

# Real techies don't speak 'Klingon'

Understand exactly what that office technical guru is trying to tell you



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The following tips may help to minimize the “intimidation factor” and raise your understanding of the ever-changing world of business technology.

It's a typical scenario in companies all across the country, throughout nearly every industry (except perhaps those located in Silicon Valley). The boss has a simple question regarding a technology issue. The question is phrased something like, “How do I send some job data over the internet to a subcontractor?” The company's tech expert gives this answer in reply: “Just ftp your SQL data backup using a GUI application that can be downloaded. Prior to backup, make sure that your Login is on the correct ACL. You may need to modify your firewall, however, because we've seen some TCP session hijacking lately via IM Worms.”

What the boss heard is, “Blah, blah, blah. Techno babble, techno babble.” Sound familiar? So how do we bridge this enormous communication gap, you ask?

As the technology expert for this publication, I feel an obligation to address this jargon divide. I am frequently challenged to explain brand new technologies to people who know little about them or infrequently use them. There are several things that you can do, and should be doing, to facilitate communication with your internal and external IT (information technology) resources. Your business cannot operate independently of technology, and you must make sure you do not either. The following tips may help to minimize the “intimidation factor” and raise your understanding of the ever-changing world of business technology.

## Frequently misunderstood acronyms and tech jargon

**FTP:** Short for File Transfer Protocol, or the format used for sending files on the internet.

**SQL:** Abbreviation of Structured Query Language and pronounced either “see-kwell” or as separate letters. SQL is the “language” for requesting information from a database.

**GUI:** (pronounced “GOO-ee”). Stands for Graphical User Interface but all you need to know is that this is the program interface that makes today's computer so much easier to use. Microsoft Windows is a GUI that allows novice pc users to avoid the complexities of DOS commands. GUI components include such things as pointers, icons, and mouse and windows.

**ACL:** Short for Access Control List. This is simply a set of data that determines who (either individual or group) has access to what information (such as directory or file).

**Firewall:** Picture a brick wall between your company's computers and every outside system, protecting your firm from dangerous computer bugs and viruses. Firewalls screen all information that enter and exit via the Internet so that company security is maintained.

**IM worms:** Worms are actually self-replicating programs designed to wreak havoc on a computer or network. (And therefore should probably have a more menacing name like “maggot” or “slime ball.”) IM worms are particularly nasty because they spread by accessing the user's instant messaging address book, or buddy list. Unlike traditional “worms,” which need to scan the Internet looking for vulnerable IP addresses, an IM worm simply identifies someone who is currently online and then spreads itself by taking names from the user's address book.

To help you achieve a basic understanding of anything technical, check out the following online reference sites. They contain valuable definitions and encyclopedic topics to everything related to computer science and information technology:

[www.whatis.com](http://www.whatis.com), [www.pcwebopedia.com](http://www.pcwebopedia.com).

## It is the responsibility of decision makers to know enough about technology to know what it can or cannot do.

### Learn the basics

There will always be a debate of just how much technology the business owner or executive should know. After all, shouldn't that be left to the expert? Of course. But you would never make an uninformed decision either. It is the responsibility of decision makers to know enough about technology to know what it can or cannot do.

For example, consider the lesson learned by an electrical construction firm with annual revenues of approximately \$5 million. With no internal tech expert to consult, this company relied on the advice of outside vendors and ended up with three successive accounting software programs over a six-year period. Nothing fit the business needs of the company or met their accounting objectives until their fourth and final purchase of our system. Good technical advice from the start, from someone knowledgeable about software AND the practical applications needed by this company, probably could have prevented a long, exhausting "trial and error" search.

### Find a tech guru who speaks English

Believe it or not, there are techies out there who are not out to confuse, frustrate or intimidate the so-called technologically challenged. You don't need to find the world's greatest communicator, just someone who can articulate technology concepts into non-technological terms.

The fact that so many people today are terrified by technical terms and aggravated by acronyms is

no surprise really. Consider this fact: Nearly one in four new words added to the latest edition of the *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary* are those derived from or describing technology. Many of these words were yesterday's jargons (defined as "technical terms for which the meanings are known only to a select few.")

In most cases, technical people use jargon not to appear intellectually superior (okay, some do) but because it most accurately describes a term and has no reasonable substitute. Therefore, make sure your technical expert not only can explain topics in clear, precise language, but also is willing to define each and every acronym and jargon until you hold up your hand and say, "By George, I think I've got it."

### Understand what you have and what you're looking for

First and foremost, come to understand what your current technology strategy is...and if it is successfully supporting your overall business strategy. Before a new strategy or purchase is even considered, current technology should be evaluated based on company objectives. If business goals are not being met, define specifically what is needed to achieve these goals. Even if you don't know much about the specific technologies available, articulate to your tech expert the goals you hope to achieve.

### Ask Questions

As with our undefined "boss" above, if your unas-

suming question is met with an unintelligible answer, demand a definition. Hopefully, you've done your homework and know the basics of which they speak. Simply keep asking questions until you are satisfied. After all, you need to know not just if your goals are achievable, but if they are realistic and affordable as well.

### Be open to new technology

When it comes to technology, it's best to remember that you are never "finished." Just when you think you've got the newest and fastest product available, you could safely gamble that an even newer, faster one has come on the market.

Thankfully, you don't need to consider every brand-new technology, only the new technologies that could have a positive impact on your business. And to take advantage of those opportunities, you need to keep yourself informed and educated. Build on that budding relationship with your tech support person. Learn the basic jargons and buzzwords that matter to your business. Soon, you'll both be speaking an effective mix of English and "Klingon" as you enjoy frequent and on-going discussions about our changing world of technology. **BXM**

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