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.

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

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 DTXTR.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/BN - Bye for now
- NP - No problem

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