
TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUR INNER-GEEK: PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBILITIES

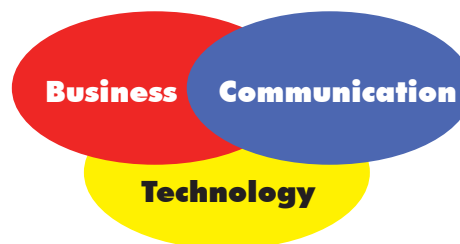
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Business

I. A PERSPECTIVE ON BUSINESS

1. The Purpose of Business is to make:

Money?

“We are not in business to conduct moral activity. We are not in business to conduct socially responsible activity,” IBM chairman John Akers proclaimed in 1986. “We are in business to conduct business.” “Greed is all right,” the Wall Street titan Ivan Boesky famously decreed in a commencement address at Berkeley, a short time before his arrest for insider trading. “I think greed is healthy.”

Petzinger, Thomas. “A New Model for the Nature of Business: It’s Alive!”. *Wall Street Journal* February 26, 1999, B1.

William K. Vanderbilt, the heir of Commodore Vanderbilt and the head of the New York Central Railroad, made the most famous and succinct statement of the individualistic ideal as it was incorporated into corporate myth. Vanderbilt was asked by a reporter for the Chicago Daily News in 1882 if he did not run his trains “for the public benefit.” His immediate reply made him immortal: “The public be damned,” he said.

Robertson, James. *American Myth, American Reality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 1-22.182-83).

As one executive said to us, ‘Profit is like health. You need it, and the more the better. But it’s not why you exist.’ Moreover, in a piece of research that preceded this work, we found that companies whose only articulated goals were financial did not do nearly as well financially as companies that had broader sets of values.

Peters, Tom and Robert Waterman, *In Search of Excellence : Lessons from Americas Best Run Companies*. New York, Warner Books, 1988.

A key role of core purpose is to guide and inspire. ‘Maximize shareholder wealth’ does not inspire people at all levels of an organization, and it provides precious little guidance. ‘Maximize shareholder wealth’ is the standard ‘off-the-shelf’ purpose for those organizations that have not yet identified their true core purpose. It is a substitute ideology, and a weak substitute at that.

Purpose gets at the deeper reasons for an organization’s existence beyond just making money, as illustrated by a 1960 speech by David Packard, wherein he said: ‘I think many people assume, wrongly, that a company exists simply to make money. While this is an important result of a company’s existence, we have to go deeper and find the real reasons for our being.’

Collins, James C. and Jerry I. Porras. *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. First Paperback Edition. New York: Harper-Collins, 1997.

There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.

Drucker, Peter F. *The Essential Drucker: Selections from the Management Works of Peter F. Drucker*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.

A Customer?

In Real Estate, this means having a “Big Why.”

“Try looking at it this way. I also need a certain amount of money, but the difference is, I’ve never worked for money. Never. Never even really thought about it. When I wake up in the morning, my Big Goal is to do my very best, to be my very best, and to grow as much as possible. Any money I’ve made is simply a by-product of my constant pursuit of personal growth. That’s why I set Big Goals and work so hard.”

So you have to be careful when you’re trying to discover your Big Why. We hope that what motivates you isn’t just money or a comfortable retirement. The truth is, you can achieve those things faster than you think; then, if you’re not careful, you’ll be left with a lot of life and little reason to live it. We hope you’re getting in touch with what truly motivates you. Maybe you love to do the deal. Some of the best agents I know love nothing more than a difficult negotiation that gives them a chance to really shine, to acknowledge objections, to discover a solution with which both sides can be happy. This is the kind of Big Why that doesn’t easily fade.

Gary Keller, *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* (Austin, TX: Relleck Pub., 2003).

Your Value Proposition

The BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal)

For example, recall how Henry Ford brought to life the BHAG to democratize the automobile with the vivid description: “I will build a motor car for the great multitude It will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one—and enjoy with his family the blessing of hours of pleasure in God’s great open spaces When I’m through everybody will be able to afford one, and everyone will have one. The horse will have disappeared from our highways, the automobile will be taken for granted . . . [and we will] give a large number of men employment at good wages.”

