

Where my ideas come from continued

parliamentary inquiry and it led to changes in policy that reduced the number of disconnections from 35,000 to 3000 a year.

I came back [to Australia] in July 2009. I was at the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network until August last year. [He took up his ombudsman position Last October].

Now, I ride for an hour around Lake Burley Griffin each morning before work. That gives you energy, peace, perspective and thinking time – that’s absolutely vital.

Up until now, the bulk of the work of the Commonwealth ombudsman has been directed to specific agencies. I think it’s time that we focused across the whole of government so we can make a concerted difference.

The biggest problem we want to tackle is the language of government. Get rid of the jargon, the complexity, use much plainer, more direct English. Australians are quite fair-minded but where they feel there’s confusion and complication I think they quite rightly become frustrated and even angry. I’ve written to the PM suggesting that this could be a great co-operative project with all department secretaries.

The second problem, something that concerns me quite deeply, is the huge proportion of Australians who never appear in the complaint statistics. You might call them the voiceless. For every complaint [agencies] get, there are probably 10 that they don’t – people who through poverty, alienation, disability, language barriers or remoteness, will never get around to expressing their problems. We want to ensure that each agency goes out of its way to address this, not waiting for people to queue up at the door with complaints but reaching out to them.

I do read a lot and I’m quite influenced by a range of literature. I like *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond. That was really, really good.

I’ve got quite an interest in cosmology as well; the physics of the universe, quantum mechanics. There’s a great book by Tim Ferris called *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, looking at the history of the universe. It’s sort of an understandable version of Stephen Hawking.

I’ve got a Kindle but on my iPad I’ve also got e-books. In my car, I have a marvellous set of readings from a modern version of the Bible, performed by leading British actors.

There’s this story that we know as the story of the good Samaritan. Really the point of this passage is that we’re all given opportunities to serve, or opportunities not to.

Allan Asher spoke to Katie Walsh.

BOOK REVIEWS

- Buy it, read it
- If you are interested
- If you must

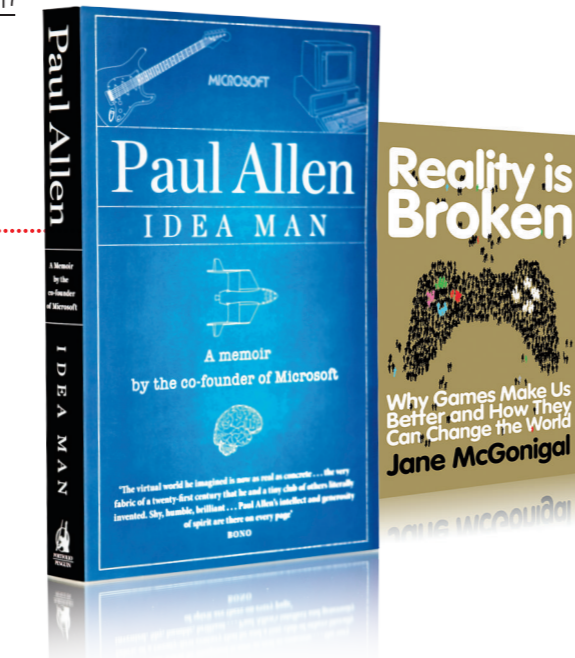
●●● **IDEA MAN**  
A memoir by the co-founder of Microsoft  
Paul Allen  
Penguin Group  
\$32.95

Readability ●●●  
Usefulness ●●●

WHAT DO space exploration, a map of the human brain, a mega-yacht called Octopus, and one of the greatest computer legacies ever have in common? They are all passions pursued by Paul Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft.

The first part of Allen’s memoir is dedicated to his childhood, including how he met Bill Gates in the computer room at Lakeside School, where they taught themselves programming. From the start, we see the duo’s intellectual curiosity and the push-pull that became the basis of their partnership. “We were friends from the day we met, but there was an underlying tension, too.”

We then journey into the founding of



Microsoft in 1975, through a behind-closed-doors account of a start-up that grows into a technology giant. It becomes clear that Allen was the technological visionary (the “Idea Man”), while Bill was the pragmatist who made things happen.

The book offers a riveting window into the complex partnership of Allen and Gates. Even in the toughest times, you get the sense Allen deeply admired Gates’ dedication and intellect. “I left Microsoft a quarter century before Bill did,” Allen recalls. “But in certain respects, neither of us has been quite as good alone as we were together.”

Allen quit Microsoft in 1983 and the second half of the memoir covers his adventures after making his billions. It’s less engaging, mainly because it jumps from one expensive pursuit to the next. It’s hard to work out whether Allen has more money than he knows what to do with.

