



Ruling the Waves: Cycles of Discovery, Chaos, and Wealth, from the Compass to the Internet

By Debora L. Spar

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The high-tech bubble seems to have burst—or has it? Knowing where you are in the business cycle is crucial. Historical perspective helps, and so does keen analysis. *Ruling the Waves* offers both.

Debora Spar begins the historical context with pirate tales. Jean Lafitte's domination of the seas and Rupert Murdoch's domination of the British airwaves with BSkyB have much in common. Tales of the telegraph and radio help you understand the natural evolution of Microsoft, the trials of the codemakers who fought the U.S. government to protect Internet privacy, and the revolutionary rap stars who challenged the record industry. Great stories of quirky pioneers and their roller-coaster rides make this the one book that you need to become an expert on the path of future innovations and the natural development from idea to market in a changing world.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In an attempt to place the commercialization of the Internet in historical context, Spar argues that advances in communications technology from oceangoing ships to the Internet occur in successive phases of innovation, commercialization, creative anarchy and rules. Discoveries by researchers and explorers acquire commercial value, she claims, which attracts both investment and pirates. The increasing value of the former subsidizes efforts to suppress the latter. Out of that conflict emerges a legal structure to support the new industry. Spar, a professor at the Harvard Business School, traces this cycle seven times, in European oceangoing trade from the 15th to the 18th century; telegraph, radio and satellite television; cryptography, software and digital music reproduction. Although her thesis is provocative, it's not precise enough to yield dramatic insights. For example, the author defines all lawbreaking as piracy. In her view, Phil Zimmerman, who developed the e-mail security code known as Pretty Good Privacy, was a pirate who gave it away for free in possible violation of U.S. technology export control laws, though this reverses the common usage in which a pirate steals something from others. Since laws are unclear during periods of innovation, the author can label anyone a pirate when necessary for her model. Often in her account, the same figures are pirates and opponents of piracy (the subtitle subtly illustrates this). The first three chapters are sketchy attempts to cover broad topics in a small space, while the last four focus selectively on narrow aspects of the innovation in question (for example, the software chapter is mainly an account of the Microsoft antitrust case). Despite its defects, the book raises worthwhile questions and delivers compelling anecdotes. Undemanding readers and browsers will not be disappointed.

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From [Booklist](#)

To understand what the Internet revolution holds in store, Spar suggests, we need only look to the past. Spar, a Harvard Business School professor, argues eloquently that history shows that "life along the technological frontier moves through four distinct phases." With a rich array of examples, she describes the phases as they follow a pattern of innovation, commercialization, creative anarchy, and governance. She illustrates how early commerce on the high seas became the target of piracy, how Gutenberg's printing press threatened the authority of the church, and how the British navy at first usurped Marconi's radio. Highlighting the dynamic give-and-take between government and business--between politics and commerce--she explains how rules evolve to "control" new technologies and how the creators of those technologies eventually accept the rules in order to protect themselves. Although drawing parallels between Caribbean pirates and Napster downloaders or between Gugliemo Marconi and Marc Andreessen may seem superficial at first, Spar's skillful, detailed narratives make those comparisons meaningfully instructive. *David Rouse*

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Review

One of the best-written books I've encountered in many a day, and because of its acute relevance to the Internet one of the timeliest as well."

-Thomas McCraw, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Prophets of Regulation*

Ruling the Waves elegantly proves that the cyber revolution is in fact a very new chapter in a very old story. Spar provides an essential guide to this new frontier. This is essential reading for entrepreneurs, policy

makers and politicians."

-Gordon Silverstein, senior editor, The New America Foundation

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Theresa Gordon:

Here thing why that Ruling the Waves: Cycles of Discovery, Chaos, and Wealth, from the Compass to the Internet are different and trusted to be yours. First of all reading through a book is good but it really depends in the content from it which is the content is as delicious as food or not. Ruling the Waves: Cycles of Discovery, Chaos, and Wealth, from the Compass to the Internet giving you information deeper including different ways, you can find any publication out there but there is no book that similar with Ruling the Waves: Cycles of Discovery, Chaos, and Wealth, from the Compass to the Internet. It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing this happened in the world which is perhaps can be happened around you. You can bring everywhere like in area, café, or even in your approach home by train. When you are having difficulties in bringing the published book maybe the form of Ruling the Waves: Cycles of Discovery, Chaos, and Wealth, from the Compass to the Internet in e-book can be your option.

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