Collins, James C. and Jerry I. Porras. *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. First Paperback Edition. New York: Harper-Collins, 1997.

Hedgehog Concept:

A fox is good at a lot of things. A hedgehog is great at one thing:

A Hedgehog Concept is a *simple, crystalline concept that flows from deep understanding about the intersection of the following three circles:*

What you can be the best in the world at (and, equally important, what you cannot be the best in the world at). This discerning standard goes far beyond core competence. Just because you possess a core competence doesn’t necessarily mean you can be the best in the world at it. Conversely, what you can be the best at might not even be something in which you are currently engaged.

What drives your economic engine. All the good-to-great companies attained piercing insight into how to most effectively generate sustained and robust cash flow and profitability. In particular, they discovered the single denominator—profit per x—that had the greatest impact on their economics. (It would be cash flow per x in the social sector.)

What you are deeply passionate about. The good-to-great companies focused on those activities that ignited their passion. The idea here is not to stimulate passion but to discover what makes you passionate.

Collins, James C. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2001.

In Real Estate, A Unique Selling Proposition:

Even beyond their sense of purpose, the very best real estate agents are able to translate this purpose and the reason people should hire them into a specific set of services that they will provide. We have come to call this the agent’s value proposition. This value proposition lays out in detail what services the buyer or seller will receive.

Gary Keller, *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* (Austin, TX: Relleck Pub., 2003).

2. Business is all about:

Knowing the technical side of your business?

Management is about human beings. Its task is to make people capable of joint performance, to make their strengths effective and their weaknesses irrelevant. This is what organization is all about, and it is the reason that management is the critical, determining factor. These days, practically all of us work for a managed institution, large or small, business or non-business. We depend on management for our livelihoods.

Knowing people?

Management is thus what tradition used to call a liberal art—“liberal” because it deals with the fundamentals of knowledge, self-knowledge, wisdom, and leadership; “art” because it is also concerned with practice and application. Managers draw on all the knowledges and insights of the humanities and the social sciences—on psychology and philosophy, on economics and history, on ethics—as well as on the physical sciences. But they have to focus this knowledge on effectiveness and results—on healing a sick patient, teaching a student, building a bridge, designing and selling a “user-friendly” software program.

Drucker, Peter F. *The Essential Drucker: Selections from the Management Works of Peter F. Drucker*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001. 3-13.

3. The Most Successful Leaders are:

Charismatic?

More important than charisma, is the ability to create a structure that will sustain the organization. Collins and Poras call this “clock-building”—something that will help many other people, rather than simply “time telling,” a narrower skill that may only help a few.

The best leaders are (Collins in *Good to Great*):

Quiet?

- Both humble and determined. “They are ambitious, to be sure, but ambitious first and foremost for the company, not themselves.”

Daring?

- More concerned about the company and its future than themselves.
- Modest, self-effacing and understated, without a “gargantuan personal ego”

Disciplined?

- “Fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results. They are resolved to do whatever it takes to make the company great, no matter how big or hard the decisions.”

People with a Great Idea?

- “More plow horse than show horse.”

People who know how to Build?

- Willing “to look out the window to attribute success to factors other than themselves. When things go poorly, however, they look in the mirror and blame themselves, taking full responsibility.”

Collins, James C. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2001.

4. A Business is like:

A Machine?

“This linear, mechanical model shaped every aspect of economic intercourse. Because matter and energy could be neither created nor destroyed, workers and owners were locked in a struggle over resources and wealth. Jobs, like machines, became ever more specialized and repetitive; the whole, after all, was always the sum of its parts. History’s first management consultant, Frederick Taylor, argued a century ago that all possible brain work should be removed from the shop.”

Petzinger, Thomas. “A New Model for the Nature of Business: It’s Alive!”. *Wall Street Journal* February 26, 1999, B1.

An Organism?

Until recently, businesspeople saw their worlds through the Industrial Age metaphor of the machine and built their organizations accordingly. Now, in irreversibly increasing numbers, they see business more as a living system. And in the process they are leading business back to its roots as a natural and fundamentally human institution.

