

How to talk the tech talk

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Working around the client's schedule is an integral part of an interior decorator's life. And, Ruchika Malhotra , an interior decorator from Mumbai, is well-versed with this rule.



"Getting time from clients who travel often is a pain, so I make sure to pounce on any opportunity I get," says Malhotra. "Last month, however, I missed a golden window, which managed to set my schedule back by a whole six months just because I could not decipher sms lingo."

It so happened that Malhotra's client, who was going overseas, had promised a meeting before she left for six months. She sent Malhotra an sms that said 'PCM'; not being much of a tech-savvy person, Malhotra ignored the message as garbled text. The client, however, was simply using tech speak where PCM is short for 'please call me'.

"When I called her later that evening, I found out that she was actually waiting for my call so that we could meet up," says Malhotra. "This incident was a great eyeopener for me. I immediately started taking a crash course on sms shorthand from my 17-year-old niece."

Funnily enough, the text-messaging shorthand has started seeping into all walks of life these days as internet lingo becomes widespread in emails, sms and on Twitter. What was just a hip thing to do in teenage circles has now started becoming commonplace in offices and such.

And, of course, it's a must-know for parents of teenagers to be able to communicate with (and keep tabs on) their kids. One of the biggest reasons behind the rise of shorthand is the growth of sms in India. An average Indian sends at least 29 smses a month, says Trai data. Add to that the likes of Twitter and IM's and you have a few million of shorthand tech speak floating around in India alone.

"Twitter has a limit of 140 characters, in order to include the identity of the sender in each text message . This constraint has created a marketplace of ideas that may only be expressed in a short format of words, symbols, and hypertext links. Turning it into a whole new genre of writing, a new form of literature in some ways," writes Dom Sagolla, co-author of the book 140 Characters, A Style Guide for the Short Form.

But, all is not lost for the poor souls who still struggle with tech speak basics such as 'LOL' (Laugh Out Loud) or 'TTYL' (Talk To You Later).

Because the new form of literature has given rise to a large variety of online dictionaries and

applications that allow you to demystify tech speak in a jiffy. Those who like to follow the dictionary format should go straight to websites such as Internet Slang dictionary (www.noslang.com/dictionary), NetLingo .com, UrbanDictionary.com or Webopedia .com.

Not only do they give you a quick cheat sheet for transcribing words, they also come with a translator option that will translate paragraphs of tech speak into good old English in no time. In fact, even regular dictionary sites have started incorporating this new shortform language. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary added texting shorthand for the first time in their 2009 edition.

It currently has shortforms such as ‘LOL’ and OMG (Oh My God). Then there are the paperback versions that give you a fairly extensive dose of internet short forms too. For those who would rather read the new form of literature in paperbacks can go for books such as Textapedia, a pocket guide to texting terms or 140 Characters, A Style Guide for the Short Form.

Kids and teenagers, of course, have the latest versions of net lingo, so peering into these web dictionaries from time to time won’t do for parents, says Namita Raje from Pune.

A software engineer by profession, Raje maintains a regularly updated cheat sheet for her 15-year-old daughter. “Being on top of technology is a part of my job, so thankfully I manage to weekly update my cheat sheet of current lingo of tech speak such as L?^ (Lets Hook Up) and F2F (Face To Face),” says Raje.

She even has a parent-teacher group where they email the weekly update of techspeak just to be able to speak in the same language with their kids.

A quick tool for decoding the texts, which can especially come in handy for parents, are sites such as DTXTER.com and transl8it.com. Both these sites allow you to convert between short texts to English and regular English to shortforms which can be very useful if you want to talk the talk.

Raje uses DTXTER.com on her LG phone to use short cuts like @TEOTD (At The End Of The Day) ^RUP^ (Read Up Please). “It makes my daughter feel that I am trying to understand her world a little bit more and these texts also make me a cool mom to her friends,” says Raje.

Popular Shorthand sms Language

Here are more examples of the most commonly used shorthand sms terms:

BRB - Be right back
GR8 – Great
J/K - Just kidding
PIR - Parent in room
HAND - Have a nice day
^5 - High five
BIL - Boss is listening
ASL - Age/sex/location
B4N/BFN - Bye for now
NP - No problem