

From technophile to technophobe

In a previous life, I was a technology junky. Despite the stylish suits, high heels and perky attitude, I nurtured an inner geek. It started in the early 1990s when I transferred from a claims payment position at an insurance company to the role of marketing assistant. Excited about my promotion, I was mystified—let's be honest, horrified—to find a boxy hulk of a computer in my cubicle. I would soon learn that my boss expected me to use this foreign object to produce letters, reports and other magical tools of efficiency.

While I had seen computers before and had even done some basic programming in high school, I was not familiar with a computer's different parts. To me, a PC looked like a huge hunk of plastic with a TV poised on top. I was such a newbie, in fact, that I couldn't even turn on this hideous device without studying it for at least an hour. I began by running my hands along the surface of this plastic-encased mystery machine, pushing every button I could find until a flash of white text appeared on the black screen. BIOS? C:\? What is that supposed to mean, I asked myself, wondering what planet had hatched such an alien device. I was clueless.

My boss promptly (pun intended) informed me that I would be responsible for updating a 20-column report each month using Lotus 1-2-3, a DOS-based spreadsheet application. Sure, no problem, I said, wondering how I would ever make this work. That night I visited my local video store and rented a VHS tape for beginners on how to use 1-2-3. That tape may not have saved my life, but it certainly saved my job. It also sparked an interest in technology that would plague me for the next 15 years.

I soon became the "go to" person in my department for anything PC-related that our IT department couldn't handle. Since my company's PC division consisted of three former-mainframe staffers with limited PC knowledge, my skills were often in demand. I quickly mastered Lotus, creating new reports and statistical analyses that not only amazed my boss, but also made my job so much easier. Like the bursting blossoms of spring, my love for technology exploded into a full-blown obsession, replacing my lunch hour with new technology discoveries and my usual reading with magazines like *PC World*. I befriended another PC guru "wannabe," and we were on our way to geekdom!

This newly developed technological passion paved the way for my promotion to another department, where I helped teach our sales team's administrative staff how to use the newly launched MS Windows and the Lotus

suite of products (1-2-3, Ami Pro, etc.) and to install new PCs and software in our regional offices. As the department adapted from its mainframe way of thinking to the PC world, my focus shifted to assisting with the programming of an application for quoting rates for group life insurance. Initially working with a C++ programmer to design a proprietary quotation system for our field offices, I find myself in the unlikely position of chief tester, trainer and writer of the user's manual.

I was in my element—enconced in burgeoning technology as I watched the delight of my co-workers using exciting new tools that streamlined their jobs and made mundane tasks easier. Over time, I developed a body of experience and knowledge that made me invaluable to the growth of my department. Finally, I was in control of my own career destiny...

... at least until the rest of the company caught up with us. With a new technology officer at the helm of IT, it became readily apparent that the company would soon move away from mainframe technology to use PCs across the board. Equipment was ordered, hardware and software were installed, and training began. Soon the unique knowledge I had painstakingly acquired was no longer exceptional. In fact, as Microsoft, Word and Excel became household names, my expertise became commonplace. I no longer had that unique knowledge that made me technologically invaluable. I lost my competitive edge.

At first, I was saddened by this change in circumstances. In fact, I suffered withdrawal as my co-workers called the support desk in IT instead of coming to me for help. I felt like I had lost what had once been a unique talent, and, like anyone suffering such a career shift, I mourned. I started buying *Business Week* and *Glamour* instead of *PC Magazine*. I skipped training classes, and I allowed the PC experts in IT to invade my world.

After about six months, I realized that the world of technology had advanced so quickly that I had already lost touch with what was new and different. Technology had changed rapidly, not waiting for me to catch up. My love affair with user manuals, databases and spreadsheets was officially over. I was just another end user lost in a sea of blogs, Podcasts and social media.

Shortly thereafter, I left the corporate world to start my own business. Out of necessity, I now embrace the technology I need to communicate and serve my clients, but I no longer obsess about new products, software updates or automatic back-ups. I leave that to my IT department (aka my boyfriend, Jim). I prefer to stay on the periphery, looking over his shoulder as he installs networking tools, external hard drives and surround sound.

Once in awhile, I catch myself watching him wistfully as he uninstalls, patches and password protects. When his technological prowess becomes too much for me to handle, I return to nature—grabbing my iPod and Blackberry for a leisurely stroll around the neighborhood—as I leave geekdom behind once and for all.

—Dana Blozis

