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# What Is The Long Tail?

The "long tail" is a term used to describe a type of marketing or business model that focuses on a string of "niche" products and services, rather than the top few hot products. The phrase "the long tail" was coined by writer Chris Anderson, who subsequently wrote a best-selling book by the same title. Anderson and his concepts have since become very prominent in the internet world, having an influence even on major search engines. The term "long tail" comes from the look of a graph charting the popularity and inventory of products and services. At one end of this graph appears a short spike where the sales of mega-products can be seen, while on the other end there is a "long tail" mapping less popular products, in other words those with low demand and sales. It is claimed that the future successful business model will be in following the "long tail," i.e., selling many less popular products and services, rather than chasing the megahits. The arguments of Anderson and others concerning the long tail include that, with large enough storage and distribution, these less popular products could do as well or better than the bestsellers in the long run.

One very successful company that is often cited as an example of the long tail is the online seller Amazon, best known as a bookseller but also a merchant of many thousands of other products. What we are really discussing is simply the "supermarket" or "superstore" business model, providing numerous small volume products rather than a few megahits. In reality, the long tail has always been around, but it hasn't been named as such. "Diversification" is one word that describes this type of marketing to a certain degree.

In this regard, in a surprising move that may mark the end of theater-release movies and that follows the "long tail" business model, in November 2006 superproducer George Lucas announced he would quit making such movies, instead turning to TV. Lucas said that for the same price of making a blockbuster hit like "Star Wars" he could create 50 or so two-hour movies for TV instead. This same sort of thinking is occurring in almost every significant field of business.

One thing that has made the long tail more feasible for all types of business is the internet. The internet and the type of technology it represents have had an enormous impact on traditional business models and popular mainstream media, such as the television, radio and music industries. This impact will continue to be felt for many years to come, and the term "the long tail" is likely to become permanently entered into the business vernacular, as more people base their businesses around it.

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