

## How Big Is Amazon.com?

**The Rich Get Richer**

**Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

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I made a comment to Joe Baity yesterday as we were talking along the lines of “How long until we are the United States of Amazon?” It sure seems that Amazon’s founder, Jeff Bezos (who is only \$4 billion away from supplanting Bill Gates as the world’s richest man), is using his billions to gobble up property after property. At least that is what it seems like when we hear the business news. Amazon has grown to seems to be one giant monopoly of online—and now real world—retail.

Here are ten companies owned by Amazon:

1. IMDB.com (movies)
2. Alexa.com (big data, like Google)
3. Audible.com (audiobooks)
4. DPReview (digital photography)
5. Box Office Mojo (movie performance)
6. AbeBooks.com (used and rare books)
7. Goodreads.com (book reviews)
8. Twitch.tv (video gaming)
9. Woot (daily discount retailer)
10. Whole Foods (upscale, organic grocery)

Bezos also owns the *Washington Post* and Blue Origin (aerospace and spaceflight services), and has significant investments—personal and through Amazon—in Lookout (mobile phone security), Grail (early cancer detection), Juno therapeutics (clinical-stage cell immunotherapy), Rethink Robotics, Workday (on-demand financial and human capital management), Everfi (education software), Zappos (shoes/clothing), AirBnB, Uber, Business Insider, Living Social, Twitter, and Google.

That’s quite a portfolio—and it is not even complete, as I failed to mention perhaps a dozen or more smaller companies that he has invested in over the

years. We would all love to have a share of the kind of money those companies bring in each year. It is really impressive, and if you are not careful, it can provoke a great deal of envy of these types of people.

But that kind of money, believe it or not, is not all that unusual. And historically, it is not unusual. It just seems like a lot because they've got all these billions, but in real dollars, they are probably just as wealthy as the wealthiest have been in the past.

The aforementioned Bill Gates has even more money than Bezos, all built on his Microsoft fortune. We could say the same for investor Warren Buffett, for Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, for the Koch brothers (Charles and David), who both are on the top ten list (I think they are Numbers 7 and 8), and several other Americans whose connections to major corporations have netted them huge fortunes—in the multiple billions of dollars. I haven't even mentioned international billionaires, like Amancio Ortega of Spain (he has a clothing chain called Zara that brings in billions of dollars) and Carlos Slim Helu of Mexico (who made his money in the telecom industry). All these have similar wealth and influence.

In fact, these men are getting richer—and a lot of others are getting wealthy too. As a matter of fact, last year was one of the biggest years for billionaires ever.

Here is the opening paragraph of *Forbes* magazine's annual list of billionaires for 2017:

It was a record year for the richest people on earth, as the number of billionaires jumped 13% to 2,043 from 1,810 last year, the first time ever that *Forbes* has pinned down more than 2,000 ten-figure-fortunes. Their total net worth rose by 18% to \$7.67 trillion, also a record. The change in the number of billionaires—up 233 since the 2016 list—was the biggest in the 31 years that *Forbes* has been tracking billionaires globally. Gainers since last year's list outnumbered losers by more than three to one.

So it is a great time to be a billionaire. Seems like everyone's doing it, and we would probably all like to jump in. The water's warm!

Here's the top-four billionaire nations, also according to *Forbes*:

The U.S. continues to have more billionaires than any other nation, with a record 565, up from 540 a year ago. China is catching up with 319. (Hong Kong has another 67, and Macau 1.) Germany has the third most with 114 and India, with 101, the first time it has had more than 100, is fourth.

We need a little bit of historical perspective here before we get apprehensive that these men and women (227) are going to take over the planet. While they may wield significant and even excessive influence, they are newcomers in a long line of such people who have made a killing in the cutting-edge businesses of the day, only to be replaced by the new kids on the block. And Jeff Bezos is one of those. Whether it is railroads, oil, shipping, airplanes, computers, Internet, bio-engineering, medicine, space, batteries—whatever it is, there are industries that pop up because of the change in technology, and someone ends up making a killing.

Just recall the robber barons of our own history, back about 150 years, not to mention the banking barons, the oil and industry tycoons like Rockefeller and Carnegie and Morgan. They were all *very* wealthy men, about to—like Carnegie—endow hundreds of libraries across the country. These men were just giving their money away. They had no use for it except to endow things and put it in trust. It is more than one person can handle.

They had huge companies that grew into monopolies of certain industries in some cases (ATT, Standard Oil), and market forces or governmental action forced them to break up into more manageable and more competitive concerns. Usually, if we let the market function—and here we must mention that too often government meddles and interferes, stalling or hindering the way the market should work—it is self-correcting, and these gargantuan businesses are whittled down to size, if not by the market then by history.

Repeatedly in Scripture, we have various ones, like Asaph and David and others, asking, “Why do the wicked prosper?” Why do they have so much and we so little, though we try to please God and do what is right? The answer that we receive it: You don't need to worry about them. As Jesus

says, what good is it if they gain the whole world and lose their own souls? They will get their due. They will get their comeuppance. We have a far greater source of wealth—we have God, and we also have a glorious future.