

# Claude Roeltgen

Everything you always wanted to know about  
Information Technology.

A look behind the scenes.

## IT's hidden face (FOREWORDS)



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ISBN 144-215-231-1

EAN-13 9781442152311



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## **Foreword by Dr. Andreas Resch**

Where can you experience something like this? On one hand, having an enormous impact on almost all areas of daily life, a strong pervasion of free time and the job—and on the other hand, fundamental misunderstandings about interdependencies, totally contradicting expectations and many misapprehensions. Information Technology offers this every day, again and again. The big things are present everywhere—in aerospace and navigation, at wars, and in hospital operating theatres. But it's also indispensable with the small things—music, TV, telephones, storing appointments, and writing letters. And at the same time, full of surprises, unexpected events, difficulties to evaluate costs, and timeframes.

When engineers began to build machines that were designed to abate the work from our brains, they bequeathed a special challenge to us: do we sufficiently understand the technology that processes the information, the material of understanding? As far as machines have taken over the movement of arms and legs, we could get an intuitive understanding of interdependencies. Of course, there remains a certain astonishment as to why heavy planes can remain in the air, but the basics of lift and the effect of engines are understandable. We basically understand motors, saws, and power stations. With IT, this is all still somewhat different. There, the predictable computer creates a quintessentially unpredictable world.

Books which contribute to a better understanding of IT should, in fact, be available en masse. I'm not talking about user guides that help reduce the number of application errors. I'm talking about the effort to develop a public understanding for the interdependencies in the background. At the very least, we should cultivate a rudimentary reliable intuition to support what IT can deliver, what preconditions must be fulfilled, and how a thing roughly works. But there is hardly any reading material about technology's inner life, from the engine room of IT, this foreign yet so proximal world.

This is what makes this book so precious. It elucidates many of the reasons why things are not as they were expected, why things still don't work the way they were announced. But it also explains how it can be better understood and, therefore, be better managed. The book builds bridges; it connects worlds and, therefore, prevents small incidents at the frontier between technology and applications, as well as hard confrontations between huge expectations and complex projects.

In other industrial sectors, the maturity level of technology and the penetration of application areas were linked closely together. The generator has made its way into every bicycle as a dynamo at the moment when technology was mature and didn't have any major surprises. Cars and washing machines have spread over the globe in the same way as their technology became mature and manageable. To some respect, this has happened differently in IT. Information Technology is, at the same time, a very young industry with permanently changing standards, unexpected innovation, and surprising mistakes. At the same time, it has already diversified very strongly and has nested in the most diverse areas of life. It is very immature and, at the same time, very widespread. A problematic mix.

Claude Roeltgen has made an important contribution about how the disparities can be managed better. The one who has read his book will be wondering much less, will understand more and judge better, will be better prepared, and will be able to react in a wiser way. The one who has read his book will be less a fascinated victim of technology and more an up-to-date epicure of technology, which is supposed to be a favor to our brains.

***Mike O'Dell***

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## **Foreword by Mike O'Dell**

As a CIO (Chief Information Officer) with years of experience as a business manager, I'm in the unique position to personally understand the vicious cycle caused by technology and the business not understanding each other. Claude Roeltgen tells us why we find ourselves in this cycle, and notes that the stakes are high—IT projects can often be over budget or time, and/or haven't solved the actual problems they were trying to address.

When I was a plant engineer, and later an operational manager, I experienced the frustration of technology being implemented for technology's sake. Technologists didn't understand the negative impact their decisions were having on the business. Conversely, some on the business side didn't understand how one little change requested by the business could affect the entire IT ecosystem.

While it's generally accepted that IT professionals need to understand the business they're serving, Claude Roeltgen tells us that, in order to together create relevant solutions, it's now time for the reverse to be true.

To end the cycle of business demanding too much too soon, which results in poor-quality IT solutions and/or failed projects that cost "too much" and take "too long", IT needs to learn to educate the business about what's truly involved in any IT solution. Too often, the

business's expectations have been set by “plug-n-play” product marketing, while the reality of implementation, maintenance and support processes tell a different story.

