



The *Times* calls it the “the most talked-about business book of the year,” sometimes hailed as a new law of supply and demand, sometimes roundly criticised for extending a statistical distribution analysis too far. Love it or hate it, *The Long Tail* succeeds at making its ambitious point. I caught up with its author, Chris Anderson, editor-in-chief of *Wired* magazine, at *Wired*'s offices in San Francisco between stops on his book tour this year.

The Long Tail has been referred to by PBS as an assessment of the forces shaping entertainment and media today. As Anderson himself says, its focus is the shift in today's culture “from mass markets to millions of niches,” signalling the end to what he calls “the tyranny of the hit”.

The concept refers to the long tail of the market demand curve that

stimulate the grass roots response, rather than pushing down that kind of broadcasting?’

Greenfield: Is this kind of word-of-mouth revolutionising the way people are doing things?

Anderson: It isn't the only way to do it, but it's been interesting to watch Microsoft, which had been a traditional top-down marketing machine, realise that its marketing methods were losing traction, that

mouth, people talking to other people; and these *influentials* are amateurs. So the question becomes, ‘How do you influence them, how do you market, how do you

The Long Tail Tomorrow's Media Market Space

consists of mega-hits at the top and hundreds or thousands of niches creating an extended tail of small hits thriving in unlimited shelf space found online through the likes of Amazon, eBay, NetFlix and others.

The term has been widely adopted and crops up in business meetings, news reports, and industry marketing patter, as a new definition of how markets are opening up in a connected broadband world. Whichever side of the fence you sit on, the change basic tenets are striking in their application to business, media, and the web. The hallmarks of the new market space consist of:

- New, viral advertising influences
- A sea change in storage and distribution practices
- Channel opportunities that never previously existed

We started our discussion with the book's theme of how media is changing shopping forever. His theories amount to his own ‘Greatest Hits’, ones that, I believe, push the envelope of how media providers must plan and operate in a post-Internet, convergence world. This is a world where one size no longer fits all, and where media companies will be forced to efficiently determine who their customers really are, which are passionate, and how to reach them.

Greenfield: Are we seeing the rise of a new law of marketing?

Anderson: The traditional model of marketing is where you have a message about a product and you push it out through mass market advertising, such as PR and the media, to generate some big bucks and reach as many people as possible.

This traditional model is very much a top-down mass-market sort of approach. That looks great for mass-market products but for niche products, obviously, one size doesn't fit all.

In the niches, the most powerful marketing is word-of-

its executives, who were once much respected and admired by consumers, didn't have the influence they used to have. Basically the brand quality was turning negative and the marketing machine wasn't effective.

And so, Microsoft allowed its employees to start blogging and you now have more 3,000 Microsoft blogs. The relationship with some of the most influential consumers has become not ‘me reading a Bill Gates speech’, but ‘me reading the blog post of someone just like myself’, on a product or micro division level.

A hundred years ago, Louis B Mayer walked into one of the many Nickelodeons spreading around Boston, forerunners of the motion picture business. He recalled: “What I saw in front of me wasn't that dingy theatre. I saw what it could become.” The Long Tail concept is a work in progress. It's an *innovation radar*, as BT CTO Matt Bross has suggested in referring to identifying profit centres within today's new generation of technology products and services.

To put his money where his mouth is, Anderson recently posted on his blog that he and *Wired* had engineered the acquisition of Reddit, a web platform for what's new and popular online. It is part of the mission to revamp *Wired*'s website as a long-tail vehicle, applying the wisdom of crowds. Anderson describes the Reddit team as “every bit as smart and energetic as you'd guess from the site, and geeky enough to fit in perfectly here. I can't wait.”

As Steve Jobs once said of great innovators: “About the only thing you can't do is ignore them”. The new laws of supply and demand touch a nerve because the online forces of broader choice, unlimited shelf space, and socially networked shopping intelligence is greater than the gravity that's holding the current world of commerce together. Here's to the crazy ones.



About the writer

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