Geek **Speak**
Essential IT Skills for CEOs

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Many CEO's aren't comfortable with technology. In today's fast-moving world, virtually every businessperson uses a computer during part of their day. In my experience, however, the leaders of industry—the business owners and CEOs—are frequently the least comfortable with the technology that runs their businesses. There are a number of reasons:

- Many CEOs never learned to touch-type, so typing can be a daunting process.
- CEOs already suffer from information overload. The additional burden of e-mail, instant messaging, or other computer-based tools overwhelms them.
- Computer technology has its own jargon and language. CEOs are often lost in a jungle of terms like SCSI, XML, and HTTP.
- Many CEOs spend a good deal of time on the road and at clients' sites—frequently with laptops, which require the user to learn a few extra "gadgets and features."
- CEOs need to stay connected while on the road. Unfortunately, there are many overlapping and inconsistent ways of staying connected.

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Essential Skills

Here are some tips that will point you in the right direction to fill your IT knowledge gaps and make you a more effective leader:

Typing

Typing skills are easiest to learn when you're having fun, so find a typing game that you enjoy. (I know CEOs who love a program called "Typing of the Dead," which teaches you typing skills while you blow up zombies.) Play for a little while each day and soon you'll be touch-typing with ease!

Managing Information Overload

Many CEOs' computers look as if someone took every file they ever got and dumped them all into a single bin. Wading through these poorly-organized files can be a real chore. Fortunately, there is a way out: the proper use of folders and search tools.

You're probably familiar with the "Inbox" folder in your e-mail mailbox. Take a little time to create subfolders under this critical folder. Set up a "For follow up" folder for important documents or e-mails you must reply to, so you know what is still pending. Create a folder for each client, employee, or other contact person. Outlook can then automatically route incoming messages into the folders based on information such as the sender's e-mail address, or text in the subject or body of the message. Folders with pre-sorted new mail will appear in boldface so you'll see them easily.

A great search tool you can use is a program called Lookout, that indexes your "My Documents" directory and your e-mail Inbox into a single searchable toolbar. Lookout is available free at **www.lookoutsoft.com/Lookout/download.html**.

Understanding the Jargon

Most technical people are happy to explain jargon in simple terms. If someone uses a term that you don't understand, just raise a finger and say, "I'm sorry, that's not my area of expertise—could you explain 'X' to me so that I can understand it better?" Make sure you understand the benefits of the latest jargon-laden gizmo you're buying——no matter how "cool" it sounds, it needs to work faster, better, or cheaper than what you already have.

Laptops and Staying Connected

If you travel with a laptop, learn the various power-saving modes (sleep, hibernate, off) to use the computer most effectively. Have a technical person sit down with you and show you the best way to use your laptop, both on the road and at your office. Understanding how to hook up your computer to an Ethernet connection or a wireless connection in a hotel room can make a huge difference in how useful your computer is to you. When traveling, choose a hotel chain that has a consistent way of connecting to the Internet and use that chain whenever possible—then you only need to know one interface model.

Keeping your computer secure, especially a laptop, is paramount for a CEO. Make it hard for competitors or crooks to find and access your information! Using a complex password can foil a large percentage of casual access attacks. On most operating systems you can change your password yourself—do so, and keep it secret from everyone, even your IT staff.

Have a competent and trusted staff person run a security check on your PC to be sure that you have good virus protection, updates, and security configuration. Have them show you how to check to be sure these are active and up to date. If you're on the road or using a public wireless system, always have a software firewall installed on your system. Be sure that any data stored on your personal computer or desktop is properly backed up and protected from disaster.

In Conclusion

Using a computer effectively is an essential skill for most CEOs, and it doesn't have to be painful. Invest a small amount of time learning how to organize and secure your data, type efficiently, and understand jargon and systems operation. You will find yourself becoming more productive, and you'll feel more confident about your technology decisions every day. **BSM**

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