

# THE MEETING MANAGER

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## Overcoming Technology Anxiety

When you first started using a computer at work, it may have felt uncomfortable, but the variety of tasks you handled (in retrospect) was manageable. As the primary functions of your computing systems switch from word processing and data crunching to communications and presentations, undoubtedly you'll feel another surge of anxiety in your attempt to learn new programs, new features and new ways of proceeding.

While it might be temporarily comforting to hide under the banner of being "technologically disadvantaged," the reality for most of us is a growing need to incorporate new technologies on a continual basis. But the leap doesn't have to be painful. Following are some effective ways to become more technologically adept:

■ **Each week, learn one new presentation or communication tool**—particularly those that are part of existing software packages you use.

■ **Read at least one article a week related to communication or presentation technology.** It doesn't have to be highly technical; it could be in a PC magazine, a business journal or your local newspaper.

■ **Once a month, read a book related to technology.** Again, go easy on yourself. There are a variety of books that put technology in perspective in an understand-

able, friendly way. Also, choose one of the many books on using Internet navigating software such as Netscape or Mosaic. The Alpha and Que division of MacMillan Books has an excellent series called *The Complete Idiot's Guide*, covering such topics as the Internet, DOS, Windows, CompuServe, America Online and PCs in general.

■ **Find out what your clients and customers are doing with technology.** Remember five or six years ago, when faxes were becoming commonplace in offices? The first time a client said, "Could you fax it to me," you thought twice. By the 10th call, you'd bought a fax machine. So it is with the latest technology. Similarly, pay attention to what others in your industry—particularly, close competitors—are using. Ask people how they're accomplishing certain tasks and what works well.

■ **Join a technology group in your area.** The business section of your local paper will list who's meeting, when and where. In metropolitan areas of at least 75,000 to 100,000 people, there are PC and Macintosh user clubs, bulletin boards, support groups and the like. And almost every community has its own news group that can be accessed over the Internet. Form alliances with people who know what you need to know, as well as those who are at the same level of technology as you.

■ **Once you begin to feel more technologically at ease, consider subscribing to a technical publication.** Some examples: *Wired*, *PC World*, *Home Office*, *Internet Magazine*, *The Net*, *Byte*, *MacWorld* or *PC Computing*.

■ **Check your local paper for upcoming technology trade shows and expositions.** Again, in any metro area, there are at least four to six technology fairs per year, in which both hardware and software vendors display their latest products and services. Many also have specialized seminars that are free with the general admission (usually no more than \$5 to \$10) or which charge a nominal fee.

■ **Designate one night a week to spend two hours or so learning more about technology.** Make sure you have a quiet, uninterrupted space in which to absorb new concepts and explore new ways of thinking.

Remember that others who felt even less comfortable than you have been able to master communication and presentation technologies. You'll be just fine.

—Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

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