



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

Clay's Corner Talking Like an Old Hand



By Clay Freinwald

[July 2015] As times and technology change, common terms often change their meaning, and can create curious turns of phrase. Sometimes the younger guys and gals do not know exactly why they say certain things. Let us ask Clay for his definitions.

I thought it might be interesting to do a quick review of terms that you and I likely use on a regular basis that, nevertheless, may confuse many folks who are younger than we are.

So, here are some words often in daily use that actually do not refer to anything we see or use.

CLOCKWISE

Have you ever told someone to turn something “clockwise” and had them ask “what does that mean?”

Boy, do I love this one. In this day of digital clocks and timestamps on computers and tablets, I still find it amazing that we have so many who cannot tell time with an analog clock – or even have any idea of which way the “hands” on a clock rotate. To them, the term “clockwise” or “counter-clockwise” is meaningless.

The question is now what to use to describe the direction of rotation? Righty and Lefty?

METER HANDS

Recently I encountered a person who referred to a meter as a device with a “hand.”

This person was trying to determine which number the “hand” was pointing towards. Apparently he had never heard the term: “needle.”

REWIND

Why do we say "rewind" for a do-over?

This is a reference to the days of tape recorders. Rewind was a universal term for do-over, or re-record on a segment of tape.

ON TAPE

By the way, why do recording processes still have to be called “tape?”

We finally got over having “film at 11.” Or explaining that something was “filmed.” But then we got hung up with the term “tape.” Just re-

cently I saw some video on a TV newscast that came from some homeowners security camera. Yep, according to the talking head, it was something caught on “tape.”

I almost could visualize someone with a Vidicon camera connected to a consumer grade VHS recorder. But, stations and even TV Networks, are having trouble letting go of the term “tape.” They cannot seem to bring themselves to say “recorded or saved on our server.”

The reliance on old terminology gets worse. Just recently I was viewing a TV channel where they were playing a previously recorded bit of audio and – you guessed it – there was the video loop of an old 10 inch reel-to-reel. One supposes it was a bit more exciting than watching a flash drive lay there.

DIALING AROUND

Here is one that works in several settings: When was the last time you had to “dial a number” on a phone?

Perhaps the term will remain but many will never know why we use that term.

Sadly, in the cell phone age, many have forgotten – or never have seen – phone “dials.” Of course it was not really all that long ago when phones had dials (those round things you put your fingers in and rotated according to the numbers you desired). For many years we used the term “Rotary Dial” but that is now pretty much passé.

Also, how about the last time you saw a “radio dial?”

The digital age replaced the long-used circular (or later, linear) radio dials with the numeric readouts of which we are so familiar. The current generation is mystified when they see classic radios in old movies and television shows.

TURN IT ON

Some may ask why do we “turn” a device on or off, even as we push the power button.

That is because, for a very long time, devices like radios, TV’s, phonographs, etc. were started and stopped with a rotary action switch. And the word “turn” endures.

BROKEN RECORD

There is a phrase you may hear, during conversation, suggesting that something “sounds like a broken record.”

Since anyone who recalls vinyl records knows that a broken record is completely unusable, what could this mean?

Just recall those days when radio stations played “phonograph records.” If so, you may remember hearing a radio station playing one of them when the needle got stuck.

The result usually was the same phrase being repeated over and over for seconds, minutes – or longer, until the DJ realized what was happening.



Interestingly, there are many stories about the strange phrases that were repeated by the stuck needle. Some are even true.

More recently, with newer technology, the stuck or skipping record was replaced by radio stations playing something that sounded like C-DDDDDDDDDDDD.

“GIVE ME A RING”

Are you young enough to wonder what it means to say a phone or alarm clock “rings?” Or why they call it a “ring-tone?”

If so, I will bet you are among those who do not know all telephones had “ringers” in them that were actual “bells” which were electrically activated. Alarm Clocks also had bells, until they were “electronic-ified” and gained buzzers and chimes.

Today, of course, our smart-phones come with a number of “ring-tones,” some of which may even sound like the bells of old.

Why do cashiers “ring up” a purchase? That is because cash registers also used to have little bells in them when the cash drawer opened up. Now registers scan bar codes and we can all enjoy the sound of beeps.

COPY TIME

Have you ever had to try and explain to someone what “cc” means on an email?

If so, and you realized the original term meant “carbon copy” to someone, did you have a piece of carbon paper to show them what that was?

Although some effort to modernize the term resulted in “courtesy copy,” most older folks still think and say “carbon copy.”

A WINDOW ROLL

Again, if you are old enough, you might remember the days before cars had power windows.

Those were the days when you would rotate the crank handle (clockwise or counter-clockwise!) on the door to “roll” the window up or down.

YMMV

While we are thinking in automotive terms, I sometimes wonder if Canadians still talk about their gas “mileage” as they drive kilometer after kilometer?

Meanwhile, have you ever stopped at a service area, even if you are traveling in vehicle with a diesel engine, to “gas it up,” right?

I suppose one could write a book about all these terms that are no longer more than the ghost of technology past.

Perhaps there is a favorite anachronistic term you like to use. Want to share it? Drop me a line and we can enjoy them together.

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