Case Study: Simplifying Technical Jargon to Build Understanding

Introduction and Context:

When technical founders fail to simplify complex problems and solutions for non-technical stakeholders, they threaten the success of their venture.

Professionals outside of a technical discipline need to clearly understand the nature of your solution, but more importantly, the "why" of your solution, as well as the problem that it solves. It is critically important to "decode" your technology and solution, so people like investors and business partners, industry reporters, vendors, and potential new team members can appreciate your goals, objectives, mission, and values. Using jargon and complex, technical terms which are foreign to a lay person leaves everyone frustrated.

How do you know that you have a problem? What are the signs?

- You find it difficult to explain complex technical concepts with simple relatable terms.
- You struggle to articulate the benefits of your solution rather than the features and problems solved.
- You find yourself using technical terms as a crutch because it makes you feel comfortable.
- Your audience gets detached, fidgety, and distracted by devices during presentations.
- There is an absence of questions and engagement during Q&A sessions when you speak with non-technical stakeholders.

Here is a case situation based on my personal experience.

Case Problem:

I was working for a well-established and profitable tech company as a Business Development leader. We had been accustomed to building our business based on word-of-mouth and inbound strategy, rather than deliberate outbound communications. The company had been working in several industrial verticals with highly-specialized metrology products – products which allowed the end-user a high degree of precision and accuracy to track the position and orientation of a sensor-enabled device. Notably, the company had recently made a strategic decision to focus on the MedTech and medical device markets.

In my position as a Business Development leader, I was well-versed in the clinical space due to my lengthy experience in the medical device world, but I was not an engineer by training, and as such, I needed to learn about the underlying technology, but more importantly, I needed to become "Chief Evangelist" for the technology in discussions with new contacts and potential partners, not all of whom had a technical background. These people were located in universities, incubators/accelerators, start-up companies, and established medical device strategics.

I needed to develop a consistent talk-track that simplified a complex product and solution, making it readily understandable to laypeople and potential partners who did not have a technical background, because as we know, business opportunities require people in legal, marketing, sales, purchasing, and HR who don't have technical training, but need to be able to communicate a consistent message.

Producing a simplified explanation of this complex technology could be used:

- By Marketing to build product support materials and selling collateral.
- By HR to explain the basic nature of our technology and value proposition to potential hires in initial exploratory interviews.
- By Product Management and Marketing in focus groups with clinical partners.
- By Leadership in discussions with the media, with investors deploying capital, and with local government officials and business groups to build understanding and awareness.
- By Sales teams attending conferences or having 1:1 client discussions where time is scarce, and your message must be easily and effectively communicated.
- By Corporate trainers who were trying to level-set understanding, regardless of position.

Impact and Implications of Problem Left Unsolved:

Without a clear communication strategy, lacking jargon and overly complex terms:

- We would continue to lack compelling, widely accessible marketing resources.
- New hires would not appreciate the significant value and impact of the product and solutions on end-users.
- Clinical partners, with limited availability and time, would burn a great deal of time building a basic understanding before they could comment on clinical application.
- Leadership would lack a compelling and easily understandable story to excite partners in the local ecosystem.

- Lead generation would falter and be inconsistent for the Sales team, leading to mediocre results and an inability to reach the business' true potential.

Example Problem and Solution:

Here is a technical description of the product which I was using, drawing a lot of blank stares from non-technical people:

"We make an electromagnetic metrology device which is highly customizable and consists of a field generator, control module, interface platform, and sensors. The sensors can be either 5DoF or 6DoF, and they are ideal for integration. Line of sight is not required, making it very versatile in specific environments, although there is a risk of inaccuracy with ferrous material interference. It can be registered against typical DI modalities. It has a low latency, which should provide confidence to the end-user regarding its tracking capabilities. It also allows you to choose a measurement volume represented as a dome or cube."

Wow. I was doing a lousy job of explaining a fantastic product that could save lives.

This description was likely understandable to an engineer, but if you are a CPA, it sounds like Ancient Greek. And…there is no mention of the MedTech market, potential valuable applications, and why we should care.

Let's de-construct this line-by-line:

"We make an electromagnetic metrology device which is highly customizable and consists of a field generator, control module, interface platform, and sensors."

How about this:

We make a product which is like GPS for a medical device. It provides the surgeon with the ability to monitor where a device is located inside the body by matching system data with previous diagnostic imaging studies like CT and ultrasound. This allows them to move quickly and confidently to their treatment area by watching a screen in the Operating Room in real-time.

Ok, now this:

“The sensors can be either 5DoF or 6DoF, and they are ideal for integration.”

Yuck. DoF = degrees of freedom. Your HR Manager doesn’t care and is now confused.

How about:

Sensors are very small, and they can be embedded into the tip of a medical device. Depending on the specific need, they can be designed and built to a customized degree of measurement precision and accuracy.

“Line of sight is not required, making it very versatile in specific environments, although there is risk of inaccuracy with ferrous material interference.”

Oh boy. So much to tackle.

How about:

The system generates an electromagnetic field around the patient, and it locates the sensor in the tip of the medical device within this field. Imagine dropping a pebble into a pond and watching the ripples move outward from where the stone entered. Our system detects the ripples.

An operating room can be crowded with a lot of people and equipment. Luckily, our system doesn’t care if people get between the generator and the patient, but since it’s an electromagnetic system, having a lot of other metal equipment can create issues with our measurements because the iron in items like beds, microscopes, and cabinetry creates interference and errors.

Ok – now:

“It can be registered against typical DI modalities.”

Easy. We’ve already covered this.

How about:

We can match the data that our system creates with diagnostic imaging studies like CT and ultrasound, allowing the clinician to use these studies as a roadmap and to “drive” to the location which needs treatment. The treatment can occur faster, and it increases overall safety.

Lastly:

“It has a low latency and high frequency which should provide confidence to the end-user. It also allows you to choose a measurement volume represented as a dome or cube.”

Let’s bring this home:

How about:

Our system takes many measurements within a given amount of time, and the unit quickly re-interprets where the sensor in the medical device is located within a field, whose shape and size can be chosen to fit the procedural need.

Payoff:

Here is the final product:

“We make a product which is like GPS for a medical device. It provides the surgeon with the ability to monitor where a device is located inside the body by matching system data with previous diagnostic imaging studies like CT and ultrasound. This allows them to move quickly and confidently to their treatment area. The treatment can occur faster, and it increases overall safety for the patient.

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The system generates an electromagnetic field around the patient, and it locates the sensor in the tip of the medical device within this field. Imagine dropping a pebble into a pond and watching the ripples move outward from where the stone entered. Our system detects the ripples.

An operating room can be crowded with a lot of people and equipment. Luckily, our system doesn’t care if people get between the generator and the patient, but since it’s an electromagnetic system, having a lot of other metal equipment can create issues with our measurements because the iron in items like beds, microscopes, and cabinetry creates interference and errors.

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While this explanation has a higher wordcount than my original jargon-filled and complex paragraph, it doesn't matter - it is highly readable and relatable to non-technical people.

If you can explain complex topics to non-technical people, then you give them the opportunity to spread this information and drive word-of-mouth advocacy to other potential partners.

As Richard Feynman noted, try to relate a difficult concept in such a way that a 12-year-old can understand.... or a CPA 😊

I would love to learn more about the problems that you are trying to solve. If you want to speak, please DM my LinkedIn account, or email me at dgibson@gibsongrowthinsights.com