



There is remarkable satisfaction to be taken from technology gone right. Just like the little girl with the curl right in the middle of her forehead, when technology is good, it's very, very good. We see innovation, convenience, ease of use, customer recognition, competitive advantage, revenue enhancement and positive impact to the bottom line. There's just no reason not to love a good technical product or service.

But there is, as always, the other hand. I suspect that there isn't a vendor out there who hasn't at some time or other had to go hat in hand to explain a shortcoming of some sort. It could be a piece of plug-and-play hardware that did neither, or a software project lost in a hazy maze of complication. That latter possibility shouldn't surprise anyone since I've mentioned it myself one or two thousand times before in this very magazine alone. Software project failures can be judged by either objective standards (e.g., budget adherence, timely delivery and specification compliance) or purely subjective ones ("this sorta sucks"). By every measure more than half will fail, and that figure runs much closer to 75 percent to 80 percent depending on how restrictive your standards are. A sadder footnote to all those sobering numbers is that the larger the project, the more likely the failure. What's more, the earlier you assess your budget, delivery date and scope of work, for instance, before you actually begin the project, the more wildly wrong you are going to be. For some interesting statistical views on this subject, go to www.it-cortex.com/Stat_Failure_Rate.htm, whom I wish to cite and thank for much of this depressing content. Such overwhelming failure rates lead us to the tragic realization that statistically, someday an explanation and apology will be due.

It's safe to say that being wrong and having the need to apologize join death and taxes in the ranks of inescapable human experiences. As such, you would expect that some entrepreneurial free spirit would figure out a way to cash in on it, and, at

long last, one has. A Brazilian underwear manufacturer recently launched an advertising campaign which suggested that when a loving wife has bad news to break to her husband, she should do it dressed only in her underwear and high heels. The example they used was a wife who had run her credit card over its limit and therefore had, in the grand tradition of *I Love Lucy*, some 'splainin' to do. Apparently the theory here is that no financial disappointment is so great that it can't be mitigated by an attention-grabbing outfit. And clearly

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Brazilians are no strangers to high fashion – remember, these are the same fine folks who gave us platform sandals and fresh fruit turbans.

As you might have guessed, this particular set of advertisements unleashed an international firestorm of feminist backlash. The complaints of sexism weren't unjustified – the idea that a wife would have to defend expenditures to her husband as her superior does have an awkward, throwback-to-the-fifties feel to it. Beyond that, you can't blame women for being angered at the suggestion that a financial transaction is more easily explained and readily rectified if a woman discusses it while dressed as a pole dancer. Come on, Brazilian underwear makers! I understand you have a vested interest in the outcome but you can't be serious.

OK, now that I've put that industry in its place, I still can't help but wonder if the feminist movement brushed right by the more interesting social possibility that this situation presented. If we all had to strip down to our apology outfits during times of

disappointment, we could eliminate the charges of sexism and might even see a number of other benefits. (We may have to give the men a pass on the high heels but I think that under the concept of equal access, we could arguably substitute hiking or cowboy boots.) Stealing a page from the Disney playbook, Mary Poppins once tunefully observed that a spoonful of sugar isn't such an unpleasant additive to an unhappy situation. Sure, bad news is always bad news, but maybe bad news delivered in your Brazilians isn't quite as bad.

What other advantages might there be? One thing for sure, vendor meetings of the future will be a vastly different experience. Another decided benefit is that there would be no more blindsiding, no option for the timid to drag their stylishly shod feet. You would literally see the bad news bearers coming at you. In other walks of life, you would never again have to be surprised at the answer to a question such as, has the jury reached a verdict? You're pretty much down with news when they are.

We could bank on an inevitable renaissance of reinvestment in personal grooming if we all knew that PDU (public display of underwear) was a mandatory event. Count on an upswing in

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smarter eating and regular trips to the gym because nothing says let's rethink our health and appearance like having to take down your pants when you have to make your point.

Also, let's not forget that an I'm so sorry foundation garment industry could be a tremendous boon for an economically troubled and increasingly pessimistic world. And I don't see why Brazil should be the only country to capitalize on this; we need to bring apology underwear to American manufacturers where it really belongs. In this election year, citizen patriots need to hang in there (if you'll pardon the expression) and demand affordable American briefs for profound American screw-ups. Let it be in red and white when we have to be blue.

Although we may not be able to improve our odds of success in technology ventures, we can certainly change the world when it comes to admitting our failures. Forgiveness can't be far behind when you do your 'splainin' with just the right blend of high fashion and ritual humiliation. Years ago, a memorable mid-century advertising slogan became a classic: if I only have one life, let me live it as a blonde! Tomorrow's equivalent might well become if we really messed up, let's show them our Ameri-Cans! Bad news delivery will never be the same.

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