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Crossing the Chasm
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When the proposal for *Crossing the Chasm* was under negotiation, both the publisher and the author agreed that if the book sold more than 5000 copies, it would have done well. After all, it was a niche book from an unknown author aimed specifically at the somewhat esoteric challenges of marketing high-tech products.

In fact, the book has sold over 300,000 copies since its first publication. Of course, publisher and author are delighted. But the more interesting question might be, how come? The answer is a textbook guide to word-of-mouth marketing, the very practice that the book teaches in its niche approach to gaining mainstream adoption for disruptive innovations.

First of all, it turned out that the metaphor of the chasm and the recommendations for how to cross it struck a deep chord among experienced high-tech managers. Countless readers have told me that, while they value the material in the book, it really didn't tell them anything they didn't know. Rather it captured what had been for them scattered intuitions and rueful learnings and put them into a coherent set of frameworks that could be used for future decision making.

This, in turn, caused them to pass it along to colleagues, as much to proliferate the vocabulary as anything else. Thus the book left the marketing department and began to find its way to the engineering section where a whole lot of readers claimed it was the first marketing book they didn't throw away after reading the early chapters. Praise from engineers is praise indeed, and this author was deeply grateful for this response.

This unusual turn of events also caught the eye of the venture capital community which in turn became a channel for more book sales. They saw in the new vocabulary a means to begin a market development dialog with their engineering-oriented entrepreneurs. Indeed for whole companies it became required reading, just to get everyone on the same page.

Professors at business schools then picked it up for their courses in entrepreneurial marketing, which was becoming all the rage in the years after the book's first release. Students liked the book because it was both descriptive and prescriptive in clear terms, largely because it communicates the core of its arguments through metaphors, mixed though they often be. If you bought into the analogies, you pretty much had the essence of the book, and reading it was just a reconfirmation of what you already knew.

And so things went swimmingly until around 1997 or so when students began asking, "Who is Ashton Tate or Cullinet? What is Wordstar or Ingres?" The examples, which are key to any argument by analogy, had grown long in the tooth. And so a revised edition came out, keeping the argument largely in tact, but substituting 1990's companies for their 1980's predecessors, further affirming the author's belief that chasms are a perennial feature of the tech sector's landscape.

And that brings us to today. In addition to a revised edition, the book has spawned two sequels of sorts: *Inside the Tornado*, which covers the opposite of the chasm challenge -- how to market during hypergrowth, and *Living on the Fault Line*, which addresses how incumbent market leaders must respond to new technology challenges. It also created a platform for a fourth book, *The Gorilla Game*, co-authored with Paul Johnson and Tom Kippola, about how these same dynamics play out in the stock market valuations for technology companies. And now in 2002 Harpers will be releasing the first wholly non-Moore entry into the chasm fray, *The Chasm Companion*, by my colleague Paul Wiefels.

In short, chasm-writing and reading has become a cottage industry of sorts, and the technology sector has demonstrated infinite patience in absorbing its unending slew of metaphors, from bowling alleys, tornadoes, and Main Street to gorillas, chimps, kings, and serfs, to GAP, CAP, core, and context, to who knows what next. All the author can say to this is that he tries find whatever words can best capture the dynamics of the real-life situations his clients find themselves in.

And that leads to a final thought. Books are a collaboration between author and editor, and I am afraid I have worn out several in this journey, beginning with Virginia Smith who championed *Crossing the Chasm* way back when, and subsequently including Kirsten Sandberg and now Dave Conti. HarperBusiness continues to bear with me, and I with it, so the real question is, how long will the reading public bear with the combination. I hope it will be for a long time to come.

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