Petzinger, Thomas. “A New Model for the Nature of Business: It’s Alive!”. *Wall Street Journal* February 26, 1999, B1.

Problems with Not Seeing the System: The Learning Disabilities and Our Ways of Thinking

- Because they “become their position,” people do not see how their actions affect the other positions.
- Consequently, when problems arise, they quickly blame each other—“the enemy” becomes the players at the other positions, or even the customers.
- When they get “proactive” and place more orders, they make matters worse.
- Because their overordering builds up gradually, they don’t realize the direness of their situation until it’s too late.
- By and large, they don’t learn from their experience because the most important consequences of their actions occur elsewhere in the system, eventually coming back to create the very problems they blame on others.”
- The “teams” running the different positions (usually there are two or three individuals at each position) become consumed with blaming the other players for their problems, precluding any opportunity to learn from each others’ experience.

Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*, 1990, p. 51-52.

5. What Matters Most in Business is:

What?

It has been said that “the only way for any organization to ensure its financial security is by creating satisfied, loyal customers.” To the extent that the organization is at all labor-dependent, we propose that the principal requirement for operationalizing that aim is the creation of a satisfied, fully engaged workforce. In the main, our products and services, technology, methods, tools, and strategies can all be copied. But it’s not as easy to duplicate a focused, caring workforce. In the final analysis, “people factors” are frequently the key source of competitive advantage—the factor least visible to the naked eye and most difficult to emulate. Sooner or later, we must come to grips with the fact that most businesses aren’t so much capital- or expertise- or even product-driven as they are PEOPLE-driven.

Where?

Bill Callette and Richard Hadden, *Contented Cows Give Better Milk: The Plain Truth about Employee Relations and Your Bottom Line*, 1998, p. 7.

Who?

The best leaders, according to Jim Collins, think of “who” first.

- They “began the transformation by first getting the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figured out where to drive it.”
- “The key point is not just the idea of getting the right people on the team. The key point is that “who” questions come before “what” decisions—before vision, before strategy, before organization structure, before tactics. First who, then what—as a rigorous discipline, consistently applied.”
- Less successful companies “frequently followed the ‘genius with a thousand helpers’ model—a genius leader who sets a vision and then enlists a crew of highly capable ‘helpers’ to make the vision happen. This model fails when the genius departs.”
- The great leaders “were rigorous, not ruthless, in people decisions. They did not rely on layoffs and restructuring as a primary strategy for improving performance.”
- The great management teams “consist of people who debate vigorously in search of the best answers, yet who unify behind decisions, regardless of parochial interests.”

Collins, James C. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2001.



Communication

Billions are spent every year on internal corporate communications, including \$50 million. Even so, most organizations still do a miserable job of helping their folks understand the direction, goals, and priorities of the business (let alone securing their Commitment to them). If you doubt the magnitude of this “failure to communicate” claim, take five minutes and go do some field research of your own. Ask a sample of your people to jot down what they believe to be the organization’s three highest priorities and where they think it is headed. When the answers come back without any degree of consistency, the question is obvious: If they don’t know where you’re going, how can they possibly help you get there?

Bill Callette and Richard Hadden, *Contented Cows Give Better Milk: The Plain Truth about Employee Relations and Your Bottom Line*, 1998, p. 56.

II. A PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNICATION

1. Communication is all about:

Information?

The first myth is that communication is simply the transfer of information, just like a computer. This is part of what Theodore Roszak in 1986 called The Cult of Information, where we assume that human beings behave just like computers as data processing machines. The fact is, we’re not machines. Our communicative behavior is much more complex. Part of that complexity is the fact that we do not respond equally to the each message, even to the same message sent at different times in a different context. If we assume, therefore, that once we have sent a message, it will obviously be correctly received, we set ourselves up for communication failures.

Influence?

Communication is not about giving information. It is about exerting influence. Far from being guided by logic, it is guided by psycho-logic, to coin a phrase. The goal of communication is not simply telling, but acting, changing another person’s behavior through what we say to them.

2. Communication is:

Passive?

