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Autor: Zittrain, Jonathan

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This extraordinary book explains the engine that has catapulted the Internet from backwater to ubiquity_and reveals that it is sputtering precisely because of its runaway success. With the unwitting help of its users, the generative Internet is on a path to a lockdown, ending its cycle of innovation_and facilitating unsettling new kinds of control.

IPods, iPhones, Xboxes, and TiVos represent the first wave of Internet-centered products that can't be easily modified by anyone except their vendors or selected partners. These "tethered appliances" have already been used in remarkable but little-known ways: car GPS systems have been reconfigured at the demand of law enforcement to eavesdrop on the occupants at all times, and digital video recorders have been ordered to self-destruct thanks to a lawsuit against the manufacturer thousands of miles away. New Web 2.0 platforms like Google mash-ups and Facebook are rightly touted_but their applications can be similarly monitored and eliminated from a central source. As tethered appliances and applications eclipse the PC, the very nature of the Internet_its "generativity," or innovative character_is at risk.

The Internet's current trajectory is one of lost opportunity. Its salvation, Zittrain argues, lies in the hands of its millions of users. Drawing on generative technologies like Wikipedia that have so far survived their own successes, this book shows how to develop new technologies and social structures that allow users to work creatively and collaboratively, participate in solutions, and become true "netizens."