have a sense of

entitlement, and as they enter the workforce they are placing all kinds of unrealistic demands on employers for everything from sophisticated technology to new approaches to management. Many companies and governments have banned social networks like Facebook because youth “love to waste their time.” “They’re woefully ill-prepared for the demands of today’s (and tomorrow’s) workplace,” according to a consortium led by the Conference Board.

- *This is the latest narcissistic “me” generation.* “They are far more narcissistic than students were 25 years ago,” says Jean Twenge, the professor who reviewed college students’ responses to the Narcissistic Personality Inventory between the early 1980s and 2006. “Current technology fuels an increase in narcissism,” she said. “By its very name, MySpace encourages attention-seeking, as does YouTube.”
- *They don’t give a damn.* They have no values and they don’t care about anyone else. Their only interests are popular culture, celebrities, and their friends. They don’t read newspapers or watch television news. They get their news from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* on Comedy Central. They don’t vote and are not involved in civil society. When they become adults, they will be bad citizens.

Professor Bauerlein sums it up well: “The twenty-first-century teen, connected and multitasked, autonomous yet peer-mindful, makes no great leap forward in human intelligence, global thinking, or netizen-ship. Young users have learned a thousand new things, no doubt. They upload and download, surf and chat, post and design, but they haven’t learned to analyze a complex text, store facts in their heads, comprehend a foreign policy decision, take lessons from history, or spell correctly. Never having recognized their responsibility to the past, they have opened a fissure in our civic foundations, and it shows in their halting passage into adulthood and citizenship.”⁷

We should look closely at the criticisms. They’re not coming from some crazy zealots or from hardened ideologues. Robert Bly, for instance, is a mainstream, well-known, bestselling author and social commentator. While there are some interesting ideas in his writings, his hostility is so over-the-top it should cause us all to listen up.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

It’s a pretty depressing picture of this generation! And if accurate, the future is surely bleak.

To find out the truth about this generation, my company set out to conduct the most comprehensive investigation of them ever done. This \$4 million research project, funded by large organizations, was conducted between 2006 and 2008. My colleagues and I have interviewed nearly 6,000 Net Geners from around the world, and while most of the research, described in over 40 reports,

is proprietary to the research sponsors, I'm going to share some of the findings and main conclusions throughout this book.

I then put together a core team that could help me take this work to the next level by creating an accessible book that I hope will have mass appeal. I've spoken to hundreds of members of the Net Generation, from the kids in my neighborhood to some of the generation's biggest stars, like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and Michael Furdyk, who made his first million in the dot-com age in high school, and then launched a network called TakingITGlobal.org, comprised of over 100,000 digital activists from around the world. We created communities on Facebook and TakingITGlobal.org that would give me answers to dozens of difficult questions. We also interviewed academics, scientists, and business, education, and government leaders who have unique experiences and insights.

Not surprisingly, my two most important collaborators were my children, Niki and Alex, who spent many hours with me brainstorming, reviewing ideas, and often setting me straight. In a sense they are my coauthors, and you will read many of their insights and comments throughout the course of this book, supplementing all the hard data, case reports, and interviews.

THE NET GENERATION HAS ARRIVED

In this book you'll learn that the Net Generation *has* arrived. And while there are many concerns, overall the kids are more than alright.

The story that emerges from the research is an inspiring one, and it should bring us all great hope. As the first global generation ever, the Net Geners are smarter, quicker, and more tolerant of diversity than their predecessors. They care strongly about justice and the problems faced by their society and are typically engaged in some kind of civic activity at school, at work, or in their communities. Recently in the United States, hundreds of thousands of them have been inspired by Barack Obama's run for the presidency and have gotten involved in politics for the first time. This generation is engaging politically and sees democracy and government as key tools for improving the world.

With their reflexes tuned to speed and freedom, these empowered young people are beginning to transform every institution of modern life. From the workplace to the marketplace, from politics to education to the basic unit of any society, the family, they are replacing a culture of control with a culture of enablement.

Eight characteristics, or norms, describe the typical Net Gener and differentiate them from their boomer parents. They prize freedom and freedom of choice. They want to customize things, make them their own. They're natural

collaborators, who enjoy a conversation, not a lecture. They'll scrutinize you and your organization. They insist on integrity. They want to have fun, even at work and at school. Speed is normal. Innovation is part of life.

