

## Reviews

**Chris Anderson. *The Long Tail*. New York: Hyperion, 2006.**

Chris Anderson's book is aptly subtitled "Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More," a slightly convoluted phrase that neatly sums up his book's thesis. New business models, powered by the internet, are successfully breaking the dominance of the hit-driven, superstar-oriented entertainment industry. *The Long Tail* provides compelling evidence as to the how and why this is occurring.

The book's title refers to the flattening demand curve for music, movies, books, and other forms of entertainment that are not blockbuster hits. Such "un-hits" sell far fewer units than a mega-hit, but the evidence Anderson compellingly presents explains why even selling a few copies of a title, when done over a broad enough catalog, represents a profitable business opportunity. The hit-driven system that is focused on creating the next platinum album, hit TV series, or \$200 million grossing feature film was, in fact, created by the economic principal of scarcity, Anderson argues, whereas today's internet-powered firms such as iTunes, Rhapsody and Netflix (to name a few) can offer a seemingly limitless inventory of media content that would never be dubbed "prime time" in the mainstream media that features a limited number of selections. After all, how many movies are showing in your hometown tonight, how many CD titles are in stock at Target, and how many prime time slots are there on network TV each night?

Anderson, editor of Wired Magazine, and formerly a journalist for *The Economist*, provides substantial evidence of the long tail phenomenon including sales data and analysis from Netflix, Amazon, Rhapsody, and the Billboard charts. He clearly explains how this sales data challenges the long-standing "80/20 rule," where 20% of the products generate 80% of the sales, and usually all the profits. Consider, for example, Rhapsody's model, which at the time of the book's publication delivered more than 1.5 million songs for subscriber listening via audio streaming. Surprisingly, Anderson states, virtually *every* song will sell at least once. (Rhapsody now offers more than 3.4 million songs according to an April 2007 conversation with one of its senior managers, and is adding roughly one thousand albums a week.) Compare this to the typical Wal-Mart store's music inventory, which is static at about 60,000 tracks or another scarcity-based model,

commercial radio, which offers an even smaller selection of music tracks to its listening audience.

Simply put, scarcity-based media dissemination results in a small number of hits and a far greater number of misses. Long tail models allow consumers to explore niches that would never be marketed without the power of the internet. Anderson cites the average Borders store which stocks 100,000 titles. 25% of Amazon's book sales come from titles *not* found in the list of the top 100,000 sellers. Hence, Anderson argues the market for books not even available in a book superstore is already one-third the size of the existing market! Likewise, fully 40% of Rhapsody's sales are comprised of songs not found in a typical record store. Anderson goes beyond the media world and also looks at general retailing, blog popularity, true information-based business models such as Google, and other examples that paint a broader picture of the implications for a future made possible by long tail economics.

*The Long Tail* is a useful book for two main reasons. First, it clearly explains the seismic shift underway in the distribution of media and entertainment products. This change has immediate repercussions for scholars, students, and professionals involved in the music and entertainment industry. Second, Anderson provides a handy road map for the reader in his conclusion titled, "Long Tail Rules: How to Create a Consumer Paradise." This section provides anyone interested in profiting from this paradigm shift some direction in how to participate in the new economy. "Make everything available," Anderson advises, "and help me (the consumer) find it." Ever the pragmatist, he goes on to explain the inherent challenges in doing just that, maintaining a balanced, thoughtful dialog with the reader, never succumbing to any Pollyanna-ish notions that the migration will be clean or easy.

*The Long Tail* makes for an interesting book to use in any discussion (or curriculum) considering the evolution of media dissemination. The book's premise, and the multitude of credible evidence it marshals, should prompt lively discussion among musicians, artists, and scholars who see the emergence of this economic model not only as one that will provide consumers with a greatly expanded musical universe to explore, but also as one that will lead to a shift in culture, by providing efficient and affordable access to heretofore unavailable (i.e., artistically and culturally diverse) niche products that would never have seen the light of retail daylight in a scarcity-driven media economy.

