

Anytime, Anywhere: Entrepreneurship and the Creation of a Wireless World. By *Louis Galambos and Eric John Abrahamson*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. x + 310 pp. Index, notes, photographs. Cloth, \$29.00. ISBN 0-521-81616-5.

Reviewed by Thomas Haigh

Anytime, Anywhere tells the story of Sam Ginn's involvement in the wireless communications industry. Ginn worked as a strategist for AT&T's Pacific Telephone business, sponsor of the Pacific Telesis wireless subsidiary PacTel Cellular, and he was the CEO of the same business when it was spun off as AirTouch communications in 1994. In 1999, AirTouch was merged into the growing empire of the British wireless firm Vodafone, at which time its American assets were pooled with those of several other firms to create Verizon Wireless.

Because of these corporate transformations, a book recounting one part of a single uninterrupted career deals with several firms, numerous joint ventures, and many countries. Louis Galambos and Eric John Abrahamson do an admirable job of keeping all this straight, providing enough discussion of the technological evolution of wireless technology and the shifts in the regulatory environment and competitive marketplace to support the central narrative without capsizing it. They go far beyond Ginn himself, while retaining an insider's perspective on the development of the wireless communications field, charting its transitions from experimental technology, through analog and then digital growth, to an era of widespread consolidation. Recent developments are framed within the longer history of the telecommunications industry. Another strength of their book is its international coverage. The deregulation of European national markets proved crucial to the development of the international cellular industry, and the authors frame Ginn's dealings with British and German firms in capsule histories of these markets.

As the book's subtitle indicates, its main theme is entrepreneurship. A smart engineer from a humble background, Ginn thrived within the highly professional, insular, and bureaucratic world of the Bell system. His personal transformation into the CEO of a successful firm in a highly competitive market mirrors the transformation of the telecommunications industry itself. The book discusses the cultural shifts this demanded, the organizational learning and unlearning needed to produce a more nimble, marketing-savvy, internationally minded, and risk-taking firm. Yet it also highlights the positive heritage of Bell values, such as a focus on tight controls and engineering excellence—qualities conspicuously lacking in more flamboyantly entrepreneurial firms like WorldCom and Global Crossing.

Regulation and its removal, domestically and internationally, occupy prominent places in the book. Regulators are cast for the most part as villains, opposing the forces of entrepreneurial change. Like Ginn himself, the authors have very little sympathy for the Californian Public Utility Commission and its attempts to thwart Pacific Telecom's use of proceeds from its local monopoly to compete in new areas. The Federal Communications Commission comes off little better, as its first attempts to introduce competition degenerated into lotteries. However, the authors also suggest that free-market ideology subsequently misled the FCC when its reluctance to set technical standards for second-generation phones fragmented the U.S. market and gave the Europeans a substantial lead.

The book falls somewhere between a straightforward commissioned history of AirTouch, and its precursors, and a broader examination of the development of the global market for wireless telephony. The authors gained exceptional access to Ginn, his key lieutenants, and other industry figures, such as Craig McCaw and Vodafone chief Chris Gent. The book therefore shines when discussing the progress of critical negotiations and setting forth the strategic issues as seen by corporate leaders.

Yet this perspective is also the book's biggest limitation. Except for Ginn's retrospective self-criticism, quoted objections are usually accompanied by editorial dismissals. We seldom hear the voices of nonexecutives, and we learn little of operational matters. Thus, while we are frequently told that efforts to change organizational culture and build customer relations were important, we learn very little about how these shifts were carried out, or how they appeared from outside the executive suite. The authors' reliance on Schumpeterian entrepreneurship (and a brief invocation of economies of scale) to frame their story also forgoes the tighter integration of technological and managerial change achieved by Thomas Hughes in *Networks of Power* (1983) in his landmark study of electric power systems.

Though equipped with the scholarly apparatus of endnotes and citations, the book's prose style is primarily journalistic. Readers are thus spared academic jargon but must suffer instead the many mannerisms used by business writers to dramatize things. "Legendary" or "brilliant" executives are forever crawling onto limbs, placing big bets, or steaming ahead. Facts are sometimes repeated, in case readers are skimming. More seriously, the authors often reach for the rhetoric of the information-age revolution in lieu of more nuanced analysis. They even capitalize these buzzwords, as in their statement that "the Information Age was knocking on the door in Germany in the person of Chris Gent, a distinctly Third Industrial Revolution entrepreneur. . ." (p. 235). Better integration of these very general ideas with the specifics of the AirTouch story might have better conveyed what ideas like "information age" actually mean.

It is hard, given our closeness to these events, to know whether the chaotic scene described here is a permanent shift or a passing moment. The authors do a compelling job of showing that the huge infrastructure costs and the pace of technological change in the cellular industry demanded new corporate structures, in which joint ventures and international alliances predominated. Yet we know from Hughes's work that the early years of the electric industry saw a similar pattern of alliances, regional competition, and technology transfer. While digital technologies show no signs yet of slowing their evolution, it is not yet clear that customer demand for future wireless capabilities will sustain their rapid deployment. Vodafone and Verizon Wireless have so far escaped the worst of the telecommunications meltdown, but the breathless enthusiasm shown here for the limitless growth of telecommunications firms (and of executive rewards) already seems dated. Such are the perils of writing contemporary history.

In conclusion, *Anytime, Anywhere* gives a clear, reliable, and historically informed description of one of the central corporate stories of the wireless telephony industry, an important area unexplored by historians. While its journalistic prose style and exclusive focus on top-management perspective are constraints as well as strengths, the book will give the reader with no previous knowledge a clear idea of the crucial business and technological shifts in the industry. It will also be of interest to those exploring the changing nature of entrepreneurship.

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