CONQUERING FEAR WITH KNOWLEDGE

Why the apparent hostility toward the youth culture and its media? People become defensive when threatened by something new and which they don't understand. Historic innovations and shifts in thinking are often received with coolness, even mockery. Vested interests fight change. Just as the proponents of Newtonian physics argued against Einstein's general theory of relativity, so the leaders of traditional media are typically skeptical, at best, toward the new. Both film and print media showed considerable unease with television.

Baby boomers set a precedent of being a major generational threat to their elders. Previous generations didn't have the luxury of a prolonged adolescence; after a brief childhood, kids went straight into the workforce. But baby boomers grew up in a time of relative prosperity and attended school for many more years than did their parents. They had time to develop their own youth culture. Rock 'n' roll, long hair, protest movements, weird clothes, and new lifestyles made their parents uneasy. They also had a new medium through which to communicate their culture—television.

Now it's the boomers' turn to feel uneasy. A new generation has emerged, with new values, and it understands the new media much better than the boomers do. The situation that has developed is a classic generation gap. No wonder you see so much confusion and insecurity being shown by the boomers, not to mention all the nasty books, articles, and TV shows targeting today's youth and the Net Generation's culture and new media.

I think that, overall, the Internet has been good for them, and they will be good for us. Of all my concerns, one big one stands out. Net Geners are making a serious mistake, and most of them don't realize it. They're giving away their personal information on social networks and elsewhere and in doing so are undermining their future privacy. They tell me they don't care; it's all about sharing. But here I must speak with the voice of experience. Some day that party picture is going to bite them when they seek a senior corporate job or public office. I think they should wake up, now, and become aware of the extent to which they're sharing parts of themselves that one day they may wish they had kept private. You will also read that other concerns are more complicated and require a thoughtful response on our part, rather than the cynical and popular sport of attacking and ridiculing youth.

Most of the criticisms are founded on suspicion and fear, usually on the part of older people. Those fears are perhaps understandable. The New Web, in the hands of a technologically savvy and community-minded Net Generation, has the power to shake up society and topple authorities in many walks of life. Once information flows freely and the people have the tools to share it effectively and use it to organize themselves, life as we know it will be different. Schools, universities, stores, businesses, even politics will have to adapt to this generation's style of doing things, and in my view, that will be good. Families will have new challenges too, as their kids explore the world out there online. Life, in other words, will change, and many people find change hard.

It's only natural to fear what we don't understand.

LEARN FROM THEM AND ACT

It is my hope that this book will dispel some of the myths about this generation, revealing what they're really like and how we can learn from them in order to change our institutions and society for the better. Perhaps employers will consider changing their HR and management practices once they see the value of tapping into the typical Net Gen's extraordinary collaborative orientation, which has become so critical for twenty-first-century business. I hope that educators will consider altering their traditional sage-on-the-stage approach to instruction once they see how inappropriate it is for Net Gen learners. I'm pretty sure that politicians will take careful note of the novel ways that the Obama campaign has used the Internet to rally young people. I hope parents who come to my speeches because they wonder what is going on with their kids will read this book and understand their children a little better. I hope this book will reassure them and help them to realize that the digital immersion is a good thing for their kids.

What an extraordinary period in human history this is—for the first time the next generation coming of age can teach us how to ready our world for the future. The digital tools of their childhood and youth are more powerful than what exists in much of corporate America. I believe that if we listen to them and engage them, their culture of interaction, collaboration, and enablement will drive economic and social development and prepare this shrinking planet for a more secure, fair, and prosperous future. We *can* learn how to avoid and manage the dark side—a predictable thing with any new communications medium—more effectively.

Learn from them and you will see the new culture of high-performance work, the twenty-first-century school and college, the innovative corporation, a more open family, a democracy where citizens are engaged, and perhaps even the new, networked society.

Meet Don Tapscott, author of *Grown Up Digital*



Don Tapscott is one of the world's leading authorities on business strategy, with an emphasis on how information technology changes business, government and society. He is the author or co-author of 13 widely read books, including *Wikinomics*, which was the bestselling management book in 2007 and is now translated into 22 languages. He is chairman of [nGenera Insight](#), a global business innovation company, headquartered in Austin, Texas, with offices in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. Don directs several of nGenera Insight's research and education programs, which serve a marquee list of Global 2000 customers. Don is also an adjunct professor at the J.L. Rotman School of Business at the University of Toronto.

To learn more about the research programs behind *Grown Up Digital* and how your organization can get involved, or if you would like to arrange an executive briefing for your company or professional group, please contact nGenera at grownupdigital@ngenera.com.