

## Being Digital

James W. King

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/jac>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### Recommended Citation

King, James W. (1995) "Being Digital," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 79: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1375>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Communications* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

---

## Being Digital

### Abstract

A book review of *Being Digital*, by Nicholas Negroponte.

Nicholas Negroponte. *Being Digital*. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. 243 pp., \$23. Also available as Random House AudioBooks (cassette, \$14; CD, \$15).

"Computing is not about computers anymore. It is about living." With statements like this, Nicholas Negroponte, head of MIT's media lab, offers up a desirable set of digital visions for the near future.

Negroponte's tomorrow is oriented toward "bits," "the DNA of information," as the basic article of human interchange. Today we are ending the era of thinking in terms of "atoms," large, heavy masses of things which are not generally accessible to all. The "atoms to bits" comparison is Negroponte's way of describing our current age — electronic or information or post-information.

The author of the book argues that information is no longer "pushed" at the consumer. Rather people, or their digital proxies (like Microsoft's Bob), will "pull" and even help formulate the personal information people seek and require. While much of Negroponte's book will sound familiar to conversant communicators, readers should discover a very rich storehouse of distinctive approaches and provocative statements for thought and discussion about our emerging, global digital society. Some examples:

The digital world is intrinsically scalable. It can grow and change in a more continuous and organic way than former analog systems.

TV Guide has been known to make larger profits than all four network combined[. This] suggests that the value of information about information can be greater than the value of the information itself...

The medium is not the message in a digital world. It is an embodiment of it. A message might have several embodiments automatically derivable from the same data...

If your company makes only one kind of bit, you are not in very good shape for the future.

The key to the future of television is to stop thinking about television as television. TV benefits most from thinking of it in terms of bits.

Along with other thoughts, these ideas should place this book on your shelf. For administrators who are still early on the learning curve of the information age, or stuck in it somewhere, and require nurturing to assess the future, "Being Digital" will provide much stimulation.

No computer background is necessary. For individuals leading discussions about the future of communications and technology, there is an abundance of conversational themes.

The author does not go into the counter arguments about the digital revolution — access, affordability, or social isolation. He is an advocate, missionary, and spokesperson for it. This partly explains the entertaining nature of *Being Digital*. You can sense Negroponte's passion, zest, and enthusiasm.

*Being Digital* is recommended communication reading through 1995, and maybe 1996, when it will most certainly be dated. It is also available on cassette, read by Penn Jillette; in audio, it becomes warm and compelling. A CD version can be found as well. You can get more information and a sample of the book on the World Wide Web: [HTTP://WWW.RANDOMHOUSE.COM/](http://www.randomhouse.com/)

**James W. King**  
**University of Nebraska**