Ultimately, *The Long Tail* heralds the shift in power to the consumer, who now is able to become a tastemaker through referrals and self-published media, shining light into new worlds of knowledge, information, and art previously unavailable.

**Thomas Wolf and Nancy Keens. *And the Band Stopped Playing: The Rise and Fall of the San Jose Symphony*. Cambridge, Mass.: Wolf, Keens & Co., 2005. (Available free of charge at [www.wolfkeens.com](http://www.wolfkeens.com)).**

*And the Band Stopped Playing* is a deceptively thin volume. Weighing in at just under one hundred pages, it thoughtfully and comprehensively analyzes the demise of the oldest symphony orchestra in the western United States, a cautionary tale that provides important lessons not only for those involved in classical music, but worthy of every entertainment industry professional's consideration.

Symphony orchestras are facing challenging times in America. The well-documented graying of their primary audience, reductions in music education in most schools, and the growing popularity of alternative entertainment mediums fueled by new technologies are all affecting the orchestra's historical place in the arts and entertainment hierarchy. Put simply, as society has changed, many orchestras continued down the same path they had always trod, mainly presenting nineteenth-century classical repertoire, often to dwindling audiences, and operating on the Pollyanna-like premise that things will improve. It should be noted that there are a number of regional and major orchestras which have blazed new trails, most often leading to renewed and strengthened relationships with their communities. Unfortunately, the 125-year old San Jose Symphony was not one of these.

Authors Wolf and Keens bring a sharp eye to this extended case study, each having spent a significant portion of their careers in arts leadership positions at the national and regional levels. They begin by examining the background situation faced by the orchestra and consider how changing demographics, economic trends, and shifting consumer preferences all impact an arts organization's environment. Their research explains in easy-to-

understand terms how factors such as the rising costs necessitated by the musician's required services (guaranteed paid performances for the entire orchestra), competition from 54 regional classical music ensembles presenting regular concerts, a cavernous, uninviting home venue, and somewhere between 33-55% of each concert's tickets going unsold, combined to create a gathering storm of significant proportion, which threatened the orchestra's continued existence. The thoroughness of this analysis leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that there were plenty of causes for alarm that could have been heeded by the orchestra's board and staff, not to mention leaders among the musicians, themselves.

The chapter titled "Missed Opportunities" offers a glimpse of new initiatives that might have provided hope of renewing the vitality and viability of the orchestra, but that were either ignored or mishandled by the organization's leadership. These include:

- 1) failure to celebrate the diversity of their community, where 25% of the 1.6 million people are of Hispanic origin, and another 25% are of Asian or Pacific Islander descent;
- 2) although statistics demonstrated 95% of the community believed arts education should be increased in the local schools, the orchestra had little in the way of educational partnerships with the community;
- 3) failure to capitalize or even experiment with new technologies while located in the heart of Silicon Valley; and
- 4) an ill-fated attempt to raise \$85 million over and above their operating budget to help the city finance a new concert hall.

To recast the tale in more contemporary terminology apropos the pop music milieu, failure to connect at a deep and meaningful level with one's fan base, ignoring the competition in one's own backyard, being unwilling or unable to attempt new programming, oversupply of product, and the inability to revise long-standing performance contracts to better fit market realities will likely doom any music business, whether it's not-for-profit, or for-profit. In closing, the authors provide a useful list of "lessons learned" that will provide excellent discussion points for anyone involved in presenting the arts today. It is this writer's opinion that such discussion must be an essential point of reference for professionals to consider carefully if

they wish to insure that the arts, in its myriad forms, remain a vital and relevant part of the American experience.

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He is the author of *The Golden Moment: Recording Secrets of the Pros* published by Backbeat Books (2006), a compendium of more than fifty interviews with leading engineers and producers discussing the art and craft of music recording. The second edition of *How To Get a Job in the Music Industry* has just been published by Berklee Press and is used in many music programs to help guide the career development of young professionals. He contributes a monthly column to the online recording magazine, *Pro Studio Edition*, and is a member of the AES, MEIEA, NARAS, and other professional organizations.