

A world-class innovator divulges the short history and long future of a technology so far-reaching it cannot be overhyped.

A World Remade By Broadband

Planet Broadband

By Rouzbeh Yassini

Cisco Press, 2004

143 pages, \$29.95

Who's your daddy? Yassini is rightly considered the father of the cable modem. In 1990, he founded LANCity, which was the first company to commercialize a way to send data over existing cable TV networks. It took almost 10 years before the modems were standardized and cable companies began marketing broadband services in earnest. But in the United States today, of course, most broadband homes get their service from their cable company.

Yassini is, therefore, well credentialed as a visionary. In this book, he takes readers on a tour of the short history and the expected long future of broadband to the home and business. The book will thus prove valuable to managers new to the industry and to broadband entrepreneurs who are looking for something short, snappy and well written to hand to those financier-MBAs at sources of capital.

But beware.

There are chapters on business applications such as in healthcare, entertainment, and education. Information on micro-businesses such as at-home consulting is scattered throughout the book. On page 49, he predicts that fiber will perhaps "eventually" reach the home in volume when the financials look better.

But when? Yassini, now a venture capitalist himself (he's founder and CEO of YAS Broadband Ventures, a venture capital firm based in Andover Massachusetts, north of Boston) is worried about who might pay for all of this now. So he ends the book by saying, essentially, that cable-modem speeds, perhaps enhanced by future tweaking, will be good enough

for a long time to come. Fiber, he suggests, or any other 100 Mbps technology, might be too expensive.

"Fiber-to-the curb growth projections," he says, "often ignore the steadily rising customer base being cultivated by our existing access technologies, and fail to pay honest heed to the fact that displacing incumbent delivery networks isn't quite child's play."

The forward by David Fellows, chief technical officer at Comcast, is more optimistic. "I am often asked whether broadband is all hype," he says. "My reply is if you expect it to change your life tomorrow morning, you may safely consider it all hype. You will do what you did over dialup, only faster and with more satisfaction. But in the longer term, it is not possible to over-hype it. Broadband will change everything about the way you are entertained, informed, educated, how you communicate, and schedule your life. Maybe even how you are governed. Broadband is the electricity of the information age. Before electricity, to light up your home, you lit fires and used candles (dialup). You also went to bed early! Civilized areas and expensive homes had gas lanterns (ISDN?). But electricity changed your way of life. It not only brought you light (the first "killer app"), but powered hundreds of devices – from washers and dryers to toasters to eventually fueling telecommunications."

Need we say it? When Edison started to distribute central-station electric power in lower Manhattan, electric washers, dryers and toasters did not exist. Neither do the home appliances and business machines of the future broadband world. Reviewed by – SSR

Heneveld's Pocket Guide to Terms and Definitions

By H. M. Heneveld
Heneveld Dynamic Consulting, 2004
142 pages, \$20 spiralbound

This pocket-sized dictionary is perfect for technicians and installers struggling to understand the sketchy instruction sheets and construction documentation that accompanies so much equipment these days. The terms are arranged alphabetically and are followed by lists of industry associations and CEDIA architectural icons. From its start with 10baseT (an Ethernet local area network...) to its finish (the Z's include Zensys, Zigbee, and Zoned Control in the HVAC sense) the book is well conceived and well written. Author Helen Heneveld is well known for her work with the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association and for her massive home technology integrator book with McGraw-Hill. This guide can be purchased on her website, www.hheneveld.com.

The Business Case for E-Learning

By Tom Kelly and Nader Nanjiani
Cisco Press, 2005
190 pages, \$24.99 paperback

Cisco claims big savings for its on-line training program. The system, for Cisco's employees, consultants, and customers, touches as many as 200,000 people a year and saves the company \$140 million annually, or more.

Thus, it was only a matter of time before Cisco set out the reasons for its success in a book, along with advice for others seeking to duplicate that success.

One big quibble: The book never precisely details how Cisco added up its cost savings, although it does list the savings categories such as manufacturing, sales, and so forth.

The system clearly made the training of its sales force faster, cheaper, and (most importantly) more nimble.

Getting news of new products' advantages into the hands of field forces gave Cisco a huge advantage in the marketplace. That advantage had to translate into real money.

Some of the advice is old-hat to corporate trainers. They have long realized that the on-line environment is not the same as the printed environment, and that educational material has to change to take advantage of that difference (the book suggests ways to do this). But this will still be news for many managers.

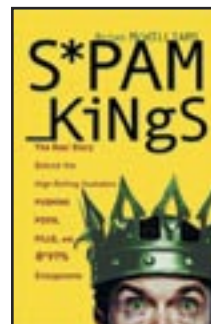
It will also be news to many that on-line courses should all maximize the use of communications channels for student exchanges, archives, and electronic conferencing.

Learning material should be carefully structured and self-paced if possible, and there must be a mechanism for learners to assess their own progress (such as on-line quizzes).

Spam Kings

By Brian McWilliams
O'Reilly, 2004
333 pages, \$22.95

With spam now accounting for about two-thirds of all e-mail messages, our industry needs little reminding about its dangers. For our tenants and customers, spam is an annoyance. For ISPs, spam is an increasingly large cost of doing business. Over the years, we have been struck by how woefully unprepared ISP managers are to deal with customers who may send spam, and to deal with security breaches that can disable or hijack our servers. This book is an entertaining and low-impact way to learn how spammers work. The book tells an engaging set of stories about many spammers and spam fighters. But along the way it describes mass-mailing programs, security issues, techniques such as using relay servers to hide e-mail headers, and a lot more. Talk like an expert to your security consultant... and take these issues to heart from the start. It will reduce customer complaints later.



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