

MicroSpeak - An Unofficial Guide to Microsoft Corporate Lingo

This unofficial guide to Microsoft Corporate culture offers you a glimpse into the minds—and offices—of Microsoft employees worldwide. Compiled by the staff of the MicroNews, Microsoft's weekly internal corporate newsletter, this book provides an overview of the vernacular of Microsoft employees. Use it for reference on your next encounter.

A

ADK: Acronym once used to describe Microsoft's hiring strategy. Stands for Attract, Develop, and Keep employees.

Adminisphere: The rarified organizational layers beginning just above the rank and file. Decisions that fall from the adminisphere are often profoundly inappropriate or irrelevant to the problems they were designed to solve.

Air Jornada: An HP Jornada Pocket PC with a wireless card

Alpha Geek: The most knowledgeable, technically proficient person in an office or work group. "Ask Larry, he's the alpha geek around here."

Ambimousetrous: Able to use the mouse well with either hand

B

Bandwidth: Amount of time or brain cells available for handling a task.

Beepilepsy: The brief seizure people sometimes suffer when their beepers or cell phones go off, especially in vibrator mode. Characterized by physical spasms, goofy facial expressions, and stopping speech in mid-sentence.

BENOFMUE (ben-ofta-moo): Big Event No One Foresaw That Messes Up Everything (Usage: Due to the recent BENOFMUE, our group had to reorg again.)

Big R/Little r: This is a legacy from the days of Xenix Mail, where the letter R was used to reply to e-mail. An upper-case R represented a reply all, while a lower-case r sent a reply just to the sender. To this day, you'll see many old-timers still include this reference in e-mail, e.g., "Get back to me on this issue by COB tomorrow - little r please."

Binary Problem: A method of paring down an often-complex issue to a two-possible-solutions scenario (yes or no, 1 or 0, stop or go, etc.).

Bio Break: Recess in a meeting for biological purposes such as restroom or smokes.

Blamestorming: Sitting around in a group discussing why a deadline was missed or a project failed and who was responsible.

Blibbet: The name of the O-like symbol in the original Microsoft logo. Memorialised in the "Save the Blibbet" campaign and honoured by the "Blibbet Burger."

Blowing a Buffer: Losing one's train of thought. Occurs when the person you are speaking with won't let you get a word in edgewise or has just said something so astonishing that your train gets derailed. "Damn, I just blew my buffer!"

Boat Anchor: Unused, obsolete CPU kept around to leverage acquisition of a new machine at the beginning of the fiscal year. "Fred's office floor was cluttered with boat anchors."

Brain Fart: A by-product of a bloated mind producing information effortlessly. A burst of useful information. "

Burning Cycles: Wasting time and effort.

Buttoned Down: Tight, clean, well thought through. A high compliment

C

Canfusion: The bewilderment that results from staring too long at the free drinks in the kitchen cooler, trying to decide whether to have a Coke, Pepsi, Diet Coke, Diet Pepsi, Caffeine-Free Diet Coke ... or grapefruit juice.

Career-Limiting Move (CLM): Any action taken that would most likely get you fired or seriously demoted. Trashing your boss while he or she is within earshot is a serious CLM.

Catering Vultures: People who flock to an unattended catering site to pick through the remains of meeting food. These vultures are quite benevolent and reduce the amount of waste we produce

CGI Joe: A hard-core CGI script programmer with all the social skills and charisma of a plastic action figure.

Chair Trap: When you trap yourself in your office chair by accidentally hitting the pneumatic seat adjustment, causing it to drop suddenly, thereby locking your legs under your chair.

Chip Jewellery: A euphemism for old computers destined to be scrapped or turned into decorative ornaments. "I paid three grand for that Mac SE, and now it's nothing but chip jewellery."

Chips and Salsa: Chips = hardware, salsa = software. "Well, first we've got to figure out if the problem's in your chips or your salsa."

Cobweb Site: A Web site that hasn't been updated for a long time. A dead Web page.

Code Bloat: The resultant growth of systems resource requirements such as processor speed and disk and memory space, caused by the addition of features and functionality in software.

Code Warrior: A developer; a writer of code; the building block of traditional Microsoft success.

COM-PLICATE: To simplify code design by heavy use of COM (Common Object Model).

Context Switch: As in a meeting. "Let's context switch to the next issue."

Copy Protection: Spaying or neutering, such as, "Janet just had her cat copy-protected."

Cost Beast: Coined by former COO Bob Herbold in 1996, refers to a Microsoft cost-cutting strategy. For example, "taming the cost beast."

