

# The family technical support department: Everything is Outlook

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We're all in the same position. Since we work with computers all day, everybody in the extended family considers us the technical support department. One thing you all need to take away from your role as family technical support department is that normal people view computers completely differently from the way you and I do. One of my relatives calls every program Outlook. "I'm on the Internet checking the weather report and then Outlook keeps displaying these windows with advertisements in them." "I'm having trouble listening to music on Outlook." "How do I get Outlook to play that card game you showed me last time?" "I tried to save my spreadsheet and Outlook gave me this weird error message." Why is every program called Outlook? At work, this particular relative received word that the computer systems were being upgraded. The old system was a dedicated CAD system, but the new computers were PCs running CAD software and Outlook. "Okay, I know what CAD software is. That's what I've been doing for the past five years on the old system. Therefore, by process of elimination, everything else on the computer must be Outlook." When they got a home computer a year later, it didn't come with any CAD software on it. It was all Outlook. (One of my colleagues is in a similar position: His relatives call everything on the computer *Microsoft X*. It could be *Microsoft Norton Utilities* or *Microsoft Quicken*. I wouldn't be surprised if they even said *Microsoft Google*.) My colleague [KC Lemson](#) is in the unfortunate position of being the "Outlook expert" in her family, despite having not worked on Outlook for six years. It turns out that there have been a lot of versions of Outlook released since then, so her specialized knowledge is pretty badly outdated. That doesn't stop them from trying, though.

She told me that she attended a family wedding some time ago, and heard from three separate people, "Oh, Alice [not her real name] has an Outlook question for you." The effect of this was perhaps not what those people expected, because KC spent the entire wedding trying to avoid Alice. KC explained, "If she'd just come up and asked the question herself, I probably would have been fine with it, but having such an early warning just scared me. Plus, *sniff sniff*, you want to be wanted for who you are and not what you know."

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