A second myth is a corollary to the first: if communication is information transfer, it doesn’t take much active effort. We have come to regard communication as passive. We simply send our messages and let them take their course, never bothering to reinforce them or check to see if they were received. When we begin to see communication as exerting influence, we can see it is hardly a passive matter. We have to actively attend to the messages we send. We have to be conscious of the unintentional messages we give out that may betray our unguarded intent. We begin to manage our communication strategically, making sure we make the most of the messages we send. We must overcome what George Orwell called “the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.”

Active?

3. Communication is more about:

Meeting a legal requirement?

A third myth comes out of the litigious world we live in. We may assume that once we have formally communicated, we have met our legal obligations to get a message across and therefore have no further obligation to communicate. If our purpose in communicating is only to meet some legal standard, this assumption would be correct. But if our purpose is to change someone’s behavior, this assumption falls far short of effective communication.

Changing someone’s attitude or behavior?

Two and a half millennia ago, Plato described three different kinds of communicators as three different kinds of lovers. The evil lover is concerned only about himself and abuses the audience to get what he wants. The neutral lover is like our legal-minded communicator; he gives the bare facts with no care for the ultimate outcome. The best communicator, Plato argues, is like the noble lover who, overcome with a divine madness, does all he can to get his message across for the sake of the audience. Giving the facts is not enough. We have to change the way people work and think.

In fact, better communication can reduce your chance to legal trouble. Train your agents to reduce risk of lawsuits through better communication skills.

4. Communication is more about:

Logic?

1. Since communication is more psychological than logical, we have to account for the fact that many things may interfere with the effective reception of a message. To counter this, we should send our messages over multiple channels—written, visual, auditory, kinesthetic—to improve the chance of the whole message getting through. We should also repeat important messages, not because the audience is lazy or unmotivated, but simply because they are human and may not remember.

Psycho-logic?

2. The form of a message is an important factor in the message's success. Kenneth Burke defined form as "that which creates and satisfies appetites in the audience." Most business communication stresses information over form, but the form is often what engages the psychology of the audience best. For example, far better than random policy changes, a deliberate cycle of policy change and review creates an appetite in the closers and prepares them to receive the messages that come with policy changes.

3. We know that a message should be clear, but to be most effective in designing our messages, we have to understand how clarity works. A clear message's structure follows a pattern that the audience can recognize. They may not be immediately aware of it, but they sense the pattern and can use it to make sense out of the message. Specifically, the pattern acts like a rack or framework on which they can hang the ideas in their minds. In other words, a clear pattern helps the audience make connections and remember the message.

For example, the general rule for the number of random elements a human being can remember is 7 ± 2 (5 to 9). However, we break that rule routinely when we teach a list of 26 arbitrary items to young children. The list is the alphabet and we teach it by creating a musical pattern to which children can connect the letters.

5. The most influential persuader is:

Logic?

4. The final key communication factor for our purposes here is the most powerful form of proof. More than logic, more than emotions, people are persuaded by the personal character, knowledge and judgment of the speaker. This potent force, called "ethos" by the Greeks, becomes a manager's principal persuasive tool. Often, people believe a message for no other reason than their trust in the speaker. Ethos is more than the facts of your reputation; it is a proof you shape and develop in the messages you send. For the measures we recommend to be credible, we must:

Emotion?

The personal appeal of the persuader?

- set realistic goals
- meet the deadlines we set
- discuss problems honestly
- be fair to opposing points of view
- recognize those who have helped work on the problem.
- separate causes from effect, short-term from long-term effects, hard facts from wishes or dreams, and each proposal from another.
- talk in terms of real-world problems rather than personalities or ideologies.
- provide adequate background information on controversial issues.

III. A PERSPECTIVE ON TECHNOLOGY

Technology

1. Business Technology has more to do with:

Calculation?

Communication?

Today—and even more in the future—technology will improve communication more than simply the ability to calculate.

2. When it comes to achieving greatness, technology can be a:

Starter?

Accelerator?

“The great companies used technology as an accelerator of momentum, not a creator of it. None of the good-to-great companies began their transformations with pioneering technology, yet they all became pioneers in the application of technology once they grasped how it fit with their three circles and after they hit breakthrough.”