Cranking against deliverables: Busting hump to keep up with the schedule that the manager promised. "For the next month, we'll really be cranking against deliverables."

Crapplet: A badly written or profoundly useless applet. "I just wasted 30 minutes downloading this stinkin' crapplet!"

Cube Farm: An office filled with cubicles.

Cubs: Playful, smart young Microsofties who are somewhat bashful with the opposite sex and haven't quite grown into their paws

D

Dancing Baloney: Little animated GIFs and other Web F/X that are useless and serve simply to impress clients. "This page is kinda dull. Maybe a little dancing baloney will help."

Dead Tree Edition: The paper version of a publication available in both paper and electronic forms, as in: "The dead tree edition of the MicroNews..."

Death March: The final phase of product development in which people commit long days and weekends, sleep on couches, and eat catered meals (for example, Windows 95 had a six-month death march).

Dogfood: Microsoft concept for internal testing of software that's not fit for public consumption, but good enough for internal purposes. Very unrefined and buggy, but containing basic nutrients. Coined by former senior VP Paul Maritz, but made

famous by now senior VP Brian Valentine in 1988.

Door Dorks: People who stand in your doorway to talk with you, rather than entering your office. Perhaps they are too shy to come in, or they know the doorway is the safest place in the event of an earthquake.

Doortag Browsing: The act of browsing nametags on doors while in a different building, in the hopes of spotting someone famous (or maybe just somebody you've conversed with frequently via e-mail, but never met).

Dorito Syndrome: Feelings of emptiness and dissatisfaction triggered by addictive substances that lack nutritional content. "I just spent six hours surfing the Web, and now I've got a bad case of Dorito Syndrome."

Drill Down: To delve deeply into the core of an issue, rather than deal with it in a superficial manner; to analyse the details. To learn more about a subject.

Drinking from a Fire Hose: To get overwhelmed with the amount of information being presented.

Drop: A release of a product or documentation set. "We will roll out a beta drop of the authoring tool next month."

Drop Point: The share to which the release files are copied when completed.

E

Eat Your Own Dogfood: Use the product you're developing in your day-to-day operations.

Egosurfing: Scanning the Net, databases, print media, or research papers looking for the mention of your name.

Elvis Year: The peak year of something's popularity. "Barney the dinosaur's Elvis year was 1993."

F

Facemail: Technologically backward means of communication, clearly inferior to voicemail or e-mail. Involves actually walking to someone's office and speaking to him or her face-to-face.

Fibre Media: Material printed on archaic paper. Used disparagingly. "Yeah, I used to be a writer in fibre media, but now I'm a content provider in cybermedia."

Fire Drill: A crisis (usually imagined) that requires immediate and sustained attention. "Sorry I'm late, honey, but we had another one of Pat's fire drills."

Fish Bowl: Unused, obsolete monitor kept around to leverage acquisition of a new monitor at the beginning of the fiscal year

G

Glazing: Corporate-speak for sleeping with your eyes open. A popular pastime at conferences and early-morning meetings. "Didn't he notice that half the room was glazing by the second session?"

Grandmanager: My manager's manager.

Great-grandmanager: My grandmanager's manager.

Great-great-great-great-grandmanager: BillG.

Granular: Generally, and rather peculiarly, used in tandem with the verb "to get," as in "We need to get granular on this issue," meaning to examine the fine details. To get granular, one needs, it goes without saying, to drill down.

Gray Matter: Older, experienced business people hired by young entrepreneurial firms looking to appear more reputable and established

H

Hall Hogs: A congregated herd of people blocking a hallway, usually after a meeting or conference, loudly discussing things too important to be discussed at the meeting and being totally impervious to anyone trying to pass through their gauntlet while also disturbing people in nearby offices trying to get some work done.

I

IAYF: Acronym for Information at Your Fingertips, a famous phrase first spoken by BillG at Comdex.

Idea Hamsters: People who always seem to have their idea generators running.

Irritainment: Entertainment and media spectacles that are annoying, but you find yourself unable to stop watching them

K

Keyboard Plaque: The disgusting buildup of dirt and crud found on computer keyboards. "Are there any other terminals I can use? This one has a bad case of

keyboard plaque."

Keyboard Vittles: The food particles that are in the crevasses of your keyboard. A little snack to save for later.

Kludge: A hardware solution that has been improvised from various mismatched parts. A slang word meaning makeshift, inefficient, inelegant. A kludge can also be in software. It may not be elegant and is probably only a temporary fix. As in, "That patch to the software is a real kludge"

L

Lake Bill: The majestic body of water between Buildings 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the main Microsoft campus in Redmond. A noted Canada goose, goldfish, and rooster habitat, this is also the site of boss-dunkings, Ballmer swims, and juggling practice.

