



“Ouch!” How to avoid ‘Cold Buttons’

Grant Pearson Brown
Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation &
Business Development
Specialists

Advice *squeezed*
straight from the
experts



Welcome to our
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In this edition:

“Ouch!” How to avoid ‘Cold Buttons’, by Tim Farish

Ever been bored silly during a presentation with excessive statistics and cliché phrases? Tim Farish provides some top tips on how to avoid these and other ‘Cold Buttons’ and keep the audience interested.

You say ‘Smorgasbord’, I say ‘What?’, by Carl Schreiter

A guide for Brits and Non-Brits. Carl Schreiter, a Swede, gives advice on how to communicate effectively with people from around the world.

Make the big bits stand out, by Ewan Pearson

Ewan Pearson explains how to add colour, passion and interest to give genuine emphasis to your presentations and make the important bits stand out.

Drilling to Projection, by Alastair Grant

Atten-TION! Alastair Grant explains the importance of voice projection in capturing attention and persuading your audience. Now stand at ease.

Tim Farish

The effect of a cold button is simple. It's when you notice the eyes of your marketing director start to roll upwards in disbelief. It's when you notice the nose of your finance manager scrunch up in disgust or the head of a cherished client drop in boredom. It's when you notice the key buyer on an important pitch reach for her blackberry or when you notice that nobody is actually looking at you. Get the idea?

Cold buttons are the things that an audience does not want to see or hear. They are the complete opposite of ‘hot buttons’ which are the things that an audience is *really* interested in. At GPB we remind our clients to bear in mind that an audience typically ask themselves “*what's in it for me?*” when listening to a presenter. If you are unable to keep their interest then you are entering into the territory of the cold button.

The following is not an exhaustive guide to all the cold buttons that exist, but it is a good start. It is based on personal experience, of being on the receiving end of many a dull presentation. Please feel free to send in any personal favourites and we will add them to the list of horrors.



1. The history of the company

Most of the time your audience really don't care much about the history of your firm. They want to know whether you are able to deliver now rather than back in 1884 when your company was set up by Italian botanists who had a great idea about how to make the world's first shampoo-cum-dandruff treatment.

2. Jargon

Impenetrable jargon is an audience-killer. The number of 3 letter acronyms in business is astounding and growing at an alarming rate. For example, we have TQM, TOM, FAB and FOL all of which have the intention of making things simpler but can end up bamboozling and alienating your audience. We suggest you always check if an audience understand the use of acronyms before going on to use them so please think twice before creating your own. Another jargon sin is sector-specific language such a ‘legal-ese’ or ‘IT-geek-ese’ which is fine with like-minded individuals but fatal with a client who dislikes lawyers or doesn't care how a computer works.

3. Reading out bullet-point slides word-for-word

- If cold buttons could kill this would be the biggest mass murderer in the history of communication
- This is the equivalent of buying an audio book and listening to it at the same time as reading the original text
- Sheer madness and totally self-defeating
- Enough said.

4. Cliché phrases and visuals

The only time you can ‘walk someone through an idea’ is when you have designed a building, obstacle-course, new crystal maze or a tunnel. Not when you are trying to show an investor how much money you're going to make them. Other classics best avoided are ‘blue-sky thinking’, ‘out of the box’, and pictures of light-bulbs for inspiration.

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“Ouch!” How to avoid ‘Cold Buttons’ ...continued

Advice squeezed straight from the experts



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5. Phone ringing

Do you think favourably of someone whose mobile goes off and its ringtone pierces the air when they are trying to deliver the key message? We thought not. It's amazing how often this happens though.

6. Busy visuals

How inspired do you feel when you see a visual that looks like a wiring diagram from the world's first super-computer? We suggest that you keep it simple with no more than one main idea per slide. If you are able to scan the whole image quickly and then understand what the slide is about then it passes the test.

7. Lots of slides

There was a time when the quality of a presentation was judged by the sheer number of slides. Around this time most people didn't have email, John Major was still in power and new cars still came with tape decks. Quite simply, remember that less is more and that at roughly 2 minutes per slide you get an idea of how many you might need.

8. The standard sales spiel

Every organisation needs to keep its marketing collateral updated on a regular basis otherwise staleness creeps in. How often it makes revisions to the materials depends on the nature of its business but the first sure fire sign is a lack of enthusiasm and conviction from staff who are asked to present. The key to keeping things fresh is to challenge those materials and how they are delivered at least annually.

9. Excessive use of statistics & numbers

This is an absolute classic which is endemic in a lot of corporate slidedecks. How many pieces of data do people actually remember? Well, the fact is not many. Research has shown that most people can only remember a few key points. Our advice is again to keep things to a minimum. A good question to ask is "what are the most important figures that back up my argument?" By all means highlight these when delivering to the audience but pointing out every item is unnecessary. And annoying.

