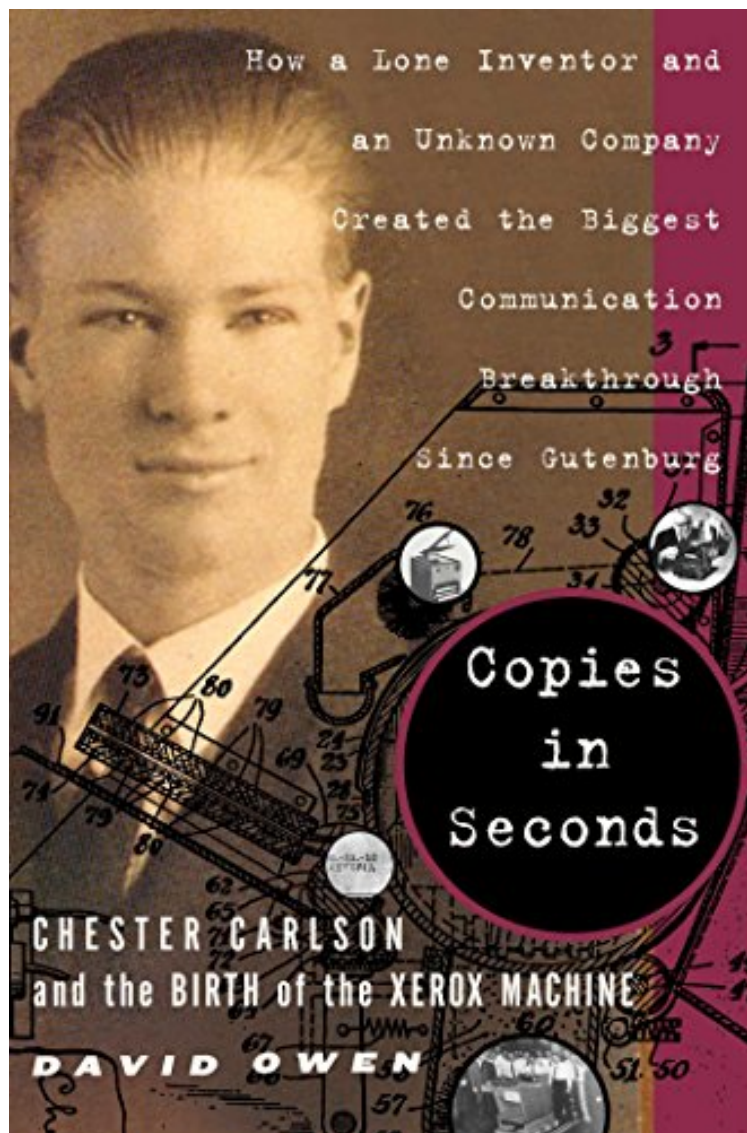


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## Copies in Seconds: How a Lone Inventor and an Unknown Company Created the Biggest Communication Breakthrough Since Gutenberg--Chester Carlson and the Birth of the Xerox Machine

David Owen

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## Lone Inventor and an Unknown Company Created the Biggest Communication Breakthrough Since Gutenberg-- Chester Carlson and the Birth of the Xerox Machine:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A book to read over and overBy T. ORourkeI've always enjoyed David Owen's writing in the New Yorker and Golf Digest, and I read Green Metropolis in the hardcover. When I got my Kindle back in 2009, this was one of the first books I bought, but I kept putting off reading it until the last month. It is such an enjoyable book! Mr. Owen has constructed a modern masterpiece of research and style. He perfectly captures the challenges of inventions and the types of people who will pursue them against all odds and in difficult conditions. Each character is expertly and endearingly portrayed. But even the best writer needs a great topic to write a really great book, and this one is timeless. It is hard to imagine what the world would be like without copiers, but I lived it for a few years volunteering in Africa, searching for the few precious pieces of worn carbon paper so I could fill out my psychiatric referrals in triplicate (once while a naked, psychotic man tried to throw his fresh feces at me through the screen of the police van). I find myself wishing I was there with Mr. Owen as he interviewed the people and viewed their demonstrations. He is always good company and seems to bring out the very best in the people and topics he investigates.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An unexpectedly engrossing storyBy Stephen C.This book tells not one but three fascinating stories. The first is the personal story of Chester Carlson, from his impoverished early life, through financial success to his philanthropy in later life. Carlson was a man of great humility and generosity.The second is the fascinating engineering story in which a cumbersome process that barely worked in the laboratory is brought painfully to commercial fruition. After reading this book, you'll never take a copier for granted again.Finally, it is the business story of how the big players like Kodak and IBM failed to see the potential in the process, and how an unknown company (Haloid) was willing to take the necessary risks.I am in the commercial printing business and have raved about this book so much that I bought two copies to loan to customers and others in the industry. It's that good.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. If David Owen wrote classified ads, I'd read them.By Kristen SmithDavid Owen is a staff writer for The New Yorker and the author of many books. He is seemingly able to write about anything. He is a gifted writer and always manages to put a few funny things into even serious topics, and I appreciate that. The first part of Copies in Seconds is an entertaining and clearly written history of printing. Then Owen tells the story of Chester Carlson's life and his belief that xerography could work. It's a story of crestfallen perseverance that seems often ill-advised. Here is a quote from the book: "Xerography is unusual among modern inventions in having been conceived by a single person. There was no one in France or Russia who was working on the same thing. The Chinese did not invent it in the eleventh century BC. The inventor was a shy, humble patent attorney named Chester Carlson." After Xerox became a copying behemoth and Carlson became a rich man, he continued to be modest person telling those who asked about his career that he "worked at Xerox." The kind of person he was is as inspiring as his invention of the copy machine, which Fortune magazine described as "the most successful product ever marketed in America." I'm really glad Owen wrote this book and told Carlson's story.

The first plain-paper office copier -- which was introduced in 1960 and has been called the most successful product ever marketed in America -- is unusual among major high-technology inventions in that its central process was conceived by a single person. David Owen's fascinating narrative tells the story of the machine nobody thought we needed but now we can't live without.Chester Carlson grew up in unspeakable poverty, worked his way through junior college and the California Institute of Technology, and made his discovery in solitude in the depths of the Great Depression. He offered his big idea to two dozen major corporations -- among them IBM, RCA, and General Electric -- all of which turned him down. So persistent was this failure of capitalist vision that by the time the Xerox 914 was manufactured by an obscure photographic-supply company in Rochester, New York, Carlson's original patent had expired. Xerography was so unusual and nonintuitive that it conceivably could have been overlooked entirely. Scientists who visited the drafty warehouses where the first machines were built sometimes doubted that Carlson's invention was even theoretically feasible.Drawing on interviews, Xerox company archives, and the private papers of the Carlson family, David Owen has woven together a fascinating and instructive story about persistence, courage, and technological innovation -- a story that has never before been fully told.