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SERVING GREATER TAMPA BAY

## *Technically speaking, it doesn't work*



**GUEST  
OPINION**

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**J**argon in the high tech world has reached epidemic proportions. It's used indiscriminately without consideration as to whether the person hearing it understands the messenger.

If you ask someone to explain what the jargon means, you're likely to be met with more jargon in the explanation. So, the poor receiver of the message doesn't know where to begin in deciphering the terms.

A new public relations staff member working with a high tech team of marketing and engineering professionals was taken off guard when she heard an engineer say, "Let's take that on a bilateral bus offline." Translation: "Let's talk about it after the meeting."

Or, as someone else, who lives in the jargon-as-English camp, might have said at the same meeting, "You know, I just don't have the bandwidth to go into that space right now." Translation: "I don't have time to explore that issue at the moment."

Jargon has so infiltrated the landscape within a number of professions that it's used to explain technical data in unintelligible ways and to communicate basic messages in ways that frustrate and alienate those not part of the "inner circle."

The end result? Multiple missed opportunities for educating customers, consumers, journalists, investors and the public.

In the case of customers, if they don't understand what the jargon word means, it's hard for them to get excited about the "breakthrough" it might describe. Ultimately, the speaker is likely to miss the opportunity to sell products, technologies or ideas which could benefit both business and personal users.

Over the course of working closely with technologists, I've discovered the source of a great deal of the misunderstandings that regularly occur between technology types and lay people. This communication issue has to do with the difference between how these two groups process and present information.

Scientists and technology types are trained in the inductive approach, a method of reasoning that starts with specifics and leads to a general conclusion.

Generalists, lay people, take the opposite approach. They want the headline first and the details later.

This is known as deductive reasoning, where you begin with a general statement, followed by the details.

When trying to understand a definition, generalists are less concerned with details and more concerned with getting to the heart of the matter.

Ask an engineer to define bandwidth for a generalist and you're likely to hear: "In order to understand bandwidth, we must understand how information moves around both within and between devices. For example in a PC, there are several different technologies at play which impact bandwidth. There is the ..."

This approach is contextual and sets us up for a long, rambling explanation.

A more useful way of defining bandwidth for the generalist is to be direct: "Bandwidth is the rate and amount of information which flows between two or more devices — such as between a PC and a telephone line — which connects you to the Internet."

If the generalist wants to know why bandwidth is important, you add: "The larger the bandwidth, the more quickly you'll receive information. So, if you're downloading photos, charts or video from the Internet you want greater bandwidth."

While mastering the jargon translation process takes effort, with practice and discipline it can be learned.

Practice is the key word.

It's a matter of exercising a new "communication muscle" in order to truly become a translator of how new products and technologies can bring value to non-technologists.

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