Let's Take This Offline: Let's talk about this later, after the meeting.

Link Rot: The process by which links on a Web page became as obsolete as the sites they're connected to change location or die.

Liveware: Slang for people. Also called wetware or jellyware, as opposed to hardware, software, and firmware

M

Meeting Seconds: Compressed minutes, such as, 1. Bob is going to Taiwan. 2. No new showstopper bugs. 3. Pizza was late.

Mickey: Smallest measurable unit of mouse movement.

MicroSnooze: Annual April Fool's Day edition of Microsoft's internal company newsletter, MicroNews.

Milkhenge: The collection of half-used milk cartons sitting on the kitchenette counter.

Monkey Testing: Giving a product to a novice without any intro/docs. From the old American Tourister ads, where they "monkey-tested" their luggage by giving it to a gorilla to play with.

Mouse Potato: The online, wired generation's answer to the couch potato.

MSFTomania: A persistent neurotic impulse to check the current Microsoft stock price.

Multi-threaded: Able to do more than one thing at a time. This term is a compliment and is the opposite of single-threaded.

N

Net: To summarize. "I was really impressed by Jon's ability to net the entire meeting down to four key points."

Net It Out: Give me the bottom line, or, get to the point. As in "Net it out for me."

Net Storm: Unexplainable multiple network failures in a specific building or region. Usually transient, but rarely fixed through human intervention. "No one was able to get onto corpnet due to the net storm."

Non-linear: Inappropriately intense negative response. "I told him we didn't have any Starbucks Gazebo Blend and he went totally non-linear."

NRO: Next Release of Office. Used for a feature that can't be put into the current shipping version, but which is flagged to go into NRO.

O

ObFun: Obligatory Fun - Team-building exercises that are not optional, usually scheduled on top of the normal team meetings.

Offline: Outside the confines of a mass meeting, so as not to take up the time of attendees not directly concerned with an issue. "Let's take this conversation offline." By extension, a synonym for "in private" or "confidentially"; "Let's take this offline" equals "Let's talk about this in private."

OGF: Overall Good Feelings or Overall Goodness Factor. Used to describe the minimum consensus required in order to move forward on a project or to a new feature

Ohnosecond: That minuscule fraction of time in which you realize that you've just made a big mistake.

Open-Collar Workers: People who work at home or telecommute.

P

Pan-Galactic: Larger than worldwide in strategic context. "Microsoft's Office has a truly pan-galactic market."

Parallel Processing: To do two things at once.

Party: Kicking out the managers and adding new features to a program, especially after the deadline for adding new features has passed. Also used to refer to what

software does to memory and hard disks. "This new code parties on the hard disk for a while and then locks up the system."

Percussive Maintenance: The fine art of whacking the crap out of an electronic device to get it to work again.

Ping: To send a brief e-mail. "I'll ping Jim about revising the schedule." Derives from Internet jargon, where one computer can ping, or send a message to, another computer, asking it to respond, to verify the connection.

Plug-and-Play: A new hire who doesn't need any training. "The new guy, John, is great. He's totally plug-and-play."

Prairie-Dogging: When someone yells or drops something loudly in a cube farm and people's heads pop up over the walls to see what's going on.

Push Back: Respond more forcefully to an unfavourable answer. If your request for three new headcount for your project is denied by upper management, you must push back with stronger reasons why you cannot possibly accomplish the project without those three headcount

R

Ramp Up: Technical term appropriated for general usage, meaning to gear up, to reinforce and, in a sense, to gird oneself for greater effort. Can be applied externally, as in ramping up resources for a new project, or internally, as in "I've got to ramp up to deal with these Web issues."

Random: Epithet describing an idea that is poorly thought out or an action that is ill considered. Most commonly used in the exclamation "That's so random!" which Bill Gates uses frequently.

Randomise: To divert someone from their goal with tertiary tasks or niggling details. "Marketing has totally randomised me by constantly changing their minds about the artwork."

Reality Distortion Field: In the MS product development process, it is defined as follows: when a team, engrossed in its own magnificence, convinces itself that impossible dates can be met, that enormously complex technical problems are nothing to worry about, and the naysayers just "don't have the religion." (From "Is Your Project Out of Control," by Chris Williams).

Release Candidate or RC: The final release build and potential candidate for RTM. Also known as "golden" code.