10. Knocking the competition

Tempting to do but shows a real lack of class and respect. Its better to show how you are different in an objective way using your clients' testimonials to make the points credible. If you haven't got any, now is the time to start collecting some! Better still, illustrate how you are different from the crowd, how what you do is special, or even unique. Support it with case studies and other evidence.

Please feel free to send in any examples of cold buttons here to us at GPB and we will aim to publish them on our website and in our next journal where we look at how to create 'hot buttons'. In the meantime, we hope you are able to stay as *warm* as possible during the summer months ahead!

You say 'Smorgasbord', I say 'What?'

Carl Schreiter

Last Sunday, while enjoying a lazy family breakfast, my youngest son suddenly gives me a contemplative look followed by the sort of question to which no parent has a logical answer. "Dad", he says. "How come we don't do Sunday roasts, like normal people?" This is twisted syllogistic reasoning at its best - merciless, frank and biased. The syllogism goes as follows:

People who don't do Sunday roasts are not normal.
We don't do Sunday roasts.
Therefore, we are not normal.

I responded (in Swedish) that although we live in England and are well integrated, law abiding, taxpaying residents of this country, when it comes to matters of the stomach, we prefer more refined gustatory delights - "à la française" or "svensk mat". My son proceeded to object, arguing that the English roast was a culinary experience in its own right on a par with gigot d'agneau or gravlax. My French wife intervened diplomatically (in French, very French indeed!) confessing to having enjoyed the odd "bon roast beef". My eldest son however got the final word, by proclaiming in a voice of universal neutrality, that in fact all nations had dishes they could be proud of. Following a collective pause, we unanimously agreed on an early dinner à la anglaise, where the roast, unchallenged, would take centre stage, in honour of the country we call home.

Cross-cultural exchange is hard work. For many it has become a lifelong project as a result of the world getting smaller, flights getting cheaper, and the guiding career principle of "I live wherever my work takes me". But while many people excel in tolerance, extol the virtues of foreign customs and traditions and attend accent reduction classes, cultures keep crashing and colliding. Even the best of intentions is no secure remedy for all matters cultural. The task is simply too complex, and misunderstandings are still too likely to interfere in order for cross-cultural endeavours to run smoothly.

At GPB we are fortunate to work with people from many different cultures and countries. Sometimes our weekly diary reveals that "foreign" clients actually outnumber native Brits. We don't claim to be intercultural communication experts, but armed with enough anecdotal evidence, combined with some knowledge gleaned from the works of those who command the highest respect in this field, we'd like to share a few thoughts with you. Our

advice is limited to the world of interpersonal communications, presentations and business development and is divided into advice and pointers for Brits and for 'non' Brits or, the British Isles vs. the rest of the world.

For Brits:

- Most 'non Brits' think of Brits as a chatty bunch that excel in the art of conversation, speedy replies, refined humour and the understatement. This is why you may find yourself being the centre of attention at networking events with foreign attendees. They listen to you in bewildered awe, while struggling to understand the true meaning of what you're saying. All this, while you're expecting someone to intervene either to match or to supersede your wit. Don't take offence if it doesn't happen. Their laughs probably hide a degree of insecurity and the mere thought of competing with the great raconteur is simply too daunting.
- Brits love their analogies, adages and idioms. These are great linguistic assets that speed up the transmission of meaning and make verbal exchanges intriguing and interesting. You're either "sober as judge" or "drunk as a lord" and if you're "cutting the mustard", you are on your way to success. Here's a simple rule of thumb: when in doubt, use plain language and avoid idiomatic parlance. I once coached a client who prepared a sales presentation for a French speaking audience. "Cutting the mustard" was a key, pivotal phrase.... "Couper la moutarde"? Pardon!? Not in the land of the great Dijon.
- English is now the unchallenged lingua franca of the world - a common possession with non-native speakers outnumbering those who speak English as a first language. Chances are, English will face the same destiny as Latin. Over time, variations and differences will be such that new languages will evolve, just like French, Italian and Spanish share Latin origins yet are distinctly different. As a native Brit you may come across expressions and idioms that either make no sense or are downright confusing. For instance, if a South African tells you he will do something "just now", what he really means is that he will do it in the near future - not straightaway. And in India, people may ask you

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You say 'Smorgasbord', I say 'What?' ...continued

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where you stay; keen to know where you live.
Rule of thumb: Humbly join in the great camaraderie of English-speaking peoples!

For non-Brits:

- "English is not my native language. I will never present in English as well as I do in my native language". Maybe, maybe not. Look at, or rather listen to, Henry Kissinger, Nelson Mandela and the late Benazir Bhutto. All non-native English speakers, all great orators. Have faith in your language skills; practice and develop your own style and remember that presentations and other forms of interpersonal communications are not all about language. Personality and rapport building are equally important. Many of our clients are non-native speakers; not only are they great communicators, they also speak pretty good English. To them English is a precious possession they have worked hard to acquire. No wonder they treat it with the respect it deserves.
- If you're from a country where high contextual communication is the norm (e.g. Italy and Spain), that is, a communication style where people jump from one idea to another and introduce a number of ideas simultaneously in one sentence, chances are your British audience will go cold. You will be perceived as chaotic and unstructured. Brits tend toward low contextual communication, preferring ideas and arguments to be presented in a structured step-by-step process. If, on the other hand, you are from Scandinavia, where low contextual communication reigns supreme, a British audience may find you overly structured, too compartmentalised, to the point of experiencing boredom. Rule of thumb: When presenting to Brits be structured but nimble and don't labour the point.

