

## Two highly recommended books for software people: One for fun, one for profit

We finished a couple of new books over the holidays; both deserve shelf space in your library, albeit for very different reasons.

***Selling Air***, by Dan Herchenroether, is the tale of a sales battle between two fictional software companies. It's subtitled as "a tech bubble novel," and while there is the undercurrent of IPO mania common in the late 1990s, ***Selling Air*** will ring true for anyone who's spent time in any era of the software industry.

The cast includes a litany of heroes and villains: The slick-but-slimy sales overachiever who cares more about Italian suits than morals; the hard-working, perpetually stressed, and slightly nerdy SEs; the clueless sales VPs who use quotas and commissions as bludgeons; the IT and engineering managers who value their empires over customers; and the noble CEO who's trying to create calm and credibility in the midst of outrageous opportunists.

In short, it's got everyone you know.

Herchenroether has 20+ years in the software industry, on both of the vendor/developer fence. ***Selling Air*** is thick with insider knowledge and real-to-life situations that, if they didn't happen, sure could have. In fact, part of the fun with this book is trying to guess who's who; even though we've never met Herchenroether, ***Selling Air*** makes us think that we worked with the same people.

Although ***Selling Air*** isn't great literature — some of the dialogue is stilted, and the characters occasionally border on caricature — it truly is great fun.

Ironically, the book's primary strength may also be a weakness: ***Selling Air*** is such a well-targeted shot to the heart of the software industry, with devastating detail and inside jokes, it may not interest outsiders. But if you love the software business — or even if you love *and* hate it — you'll love ***Selling Air***.

Two other industry veterans recently released a new book that's equally compelling, albeit for radically different reasons. ***CustomerCentric Selling***, co-authored by Michael Bosworth and John Holland, takes the business of selling apart, brick by brick, and puts it back together in a far more sensible structure.

Let's cut to the chase: This is the best book on sales we've read in many, many years.

***CustomerCentric Selling*** doesn't break new ground with sales tricks and techniques; rather, its strength is in the fact that it ties sales, marketing, and business imperatives together in a way that has the potential to turn conventional selling approaches on their collective ears. Yes, it has the word "selling" in the title, but this book is a really a *business* book more than it is a sales manual.

Bosworth and Holland won't give you 15 clever opening lines for telesales, or 12 terrific PowerPoint templates. But they will help you understand what it is that you're selling, whom you should be selling it to, where you should find them, and how you can refine and manage the messaging as well as the sales process.

In other words: Read this book when you're ready to stop screwing around. Read this book when you've realized that selling to early adopters isn't really selling, it's order-taking. Read this book if you're tired of acting as referee between marketing and sales.

Although ***CustomerCentric Selling*** isn't written specifically to software people, the fact that the authors have spent most of their lives with technology companies permeates every page. Because it applies a sales perspective to Geof Moore's chasm concepts, the relevance for software companies is very high indeed.

In fact, there's a bit of a paradox here: If you're a dyed-in-the-wool software sales rep with a quota to meet or beat, you may be disappointed in this book, because you won't find any magic bullets you can employ to meet your month-end number.

If you are that beleaguered sales rep, you may even find yourself annoyed with Bosworth and Holland, because their message is that your obsession with quotas is misguided. That's easy for them to say, right? They don't have a sales VP banging them on the head every Monday morning.

But that's exactly the point: If you're that rep, get your sales VP to read ***CustomerCentric Selling***. Better yet, get the company's CEO, CFO, COO, CTO, VP marketing, investors, and board of directors to read it. ***CustomerCentric Selling*** does such a superb job of outlining why people buy — and when and from whom — it should be required reading prior to the creation of any business plan.