

Acronym Soup

By Linda Parker Horowitz

In the late '60s, I saw the revolutionary musical, "Hair," on Broadway. Aside from the title song, one other song's lyrics stayed with me and have become more relevant than ever, now that I am working in the telecomm industry. "LBJ took the IRT down to 4th Street, U.S.A. When he got there what did he see? The youth of American on L.S.D..."

I recently began working with Tyfone, the developer of an innovative hardware and software platform for financial institutions that enables them to provide bank-branded mobile services. Mobile banking is truly the convergence of many technologies, and I needed an entire tutorial just to explain the acronyms, most of which were never defined in the popular or trade press I was reading. I began with querying Prabhaka Tadepalli, Tyfone's Managing Director in India and one of the visionary founders. I knew I sounded stupid, but I had to ask. "What does RFID actually stand for?" I innocently queried. "I can't seem to find a definition anywhere." He stumbled a bit, "ahhhhh, I think it is Radio Frequency ID, but we just all know the terms and use them without a definition." Yea, I know. I've already painfully discovered this fact. His vision didn't help my clarity in an entirely new industry for this techno-dummy.

Figuring that someone with four acronyms in his credentials and title might be able to help me out of my acronym ignorance, I asked Siva Narendra, Tyfone's Chief Technology Officer (CTO that's 1) who has a PhD (2) in electrical engineering (EEng number 3) from MIT (4, finally). "What do SIM, SMS, WAP, NFC, SDS, CDMA, TDMA, and GSM stand for, Siva?" I sheepishly inquired. An hour and a half later, I not only had those definitions but knew the history of the cellular industry. I am currently working on a glossary of terms to be posted on our website. Since it is a high tech company, tech meaning technology of course, not the theatrical type, the deck is huge and after typing it a while, my eyeballs being to look like those squirrely, goofy ones that wiggle and I stop.

I began my banking career at First Interstate Bank, known both to those of us who worked there *and* the market as F.I.B. The entire name was certainly a mouthful and time-consuming, unlike other banks like Citi and Wells, we couldn't just shorten it to "First" since so many financial institutions begin with "first." And eliminating the periods in between the letter didn't work, either, particularly since consumers would not buy from a bank that fibs.

When I began working in the mortgage industry, the acronyms there were overwhelming as well, but again, everyone seemed to know and love them, using them with great frequency in all forms of communication. DTI, LTV, FICO, HCL, HELOC, and that's just a start. I guess I wasn't the only person joining the company that needed help keeping track of the acronyms; the training manual not only had one for general industry acronyms but also an entire list unique to that mortgage bank!

The printing industry standard, Pantone Matching System or PMS, usually brings up at least a snigger when mentioned in front of any uninitiated, non-marketing male, generally.

The accounting industry's acronyms, GAAP and FASB, create visions of heavy tomes filled with detailed rules and regulations, which in turn cause me to have horrid flashbacks (not the LSD-sort) of my first semester of business school. I swore that during my REM (not the rock band)

sleep, all of the accounting information I'd just spent 3 hours studying, somehow oozed out of my ears and was absent the next morning. That's when I started to c-r-y.

One of the most famous corporate acronyms, IBM, needs no explanation, though every time we passed their building, my cousin Nancy giggled uncontrollably, something she didn't grow out of until she turned 12 and now that I have a husband and sons, well, I'm doomed to potty humor for life.

Beware of those acronyms that when pronounced aloud, inadvertently create inappropriate or even swear words. I won't follow that path, except to note that one of our most-often used English swear words is supposed to have derived from an acronym.

Worse, though not generally known as an acronym SPAM, in reality *is* one. SPAM is the acronym for Sex Pornography and Marketing in case you didn't know, and I am deeply offended that my esteemed professional career is regarded in the same sphere or certainly within the same acronym, as pornography. Once, a SPAM blocker continually rejected a cover letter I was attempting to send to a company with my resume. Not content to be defeated, I sent it over and over again, and over and over again it was rejected. I finally figured it out. I graduated from Brandeis University *magna* (bad word) *laude*.

I live in California. Names of freeways are simply shortened to one number with odd grammatical syntax which took me a while to figure out. Since I'd grown up using Interstate 75, it seemed an unusual figure of speech when I heard everyone around me referring to freeways as "the 5" or "the 101," well-known interstate highways. What's up with that? I finally got it -- just delete the word, "freeway" when referencing an interstate. Always an innovator, California has its own type of acronym.

Lest we seem unpatriotic, there's USA, US for short, but none for our neighbors, Mexico and Canada. Humm...interesting to ponder, eh?

In medicine there are many, many acronyms. Common ones include MD, ENT, UTI, OB/GYN. I learned more when I was attempting to conceive my second son. In the infertility world there's IVF (in vitro fertilization), now known generally. However, from experience I know about ICSI (intracytological sperm injection – well worth an acronym) and ZIFT, zygote intrafallopian transfer. Then of course, there's the famous DNA and its sibling, RNA, both demanding acronyms.

Now that I think about it, I'm happy I'm in telecomm.