“The key question about any technology is, Does the technology fit directly with your Hedgehog Concept? If yes, then you need to become a pioneer in the application of that technology. If no, then you can settle for parity or ignore it entirely.”

Collins, James C. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2001.

3. Great Companies:

Get out on the leading edge of technology?

Apply selected technologies based on their value proposition?

Good-to-great organizations avoid technology fads and bandwagons, yet they become pioneers in the application of carefully selected technologies.

“Crawl, walk, run” can be a very effective approach, even during times of rapid and radical technological change.

Collins, James C. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. New York: Harper-Collins, 2001.

4. Technology is:

A Necessary Evil?

A Hobby?

An Expense?

A Lever?

Archimedes said, “Give me a lever long enough and a place to stand, and single-handed I can move the world.”

“Nineteen ninety-one was also a threshold year for technology inside large organizations, which for the first time spent more money on computing than all other equipment put together. This signaled the breakup of the mainframe computer, once accessible only to its anointed brotherhood, into millions of desktop units, which not only tapped the intelligence of everyone in an organization but redistributed it to everyone else.”

Petzinger, Thomas. “A New Model for the Nature of Business: It's Alive!”. *Wall Street Journal* February 26, 1999, B1.

Technology = Skill = Lever =
A way for the little guy to win

4. The best way to take advantage of technology is:

Be a Geek?

Hire a Geek?

Hire someone who understands your business and the potential of technology?

Remarkable things occur in accordance with nature, the cause of which is unknown, and others occur contrary to nature, which are produced by skill for the benefit of mankind. For in many cases nature produces effects against our advantage; for nature always acts consistently and simply, but our advantage changes in many ways. When, then, we have to produce an effect contrary to nature, we are at a loss, because of the difficulty, and require *skill*. Therefore we call that part of skill which assists such difficulties, a device. For as the poet Antiphon wrote, this is true: “We by *skill* gain mastery over things in which we are conquered by nature.” Of this kind are those in which the less master the greater, and things possessing little weight move heavy weights, and all similar devices which we term mechanical problems.

Aristotle. *Mechanica*. In *Minor Works*. Trans. W.S. Hett. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963.

Fourth in order Antilochus, son to noble Nestor son of Neleus, made ready his horses. These were bred in Pylos, and his father came up to him to give him good advice of which, however, he stood in but little need. “Antilochus,” said Nestor, “you are young, but Jove and Neptune have loved you well, and have made you an excellent horseman. I need not therefore say much by way of instruction. You are *skillful* at wheeling your horses round the post, but the horses themselves are very slow and it is this that will, I fear, mar your chances. The other drivers know less than you do, but their horses are fleet; therefore, my dear Son, see if you cannot hit upon some *artifice* whereby you may insure that the prize shall not slip through your fingers. The woodsman does more by *skill* than by brute force; by *skill* the pilot guides his storm-tossed baroque over the sea, and so by *skill* one driver can beat another.”

The Iliad (23.301-348).

Economic pundits say small-time middlemen are toast in a high-tech economy. But they haven’t met Jerry “the Seal Man” Whitlock, who buys and sells more than \$1 million a year of seals and gaskets world-wide, mostly over the Internet from a spare bedroom in his house.

Petzinger, Thomas. “A New Model for the Nature of Business: It’s Alive!”. *Wall Street Journal* February 26, 1999, B1.

Your first hire should be a good administrative assistant who can run the office and set up your systems—both hi-tech and lo-tech.

Gary Keller, *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* (Austin, TX: Relleck Pub., 2003).

IV. TECHNOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES FOR YOUR INNER-GEEK

Gadgets

Smart Phone

What: A cross between a Palm Pilot and a cell phone
 Geek-level: 2
 How Much: \$500 plus extra service costs
 Why: Take your leads anywhere. Add an advanced calculator. Snap pictures of property and send them. Look up listings on the web from anywhere.

