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JEFF BEZOS

CEO, chairman, president, founder, **Amazon**
Revenue: **\$177.9 billion**



This year's installment of The Power List, our fourth annual ranking of the top players across advertising, marketing, media and tech, sees Amazon's Jeff Bezos return to the prime position, placing first for the second straight year. He outpaced Alphabet's Larry Page (No. 2) and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg (No. 3)—though all three continue to drive us headlong into the future. It's also worth noting that, for the first time, no holding company chiefs placed among the top 10, while honchos at consultancies, CRM firms, cloud providers and gaming concerns came on strong. To formulate the list, the editors considered numerous criteria. These included company value, revenue and growth, market performance, consumer reach, standing among rivals, industry accolades, media buzz and the amount of news each player contributes to the content cycle. As always, lesser known execs and divisional leaders share space with agency and media CEOs, brand chieftains and high-tech titans. It's an eclectic mix, designed to reflect the dynamic, complex and interconnected streams of power that propel the Adweek universe.

Can Bezos cure America's healthcare blues?

No stranger to bold initiatives, Amazon's founder and chief executive began writing a prescription in January, joining Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffett and JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon in a venture designed to lower costs for consumers. Though details about the project have been scarce, Bezos made two key moves last month: naming surgeon and Harvard professor Dr. Atul Gawande to lead the initiative, and acquiring online pharmacy PillPack, which operates in 50 states.

"Like everything Amazon touches, it will make filling prescriptions more convenient for customers," says Thomas Ordahl, chief strategy officer at brand consultancy Landor. "It already has the capabilities to ensure fast and speedy service. Given its size, it could possibly even be able to use its negotiating power to provide customers with lower prescription drug prices—especially on generic medications."

Though he adds this caveat: "Healthcare is a much more regulated and complex industry [than retail], so to completely transform the current healthcare system could be out of reach even for Amazon."

Fair enough. But transforming complex, seemingly inflexible systems is what Bezos has been all about since founding Amazon in 1994 and remaking the way billions of people buy and sell stuff every day.

Since then, he's kept evolving—Bezos once famously said it was dangerous not to do so—gaining traction in smart homes (Alexa, Echo), original content (The Big Sick, The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel), grocery stores (he bought Whole Foods last summer), cloud services (a huge Amazon revenue driver, where the sky appears to be the limit), mass media (he acquired The Washington Post in 2013), and private space exploration (his Blue Origin program will sell tickets for suborbital flights next year).

"Jeff Bezos is an architect of tomorrow," says Faith Popcorn, futurist and CEO of marketing consultancy BrainReserve. "Our whole lives are going to be consolidated under Amazon and optimized by Amazon and its metrics of what people like us buy, and what other products and services we're primed to want—yes, primed with a capital P. It's both brilliant and terrifying at the same time."

That might sound like hyperbole, but consider: Amazon's reach is ginormous, with more than 100 million Prime members and 5 billion items shipped through that subscription service last year. And as Bezos expands into new areas—which he

does with dizzying frequency—Amazon becomes more ubiquitous every day.

Of course, other corporate visionaries are likewise creating the future through technology. But Larry Page's sweeping notions—smart cities, flying cars, increased longevity—feel somewhat distant, while trust in Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook continues to erode.

Bezos, however, keeps excelling in the present day, and his aggressive style paid off with a stunning first quarter, in which Amazon's revenue jumped 43 percent and profits more than doubled to \$1.6 billion. And that performance followed an impressive 2017, in which sales spiked 31 percent and net income hit \$3 billion, compared with \$2.4 billion in 2016.

Naturally, Bezos is doing well for himself. He ranks as the richest human in the planet's history, but he's also spreading the wealth around, most recently through Amazon's Delivery Service Partners program. "Soon, we won't just be shopping from Bezos, we'll be getting paid by him, too. A perfect circle," Popcorn says.

Could anything spoil this utopian vision and topple Bezos from his lofty perch? It seems unlikely in the short term, but the man and his company aren't unassailable. For one thing, heightened competition looms from formidable players such as Walmart and Alibaba. "Right now, Amazon still does digital better than anyone else, but other companies are getting close," Ordahl says. "Once a number of brands begin to get on equal footing with Amazon, it will have to find a new touch point to separate itself from other competitors."

Popcorn views lingering questions about Bezos' ethics—stirred up by his vague responses to recent protests over Amazon pay rates and work conditions—as a possible Achilles heel. "In this era and tomorrow, as millennials and Gen Z rise in the culture, you must be transparent and communicate," she says. "If a company doesn't listen to criticism and respond thoughtfully, it'll end badly. He may be on the road to an employee-supplier-consumer strike/revolution."

So far, however, the operation has been a massive success. All signs indicate a long, healthy stay on top, and the willingness to meet challenges head-on.

"What we need to do is always lean into the future," Bezos once said. "When the world changes around you and when it changes against you—what used to be a tailwind is now a head wind—you have to lean into that and figure out what to do, because complaining isn't a strategy."

BY DAVID GIANATASIO