



Hot issues

Grand Intentions – a novel about the Australian telco industry

Grand Intentions, a new novel by Professor Trevor Barr, was inspired by the Australian telco industry. The novel tells the story of a fictitious telecommunications company, Telco One, as it undergoes major changes.

While it's inspired by true events (the story draws inspiration from the privatisation of Telstra between 1991 and 2010), it uses fictional characters to explore the human consequences for those involved in the rapid transformation of the company.

Professor Barr is a veteran of the Australian telecommunications landscape and witnessed the real life changes explored in the book. He currently holds the position of Emeritus Professor at Swinburne University of Technology. His distinguished career saw him win the Charles Todd Medal in 2007 for his contributions to the industry.

We spoke with the author (and ACCAN member), to get some insights into the motivation and inspiration behind the novel.

Inspiration behind the novel

At the beginning of the novel, Telco One, has recently been privatised and is undergoing major changes as a result. *Grand Intentions* follows characters including the new Telco One CEO, Clint Mason, recruited from New York who “relentlessly imposes new strategies.” The characters of former financial counsellors, Max and Paul, find their lives radically changing after they join Telco One's consumer division.

The novel explores the impact of the changes on these individuals and those around them.

When looking to write about the telecommunications industry, it was the lack of books focusing on the industry that motivated Trevor to write the novel.

“I thought it was odd that there were so many books about media institutions and personalities (Murdoch, Packer, Stokes) and for IT (Gates, Jobs, Zuckerberg), but almost no comparable books about telecommunications,” he commented.

“Strange too given that the telecommunications industry in Australia is more than ten times larger in revenue than for the whole of our commercial television industry.”

The book uniquely examines the internal telecommunications industry culture that so strongly influences consumer practices and services.

Response to the novel

Trevor has been delighted by so many positive responses to the novel.

From the outside looking in, the telecommunications industry can seem quite 'unapproachable,' but according to literary critic, Helen Elliot, the novel manages to be "pacey and thoughtful." John O'Hara, former Director, The Australian Film Television and Radio School, called the novel "a stunning account of the changes with a major player in Australian and international telecommunications."

The book has also received a positive response from industry figures and stakeholders, including ACCAN's CEO, Teresa Corbin, who praised the book as "very entertaining."

"Having been involved in many of the events the book is based upon, it was a surreal experience to re-live them through the characters in the book," said Ms Corbin. "I had a great time trying to guess which real life people the characters are based on!"

Adjunct Associate Professor at Monash University, Peter Gerrand, called *Grand Intentions* a 'page-turner of a novel,' while Jim Holmes, owner of Incyte Consulting, labelled the book "an exciting read that involves many themes and works at many levels."

While there are no plans for a follow-up at the moment, Trevor said that there may be screen options for the novel.

Grand Intentions is available from book stores now.