Repro: Short for reproducible. "Is that bug repro?" or "How repro is it?"

S

Salmon Day: The experience of spending an entire day swimming upstream only to get screwed in the end.

Schedule Chicken: Setting an unattainable schedule in the hopes that another team will slip first and buy you more time. From the teenage game "chicken," where two cars drive toward each other in a test of nerves to see who will chicken out and swerve away.

Scrow: To work 70-hour weeks to meet some unrealistic deadline.

Server: Fictional central computer designed to provide employees with a sure-fire excuse for failing to meet deadlines. "I would have finished but the damn server's been down all morning."

Shatner Moment: When a program has behaviour characterized by abnormally long pauses, alternated with rapid-fire delivery of some of what you typed—when.....your typ.....ing comes.....in.....bursts, because.....your e-mail program.....is.....dying.....network.....slow.....can't.....
...contin.....<crash> Example: "My e-mail is having a Shatner Moment."

Shoot in the Head: Remove a feature from a program. "Sure, we can ship on time, as long as we can shoot the TCP/IP connectivity module in the head."

Show Stopper: A really big bug. A function, object, or issue important enough to jeopardize a ship date or schedule in order to correct or include. "They're offering Dove bars to anyone who finds a showstopper in the latest beta."

Shrimp & Weenies: Refers to cost-cutting strategy. For example, getting rid of expenses such as lavish parties in favour of smaller-scale events, coined by Mike Murray, former VP of Human Resources in 1993-94.

Single-threaded: Not able to do two things at once. "He's single-threaded; he can't chew gum and walk at the same time." The opposite is multithreaded.

Slack: Used by devs to refer to a group of three or more program managers. ("Look! A slack of PMs grazing at the Espresso Bar.")

Slip: Used by PMs to refer to a group of three or more developers. ("I was caught in an elevator with a slip of devs. Fortunately, they were mesmerized by the flashing floor numbers.")

Slipping: Euphemism for abjectly failing to hit a deadline

Smart Guy: The ultimate compliment. "He doesn't shower often, but he's a real smart guy...OK, let's hire him."

Sniff Test: Also smoke test - refers to testing the daily build of a product during development; stolen from the electronics industry where people would plug in a

board and see what smoked. (Source: "Is Your Project Out of Control," by Chris Williams).

Spacordi: The mass of cords strewn underneath your desk (just add sauce).

Stress Puppy: A person who seems to thrive on being stressed out and whiny.

Swiped Out: An ATM or credit card that has been rendered useless because the magnetic strip is worn away after extensive use

T

Take-away: Not, as might be suspected, food to go, but impressions gleaned from a meeting or message. "My take-away from his e-mail was that he wasn't ready to drill down yet."

Thrashing: Never getting anything done because you are trying to do too much. Thrashing happens when you do too much context switching. "I went to that meeting but there was so much context switching that all we accomplished was a lot of thrashing."

Three-Finger Salute: Process of simultaneously striking Ctrl, Alt, Delete in order to restart your computer after it freezes up

Total Disconnect: An extremely low-bandwidth human interaction. "It was a total disconnect. I spent half an hour explaining how this stuff worked, and he just didn't get it."

Tourists: People who are taking training classes just to get a vacation from their jobs. "We had about three serious students in the class; the rest were tourists."

Trash-sitters: People who come into a meeting late and then sit on the trash receptacles instead of at the table. Usually done in an attempt to remain aloof from the rest of the participants.

Treeware: Hacker slang for documentation or other printed material.

U

Under Mouse Arrest: Getting busted for violating an online service's rule of conduct. "Sorry I couldn't get back to you. AOL put me under mouse arrest."

Uninstalled: Euphemism for being fired.

V

Vulcan Nerve Pinch: The taxing hand position required to reach all of the appropriate keys for certain commands. For instance, the warm reboot for a Mac II computer involves simultaneously pressing the Control key, the Command key, the Return key, and the Power On key.

W

Wallcrawlers: Shy Microsofties who walk down the hallways with a shoulder pressed against the wall and their eyes cast downward.

Wide Distribution: A process in which someone seeking crucial information ("Has anyone seen my Gumby poster?") sends e-mail to thousands of Microsoft employees and contractors in hopes of finding one individual with the answer. In anticipation of the inevitable flame mail and death threats that will follow, such e-mail often begins, "Sorry for the wide distribution, but..."

WIM: Any sort of party or employee morale builder, usually held during business hours. Taken from the Windows NT group's "Weekly Integration Meetings" held every Friday as a way to let off steam during the early days of NT development