Rachel Botsman

●● **REALITY IS BROKEN**  
Why games make us better and how they can change the world  
Jane McGonigal  
Random House  
\$34.95

Readability ●●●  
Usefulness ●●

WE ARE spending more than 3 billion hours a week playing virtual games. And it’s not just the young playing; a recent survey revealed that 61 per cent of CEOs and CFOs say they take daily game breaks during their work day.

If you find these statistics alarming and fear we are all turning into disconnected cyber-aliens, gaming guru Jane McGonigal is on a mission to convince you otherwise. In *Reality is Broken*, she argues persuasively that virtual games fulfil “genuine human needs that the real world is currently unable to satisfy”. In particular, our needs for community, collaboration and sociability.

McGonigal doesn’t just provocatively posit

that games can better who we are and enhance our personal happiness. She also demonstrates, through 10 years of research, that alternate reality games can help us confront real-world problems – from stopping climate change to curing cancer to alleviating poverty. McGonigal believes “reality is broken, and we need to start making games to fix it”.

The book covers a wide range of such games – from *Chore Wars*, where you earn points for completing household tasks, to *Evoke*, dubbed “a crash course in changing the world”, to *The Extraordinaries*, intended to “help you do good in your spare time”. All are designed to create “epic wins”.

*Reality is Broken* is a thoroughly researched, futuristic blend of technology, psychology, neuroscience and pop culture but the tone is gratefully overzealous and at times one-sided in its argument.

Rachel Botsman

WHAT’S NEW

● **WHEN MONEY DIES**  
The nightmare of the Weimar hyper-inflation  
Adam Ferguson  
Scribe \$29.95

LET’S GET the facts straight. Warren Buffett did not recommend this book; in fact, he told CNBC he never even read it. The mere rumour that he’d tipped it to a financier friend drove such demand that it was recently republished. Nonetheless, it is a compelling narrative of the frighteningly rapid decline

of the Weimar Republic in 1923, when the traditional repository of purchasing power lost meaning and the currency was of more use for papering walls. The economic disaster that unfolded helped lay the groundwork for the rise of Nazism. Given the current European debt crisis, it’s useful context on why the fear of inflation is so deep in the German economic psyche and a reminder to debt-strapped governments of the addictive dangers of deficit financing.

● **THE INNOVATOR’S DNA**  
Mastering the five skills of disruptive innovators  
Jeff Dyer,  
Hal Gregersen and  
Clayton M. Christensen  
McGraw-Hill, \$49.95

THOMAS EDISON famously said: “I haven’t failed; I’ve just found 10,000 ways that don’t work.” It’s a quote often trotted out by innovators when their experiment goes pear shaped. But the authors of *The Innovator’s DNA* celebrate experimentation as one of the five skills

creative companies embrace. The others are: questioning, observing, networking and associating – as in connecting fields, problems or ideas. The book is sprinkled with case studies of “disruptive innovators” such as Skype, eBay and Southwest Airlines. Reassuringly, even though the book’s title suggests that some of us are genetically predisposed to innovate, the authors claim that you don’t need to be born Steve Jobs or Jeff Bezos to come up with great ideas.

● **FIXING THE GAME**  
How runaway expectations broke the economy, and how to get back to reality  
Roger Martin  
McGraw-Hill, \$42.95

ROGER MARTIN, dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, goes back to the birth of agency theory in the 1970s to examine why the current market model is broken. Our theories of shareholder value maximisation and stock-based compensation

have the ability to destroy our economy and rot out the core of American capitalism, Martin claims. And that’s one of the gentler predictions. The disconnect between real production and market expectations is the difference between having meaning and morality and operating without them, he argues. Fixing this requires focusing on customers over shareholders, restoring executive emphasis on performance rather than expectations, and other changes.

COULD A NEW APPROACH TO R&D GIVE YOUR BUSINESS THE EDGE? YOU DO THE MATH.

It’s an approach that has proved successful for overseas CEOs of Microsoft Research, Jaguar Landrover, Pfizer, Arup, Unilever, British Telecom, GlaxoSmithKline, Shell Research, and more; and now this revolutionary approach to R&D is available for the first time in Australia.

The Australian Technology Network of Universities has set up the Industry Doctoral Training Centre in Mathematics and Statistics. It differs from other doctoral programs because it gives you direct involvement setting targeted business goals and research objectives. This means that your company can attain real world market advantages and profitability.

Thanks to investment from the Federal Government’s Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, now you can benefit from an industry-focussed doctoral program that gives you cost-effective access to Australia’s best and brightest minds.

To find out more about how the IDTC program can work for your business, visit [www.atn.edu.au/idtc](http://www.atn.edu.au/idtc) or email [directoridtc@atn.edu.au](mailto:directoridtc@atn.edu.au)

