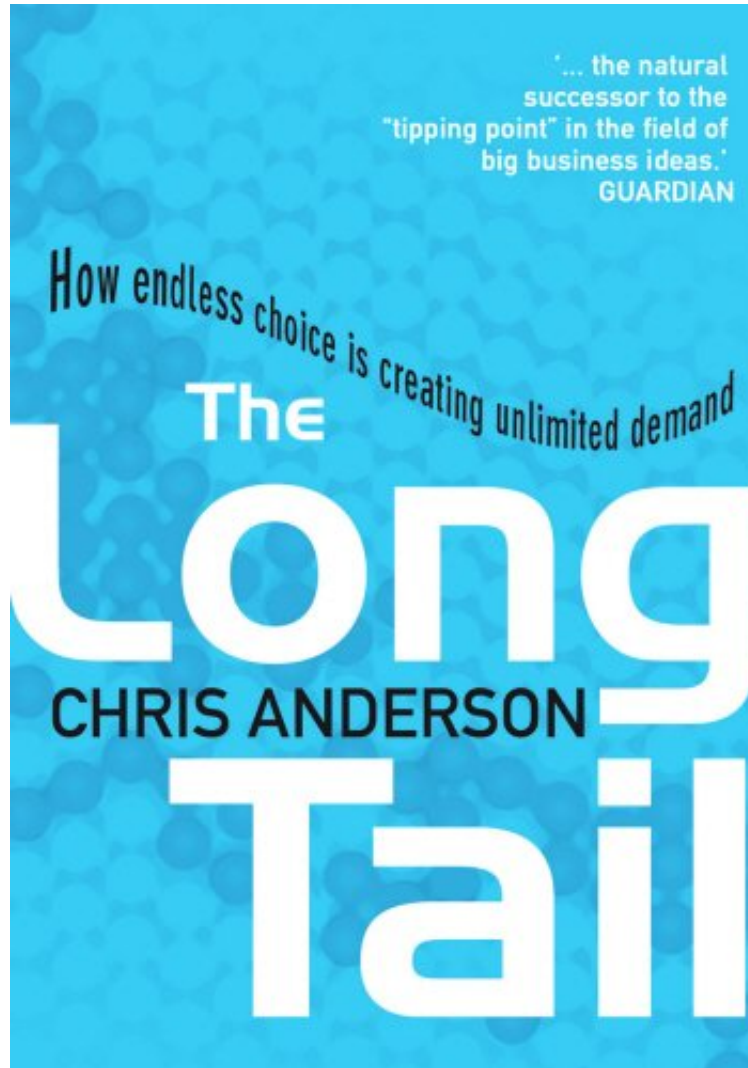


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The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand

Chris Anderson

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Tails of Two Cats: Manx and Maine CoonBy W. GreenThe Manx Cat,the powerful King of the Land of Hollyork,was fat and smoked big cigars. He drank martinis for lunch. All day he bellowed, blustered and belched from his throne atop a tall, glassy tower in the big city. Beautiful girls waited on him hand and foot, hoping for an opportunity to please him. He had everything, and everyone wanted what he had. He was the king of the entertainment and business jungle. His stubby but magical golden tail was admired by all. It

