

## Book Review of *Everything is Miscellaneous*

*Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder*  
by David Weinberger, 2007.

Reviewed by Shannon Roy.

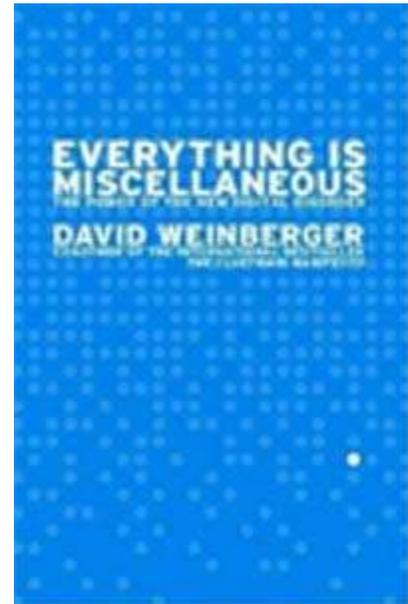
*Everything is Miscellaneous* is not just about the explosion of information that has taken place since the development of the Internet, but about the changes it will make in the way information is organized.

Weinberger comments that, “There is no dorm room, divorce or political scandal as messy as the World Wide Web.” Some people are disturbed by the messy aspects of the Web and would like to somehow “tame” it. But the messiness is not a surface trait of modern information. It results from the fact that information has completely changed its nature. In the past, information, like everything else, had to live in physical space and inside physical constraints. On the Internet, information has no physical constraints. It can expand indefinitely.

The Internet started with a very simple idea: “Suppose all the information on computers everywhere were linked. All the bits of information on the planet would be available to everyone who had access to a computer.” No one put any limits on the “information” that could be thus created and distributed, although they might or might not put a price on it. Weinberger adds, “The Web has grown without a plan, which is exactly why it has grown like crazy.”

If you have an unimaginably vast amount of information, you have the problem of locating the information you happen to want. None of the systems that scientists or cartographers or librarians have used in the past are adequate to handle modern information. The developers of modern search engines have had to develop the philosophy that everything is a tag and that tags need to be in as many places as possible. The system, like the information it accesses, does not live inside such physical constraints as a catalog, a museum or a map room. It can go anywhere and, in fact, it has to. Increasingly, information users have to filter and organize information after it has been created and not before.

Weinberger points out that the Wikipedia sounded like a terrible idea: to build an encyclopedia by letting anyone create and edit information on anything – impossible! Well, actually, that isn’t exactly what happened. Wikipedia does have authority control. It just doesn’t resemble the authority control of classic academia. And the Wikipedia project has proved that free people creating freely can create high-quality information and much more of it than any structured encyclopedia project.



The Internet contains false, misleading, biased and offensive information. But the world of print contained false, misleading, biased and offensive information and left the readers hostage to it, sometimes for years. The Internet is a wide open environment. It is self-correcting to the extent that it is created, read, edited, re-created and given away by millions of diverse, but mostly decent, people.