Examples: www.palmone.com, www.kyocera.com

Tablet PC

What: A laptop computer you can write on—an electronic clipboard
 Geek-level: 2
 How Much: \$2000
 Why: Carry your computer with you, show photos and data to clients, have clients sign forms electronically

Examples: Toshiba Protege

Getting (Un)Wired

High-speed internet

What: A big pipe to connect to the rest of the world
 Geek-level: 1
 How Much: \$40/month and up
 Why: Almost an essential for doing business
 Examples: Internet Cable, DSL

WiFi

What: A way to connect computers, printers and more without wires
 Geek-level: 1 to use; 3 to setup
 How Much: \$100 + \$50/computer to setup, \$0 to use
 Why: Easy to use, use your laptop in the office
 Examples: DLink, Linksys, Netgear

Bluetooth

What: Short-range wireless connection between devices
 Geek-level: 1 to use; 3 to setup
 How Much: varies
 Why: Limited now—could be more in the future. Imagine being able to “beam” an electronic brochure to a potential buyer as they drive by a property.
 Examples: Wireless Cell Phone Headsets

Your Toolbox

Message on Hold

What: An pre-recorded message to play while people are on hold
 Geek-level: 1
 How Much: \$100 +
 Why: You’re always selling
 Examples: Brightwater Digital Studios

Contact Management

What: An specialized database to keep track of leads and contacts, appts, etc.
 Geek-level: 1
 How Much: \$200 to \$500
 Why: Save time pushing paper, use automatic reminders, keep track of more details
 Examples: Top Producer, Act!

Spreadsheet (Probably Microsoft Excel)

What: a tool for analysis
 Geek-level: 2
 How Much: \$300 or less
 Why: You need to be able to measure your progress against your goals

Examples: Leads Generated
 Listings
 Contracts Written
 Contracts Closed
 Money
 People Systems/Tools
 Personal Education

Universal Documents (Probably PDF)

What: A way to reproduce documents electronically for anyone to view and print
 Geek-level: 1 to use, more to program
 How Much: \$100 and up
 Why: Package documents to send to clients electronically; Send electronic newsletters that look like the printed version
 Examples: www.adobe.com, www.scansoft.com

For example:
 Source of contact (ad, referral, open house, etc.)
 Referral’s name
 Date referred
 Contact’s name, address, phone, fax, email
 Contact’s employer and work phone
 Contact’s job title
 Contact’s start date of employment
 Contact’s date of birth
 Spouse’s name
 Spouse’s employer and work phone
 Spouse’s job title
 Spouse’s date of birth
 Spouse’s start date of employment
 Anniversary date
 Children(s) names
 Children(s) date of birth
 Recreation, hobbies, interests
 Desired move date
 Date began house hunting
 Owns or rents
 Desired property features
 Desired property price range
 Working with another agent (Yes/No)
 Name of the agent they’re working with
 Name of the lender they’re working with
 Lender’s address, phone, fax, email
 Has met with lender (Yes/No)
 Plans to do a FSBO (Yes/No)
 Able to offer seller financing (Yes/No)
 Seen houses they like (Yes/No)
 Available down payment (\$)
 Maximum monthly payment
 Contact history (conversations, mailings)

Electronic Forms

What: A way to make forms electronic
 Geek-level: 1 to use, 2 to setup
 How Much: \$200 to \$500
 Why: Do away with paper forms. Data info from clients electronically, then enter it into your contact system.
 Examples: www.scansoft.com (OmniForm)

Page Layout

What: a tool for laying out pages, like newsletters, flyers, etc.
 Geek-level: 2
 How Much: \$100 to \$600
 Why: Create professional looking newsletters. Create flyers and brochures.
 Examples: Microsoft Publisher (easy), Adobe InDesign (more advanced).

Email

What: A cost-effective way to communicate to groups and individuals
 Geek-level: 1 to use, 3 + to setup
 How Much: \$0 and up
 Why: An expected method of communication today
 Examples: scads

Instant Messaging

What: A way to send messages in real-time—like chatting, but different
 Geek-level: 1
 How Much: \$0 and up
 Why: Send quick messages between office staff and other key players, even when they're out of the office.
 Examples: Yahoo Instant Messenger, MSN Instant Messenger, AOL Instant Messenger

Electronic Calendars & Scheduling

What: A way to make and share schedules and appts electronic
 Geek-level: 1 to 2
 How Much: You probably already have it
 Why: Save time setting schedules. Get automatic reminders
 Examples: Act!, Microsoft Outlook