was the source of all that was good. It created the hit records, movies and books. It sent forward ceaseless waves of ideas, products and services that everyone purchased and used. Favored singers, actors, and writers became heroes. Other very talented people were ignored. Their voices, sometimes very sweet, went unnoticed. This fat cat was in charge. Everything of consequence was produced and delivered by the Manx Cat. The entire world hung on his every word, as they watched their Magic Picture Tubes and reacted to every twitch of his tiny, yet magical tail. He was the King of the Economic Jungle. Now, there was another cat in a faraway land. The city people in the Manx Kingdom knew little of this part of the world and cared less. This cat was the King of the Land of Maine -- a Maine Coon Cat. Unlike the Manx, he was long of tail, lean and he lived a clean life. His kingdom was larger, more diverse and filled with great multitudes of little people. But they lived in small hamlets far apart from each other. And because the people of Maine lived so far apart, they were unaware of their own goodness and wonder. Now the Maine Coon was good king. He traveled from village to village honestly admiring the handmade artifacts of his citizens. He would tell everyone he met about the many good works of his people. In each town he would arch his back and waggle his long tail in appreciation of their interesting and diligent efforts. The little people did create many good and different works, but their work went unknown. That is until...one day when a little girl presented the Maine Coon Cat with a special gift. It was a magical White Cube she had been given by an eccentric, but intelligent, bald-headed troll whose workshop was in an abandoned stable. The electric box captured pictures of every product, thing, talent, and service available in the Land of the Long Tail. Most magically, the Cube could send these pictures of goodies to every person in the land, every minute of the day -- and if the people wished hard enough, the pictures became real and words, music, and things of every sort were delivered instantly to the little people. Sometimes they paid for their wish -- sometimes they got things for nothing. It was a strange and wonderful machine. The people of Maine were now united. No longer were they outcast and unknown. Unlike the people of Hollyork who sold in bulk to the masses, the citizens of the Land Of Maine sold their works one by one to discriminating and dedicated customers. The Maine Coon Cat was most grateful to the little girl and to her troll friend as his Kingdom was now important just like the Manx Kingdom. He raised his long tail proudly for everyone to see. And the people cheered him. Now the Manx Cat really didn't seem to care about the magical White Cube. His tail still had some magic -- but not quite as powerful as before, because the entire world could now see everything everyone had to offer, not just the things that were issued forth by King Manx. Although he took a pay cut, he still smoked cigars and he remained convinced he was king of everything that was important. Faraway, the Maine Coon King continued to live his clean and simple life, and he too was happy because his people were happy. They enjoyed the Kingdom of the Long Tail. And everyone in the two kingdoms lived happily ever after.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Slick, well written, good insights
By Vincent Poirier
The bad news is that this book is really a long magazine article, which possibly reflects Chris Anderson's daytime job, editing "Wired". The Long Tail feels padded and lacks the substance of a real book. Too many of the examples are repeated. The good news is that the one or two insights of the book really are insightful. We've all heard the 80-20 rule of thumb that 80% of the wealth is held by 20% of the people. (The two numbers don't have to add up to 100 BTW, but we'll pass on that.) The distribution of wealth scales. In a total economy worth one billion dollars for one hundred thousand people, that means that the richest 20,000 people have 800 million dollars. But the rule can be applied to a situation as many times as we wish. 20% of 20,000 is 4,000 people who would have 80% of 800 million, or 640 million. We apply it again and find that 800 people have 512 million. When you plot this on a graph, you'll find yourself drawing a curve that is very thick at the left (the rich few at the head) and tapers out to a long thin tail (the many poor). This is called a power law distribution and many processes in nature and in economics follow it, in particular for consumer markets. Wal Mart Sears are in the left's fat head, while the fusion jazz record store is in the curve's tail on the right. Anderson's insight is that the internet has thickened the long tail for markets. Fifty years ago if you wanted to listen to Ethiopian jazz, you had one option: fly to Ethiopia. Thirty years ago you had the second option of going to import jazz record shops in large cities. Today, you can live in Medicine Hat, Alberta and instantly order Ethiopique No. 4 from . The demand was always there: in a population of millions there's always one or two eccentrics who want something unusual. More than that, in a population of millions on top of the ordinary necessities found in the fat head, everyone wants something special that belongs in the long tail. The long tail is thickening and the 21st century's gold mine is probably in it.

Vincent Poirier, Dublin
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Still an important book. For some specialists
Required Reading
By Keith McCormick
I was concerned that now that the phrase has entered the lexicon, with its own page on Wikipedia, and a dedicated blog, that the arguments might be old news. They are not. I do recommend the new paperback edition. The additional material is substantial in length, and worthwhile. I am a Data Miner, and I believe that it should be required reading for both Data Miners and for management at the businesses that hire them. The basic premise is that internet marketing makes it possible to promote a wider diversity of content than a brick and mortar enterprise can afford to do. The classic example is .com, and quite consciously knows that they are different than retailers that came before them. Remarkably a big Barnes and Nobles location can stock more than 100,000 titles, but keeps millions of titles on hand, and all of those less popular titles make a lot of money. What is surprising is that even though many new readers, like myself, know the premise before page one, there is still a lot left to read about. Anderson makes a very careful job of it. His arguments were honed via

live and web discussions over a long period of time. The second surprise is there is something of a cultural shift going on. Even in industries that would not seem to benefit from the same phenomena, The Long Tail appears. Blockbusters of every stripe still exist, but niche products are more and more of every company's revenue. This is why it is still an important book, and why this book is not just for internet retailers. I was on a project recently that involved products that were found, sold, and delivered electronically. Clearly, The Long Tail is especially salient in such a market. Even still has to physically deliver their products. I found it so critical to my thought process that I bought copies for key members of my client team, and gave my copy to a coworker. One of the points that Anderson brings home is that the factor preventing the niche choices from being overwhelming is effective filtering. Search engines, and their equivalents, are what make The Long Tail work. I read, and read again, the sections on this since one of the things that I do as a Data Miner is build recommendation models. If you are a Data Miner, and haven't heard Anderson's entire argument, you really need this book. If you are an analyst of any kind, I highly recommend. If you are a manager in an effected industry, and Anderson argues that it might well be present in all industries, then it should be on your reading list. Finally, if you are a consumer, perhaps with a technical bent, you will probably find it an enjoyable read. Highly recommended.