Conversely, IT departments by and large are interested in technology, not business. But at Pacific Coast Building Products (PCBP), our number one rule in IT is “Never forget; we are in the Building Materials Business”. We use technology as a tool to help the business. We never use it “just because we can”. And while educating business people about IT is a worthy goal, we've gone even further by pulling business people into IT roles.

As Claude tells us, because life in an IT department is about solving problems quickly, communication and quality often suffer. At PCBP, we follow his advice by concentrating on the communication piece. For instance, rather than working with the business, then going away to solve the problem in isolation, only to discover three months later that the implemented solution isn't what the business wanted, we shorten the cycle and bridge communication by: working with the business, creating a rough working model, then gathering feedback from the business in this early stage.

This communication process breaks the problem down into nibbles. As Claude postulates, fixing the communication can assuage the quality and time issues. Because over time, the new cycle of learning about each other becomes pervasive, shortening future project times.

This all starts with IT educating the business about what IT does, as well as understanding the business. If you are a business manager who needs to work successfully with IT, or if you are an IT professional who needs to be able to explain why something can indeed be installed in 10 minutes but that success demands many more steps before and after that, this book is for you.



***Jean-Claude Juncker***  
*Prime Minister of Luxembourg*

## **Appendix 2 - Foreword by Jean-Claude Juncker (German edition)**

Plug it in, switch it on, and then it has to work! The email comes in, the webpage builds up, and the printer prints. I don't see myself being a particularly demanding computer user. But it cannot be excluded that especially those ones are a mere nightmare.

I confess: I still feel more comfortable when writing is accompanied by the scraping of a pen and not the rattle of a keyboard. As a Prime Minister, you also enjoy some privileges. So I am sufficiently being taken care of so I don't have to wait for a free line at the "Helpdesk."

Nonetheless, there is no escaping.

Be it as Head of Administration or as an economics politician, be it about tax reform or the settling of new enterprises, after 30 minutes (and often earlier), every discussion comes to the unavoidable subject of Information Technology.

And when the legal objection against a planned reform can be overcome with a "then we just change the law," one often feels at the mercy of the computer experts. For the rest, the fact that, to all appearances, they speak a different language is also of no help.

So, there is no escaping: interface, public key infrastructure, data warehouse, convergence, updates and migrations, IP-telephony, and Internet-backbones are just a few of the new terms not even the Prime Minister can elude.

This a fortiori as the Luxembourg government wants more than just incur the entrance to the knowledge society or simply accompany it.

We are strongly determined—true to the longstanding experiences of our country in the radio and satellite business—to ease, accelerate, and systematically encourage the introduction of new technologies, new services, and new business models.

As the last 40 years have shown, Luxembourg is an ideal location in order to approach the European market, due to its central position in Europe, its economic openness, and its linguistic and cultural diversity, accompanied by a stable, serious, and competitive legal framework. Certainly, there is no other domain more attractive for a European portal than for electronic trade and electronic services.

The government is strongly determined to make Luxembourg one of the best epicenters of information and telecommunication technologies in Europe and in the world. Some big names in e-commerce have already made their way to Luxembourg and have positioned themselves strongly with finances and operations in the Grand-Duchy. Others even have their origin here. Therefore, in the future, we will continue to invest in infrastructure, made out of steel or fiber optics. Therefore, we will continue to pursue a modern and appropriate legal framework. And therefore, we will continue to react quickly and flexibly to new situations. Due to this, Luxembourg will continue to attract more and more IT experts. Their language will, nevertheless, remain strange to many people, and the problem of “It will take one year” or “It will cost one million” will continue to generate frustration.

With his book, Claude Roeltgen has succeeded in depicting the IT world in understandable words—both for non-IT experts and those for whom IT is their daily business. Hence, he has chosen possibly the most intelligent form of courting for understanding: to help laymen understand better.

As he succeeds in doing this also in an amusing way, his book is much more than only a compulsory reading for concerned persons.