Universal Inbox

What: One "Inbox" that holds email, voice mail, faxes
 Geek-level: 1 to use, 4+ to setup
 How Much: can be expensive
 Why: Coordinate all your communication in a single place
 Examples: Talk to your phone vendor

GIS—Database Nation Cover

What: Geographic Information Systems
 Geek-level: 1 to use, 4+ to setup
 How Much: varies
 Why: Research areas with additional information. Provide maps and more for listings.
 Examples: <http://www.castleconsulting.com/95anintr.html>
http://www.esri.com/industries/real_estate/

Leverage from the Internet**Search Tools**

What: Ways to find things on the wild and woolly Internet
 Geek-level: 1
 How Much: \$0 and up
 Why: Find things more easily. Get answers fast
 Examples: Google.com, Copernic.com

Web Sites

What: A way to give and get information online
 Geek-level: 2 to 4
 How Much: \$30/month for service; \$100 + for software
 Why: People expect a presence on the Internet. Give information quickly
 Examples: Scads of web hosting companies, your own company, Microsoft FrontPage

News Groups

What: Online discussion groups for just about everything
 Geek-level: 1
 How Much: \$0 and up
 Why: Because people out there have answers
 Examples: <http://lists.topica.com>, Google.com groups

Presentations (Usually Microsoft PowerPoint)

What: A way to put presentations on the web
 Geek-level: 2
 How Much: \$300 for PowerPoint
 Why: Give students, clients more content on the web
 Examples: see SHKaminski.com

Webinars

What: Ways to show a computer screen to several people over the Internet and conduct a virtual training session
 Geek-level: 2
 How Much: varies
 Why: Bring people together who are not in the same place
 Examples: Webex.com

Online Classrooms

What: Complete online education systems
 Geek-level: 1 to use, 2 to setup
 How Much: varies
 Why: Deliver your product to more customers
 Examples: Blackboard.com, <http://www.elearners.com/course/26395.htm>
www.SHKaminski.com

VOIP

What: Voice over IP (Internet Protocol)--make regular phone calls over the Internet
 Geek-level: 1 to use
 How Much: Less than regular long distance if not \$0
 Why: Cheap long distance
 Examples: Vonage, Skype

VPN

What: Take the Internet, a very public network, add access rights and encryption to keep out bad people, and you have a Virtual Private Network.

Geek-level: 1 to use, 3+ to setup

How Much: varies, can be cheap

Why: Expand your office or classroom beyond your walls

Examples: GoToMyPC.com, Citrix, Your own system

Virtual organizations

What: An entire organization that works together without being in the same place

Geek-level: 1 to use, 4+ to setup

How Much: varies

Why: Get the best talent even if they aren't in your neighborhood

Examples: The Seal Man

RETS

What: The Real Estate Transaction Standard (RETS) is the open standard for exchanging real estate transaction information.

Geek-level: 1 to use, 4+ to setup

How Much: nothing, once it arrives

Why: A Rosetta Stone to share Real Estate Information

Example: From a computer programmer who works with real estate companies:

Currently my hometown has been getting a huge influx of people moving to our small community from the expensive big city. Our local Realtors are trying to capture these prospective clients as they move in, and one way they are doing this is by highlighting the properties they are selling through their website. However most of their websites are static and could use some updating, but they, like many others, are too busy with business to worry about website updates. They need to have their home and property listings pulled to the web automatically to save time and money.

This is where RETS can help.

Realtors who understand RETS love the idea, but many have not heard of it or what it can mean for them. Most of the time they input their property information on the MLS server and will continue to update this information through the sale of the house. Although, many times the Realtor will list the same property on their own website, but it will usually go unchanged for months and may even remain on their own site after it has been sold, only to cause confusion by potential buyers. RETS can alleviate the double input. Once the Realtor has added or updated their property information on the MLS server, their website can be updated without having to lift a finger, and it can all be done through PHP and a good database.

More Info:

<http://xml.coverpages.org/rets.html>

<http://www.rets-wg.org>.