The Long Tail is both a powerful new economic force in the entertainment industry and perhaps the best lens on a big new trend in the business world overall: the economics of abundance. From supermarket shelves to advertising agencies, the rise of the niche is changing everything, and causing us to rethink where our markets lie and how to get to them. Consider this example: In 1988, a British mountain climber named Joe Simpson wrote a book called *Touching the Void*, an account of near death in the Peruvian Andes. It was only a modest success and was soon forgotten. A decade later, Jon Krakauer wrote *Into Thin Air*, another book about a mountain-climbing tragedy, which became a publishing sensation. Suddenly *Touching the Void* started to sell again. What happened In short, Amazon recommendations. It created the *Touching the Void* phenomenon by combining infinite shelf space with real-time information about buying trends and public opinion. However, this is not just a virtue of online booksellers it is an example of an entirely new economic model for business, one that is just beginning to show its power. Unlimited selection is revealing truths about what consumers want and how they want to get it, from DVDs at Netflix to music videos on Yahoo! Launch to songs on the iTunes Music store and Rhapsody. If the 20th-century was about hits, the 21st will be equally about misses.

From Publishers Weekly Wired editor Anderson declares the death of "common culture" and insists that it's for the best. Why don't we all watch the same TV shows, like we used to? Because not long ago, "we had fewer alternatives to compete for our screen attention," he writes. Smash hits have existed largely because of scarcity: with a finite number of bookstore shelves and theaters and Wal-Mart CD racks, "it's only sensible to fill them with the titles that will sell best." Today, Web sites and online retailers offer seemingly infinite inventory, and the result is the "shattering of the mainstream into a zillion different cultural shards." These "countless niches" are market opportunities for those who cast a wide net and de-emphasize the search for blockbusters. It's a provocative analysis and almost certainly on target though Anderson's assurances that these principles are equally applicable outside the media and entertainment industries are not entirely convincing. The book overuses its examples from Google, Rhapsody, iTunes, , Netflix and eBay, and it doesn't help that most of the charts of "Long Tail" curves look the same. But Anderson manages to explain a murky trend in clear language, giving entrepreneurs and the rest of us plenty to think about. (July) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Bookmarks Magazine In *The Long Tail*, Chris Anderson offers a visionary look at the future of business and common culture. The long-tail phenomenon, he argues, will "re-shape our understanding of what people actually want to watch" (or read, etc.). While Anderson presents a fascinating idea backed by thoughtful (if repetitive) analysis, many critics questioned just how greatly the niche market will rework our common popular culture. Anderson convinced most reviewers in his discussion of Internet media sales, but his KitchenAid and Lego examples fell flat. A few pointed out that online markets constitute just 10 percent of U.S. retail, and brick-and-mortar stores will never disappear. Anderson's thesis came under a separate attack by Lee Gomes in his Wall Street Journal column. Anderson had defined the "98 Percent Rule" in his book to mean that no matter how much inventory is made available online, 98 percent of the items will sell at least once. Yet Gomes cited statistics that could indicate that, as the Web and Web services become more mainstream, the 98 Percent Rule may no longer apply: "Ecast [a music-streaming company] told me that now, with a much bigger inventory than when Mr. Anderson spoke to them two years ago, the quarterly no-play rate has risen from 2% to 12%. March data for the 1.1 million songs of Rhapsody, another streamer, shows a 22% no-play rate; another 19% got just one or two plays." If Anderson overreaches in his thesis, he has nonetheless written "one of those business books that, ironically, deserves more than a niche readership" (Houston Chronicle). Copyright 2004 Phillips Nelson Media, Inc. From Booklist Citing statistical curves called "long-tailed distributions" because the tails are very long relative to the heads, Anderson, editor of Wired magazine, focuses on the tail, or the development in the new digital world of an infinite number of niche markets of any size that are economically viable due to falling distribution

costs and in the aggregate represent significant sales. Although the author considers primarily media and entertainment companies, he also shows the long-tail effect at eBay, KitchenAid, Legos, Salesforce.com, and Google. His nine rules for successful long-tail strategies include lowering costs and thinking niche (one product, distribution method, or price does not fit all) and giving up control by sharing information and offering choices. In this excellent book, Anderson tells that "the story of the long tail is really about the economics of abundance--what happens when the bottlenecks that stand between supply and demand in our culture start to disappear and everything becomes available to everyone."

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