

Reading list

There are many, many business books out there. Hagiographies, compendiums of PR material, assorted schlock – and the occasional jewel that reflects industry knowledge, analysis and an ability to tell a tale.

- Deborah Cadbury, ***Chocolate Wars***. Technology is central, ditto new business models. so are networks (all the early British chocalateers were Quaker) plus intense rivalry. And the author highlights many ethical issues, some very poignant.
- Julie MacIntosh. ***Dethroning the King: The Hostile Takeover of Anheuser-Busch***. As per the title. Well done and well told.
- Brian Merchant, ***The One Device***. The development of the iPhone, Merchant did an amazing job to track down details, including the non-Apple source of most iPhone features. Lots of corporate politics so it's a good story, too, and a good book on the challenge of meshing structure with corporate focus.
- A. J. Baime. ***The Arsenal of Democracy: FDR, Detroit, and an Epic Quest to Arm an America at War***. How Detroit went from zip to volume production of aircraft and other new, complicated products in the midst of wartime rationing, the drafting of skilled workers, and the internal politics of Ford.
- Marc Levinson. ***An Extraordinary Time: The End of the Postwar Boom and the Return of the Ordinary Economy***. Mainly macro, but in the background is technology and productivity as a key determinant.
- Robert J. Gordon. ***The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War***. US history and the US economy through the lens of tech, from someone who is both an economic historian and a noted macroeconomist. He does not offer an optimistic prognosis.
- Joel Mokyr. ***The Lever of Riches: Technological Creativity and Economic Progress***. From early work on the British industrial revolution he expanded to a general argument on the pervasivity of "free lunches" and what enables them. He has many subsequent books, but I think this one remains the best.
- Steven Johnson. ***Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation***. He is a good storyteller, but also a careful historian. Among other stories, the book covers the development of air conditioning, and the background to Darwin's work on evolution.
- Jon Gertner. ***The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation***. The Bell Labs birthed the transistor, the laser, and cell phones. One component was architecture, which affected how people interacted - they were forced to walk past each other's labs, which didn't have doors, and had to eat in common areas with people from other disciplines. Those interactions proved crucial to breakthrough after breakthrough.
- Alfred Chandler. ***The Visible Hand***. An intense read. The premier business historian of his generation, at Harvard Business School, and the founder of "analytic" (strategy-based) business history. How and why did large business arise?
- H.W. Brands. ***American Colossus: The Triumph of Capitalism, 1865-1900***. This draws upon business and economic history but written against the backdrop of US history rather than as a history of business.
- Jack Beatty, ed. ***Colossus: How the Corporation Changed America***. An anthology of chapters on various firms, by journalists, historians, economists and business school professors. All fun, but selected to provide useful examples.
- Bill Vlasic. ***Once Upon A Car***. The US auto industry through the exit from bankruptcy of GM and Chrysler. You have to like cars to read most books on the auto industry. This once transcends that limitation. Vlasic is the Detroit Bureau Chief of the New York Times, and is by far the best of the many journalists who've tried spinning off books on the industry.