- In Britain most business meetings have an overture, called small talk. This is an unthreatening exchange of words exploring such topics as "My journey", "The weather" and self-deprecating rambling about the firm's inability to make proper coffee. This is how Brits "break the ice" and get comfortable with each other. Here controversial and contentious issues are to be avoided. However, feel free to voice your opinion unreservedly, should your host decide to touch on the subject of sport. A Chelsea supporter is free to have a good go at an Arsenal fan, and vice versa: "I suppose

relegation is always an option, ha, ha..."

People who have just met each other build rapport through small talk or cheeky commentary. Rule of thumb: Get used to the idea of talking about things you may not find very interesting, check the weather forecast and learn how to give a proper eye witness account from "Holborn Station, Tuesday morning, 7.35 am", or

join the cheering crowds at Emirate Stadium or Stamford Bridge. Not the cheapest of options.

There is an old Swedish saying which, roughly translated, goes like this: "If you want to know the truth, solicit the opinion of a drunkard or a child." That Sunday evening my youngest son gave my roast and more importantly my roast potatoes rave reviews. "Perfect Dad, fluffy in the middle and crispy on the outside. Just like they make them in school." As a sense of accomplishment came over me, I realised that if good cooking is about taking pleasure in other people's happiness, good communication - whether intra- or intercultural - is about taking a genuine interest in how others view the world, or more importantly how the world views you.



Make the big bits stand out

Ewan Pearson

A presentation without emphasis is like a landscape without features. Flat. Lifeless. Boring. And one of the worst things about such a presentation is that it's impossible to remember anything. But even more than that, there is no emotional involvement, no passion, no enthusiasm and no commitment. So no score either for the impression of personality.

I have recently attended a series of public presentations and studied many media interviews. What struck me was that most speakers lack emphasis, a basic and essential ingredient. As a result, I am moved, literally shaken, into writing about it. Surely it's not that difficult to be emphatic!

A presentation with emphasis has colour, variety and interest. So, it is easy to identify messages. But again, most of all it has passion, enthusiasm and commitment. We'd all agree that emphasis is vital in any presentation, speech or media interview. But what is it? How do you do it? And where?

FOR A START IF YOU EMPHASISE EVERYTHING, YOU EMPHASIS NOTHING BUT REALLY ANNOY EVERYONE. In the texting world, capitalisation is called 'shouting', and I don't think they mean that to be a compliment. Our revered Prime Minister (if he still is after this goes to print), Gordon Brown, has been accused of having an aggressive voice – punching his words out. Not pleasant, but also not effective. And in general we Brits are accused by others of lacking emphasis, and if you were to compare an average Brit with Obama, Berlusconi or Sarkozy, you would easily see and hear what I mean.

So, the first thing to understand is that emphasis is only possible *relative* to the rest of what you say (or write). It therefore involves *changing* something, or things about the way you communicate. It's actually pretty easy to describe what these changes are: They are changes in verbal, vocal and visual communication.

Verbal Emphasis

Verbally, relative emphasis comes from changes in the words to more personal emotional ones and/or the use of repetition. I really believe that repetition is the key one.

For example, one very effective verbal tool for emphasis is just to say so. *"This change is vital to*

our organisation because..." or "I want to emphasise....". Or you can use repetition with a triplet: "this plan is working well, really well, really brilliantly".

Vocal Emphasis

In the vocal arena, fluency and articulation are not normally altered deliberately for emphasis. Having said that, um, attempts at emphasis are often crushed on the rocks of um er fis er disfluency and poor articulation. Or as Ronnie Barker famously said, "misrepunctuating my worms".

The changes are in *pitch height, pace and volume*. It's not always good to generalise here, as there are many ways to be effectively emphatic, but typically pitch height rises for emphasis then falls afterwards for finality. The rise can involve as much as a doubling of pitch (i.e. an octave). Pace often accelerates by 30–50% then slows to below average speed to produce the emphasis, and volume usually gets louder, even reaching what the scientists that we work with call a 'Vocal Punch'. A more sophisticated version of slowing down is to lengthen a vowel within the word or a word group being emphasised.

The research on this subject is extensive, and it is generally accepted that to go louder for emphasis – in isolation and used repetitively or extensively – is a poor way to be emphatic, as it is processed by listeners as aggression instead. That's Gordon Brown's technique. The best of the vocal tools would appear to be the pitch rise, which is both emphatic and pleasant, adding as it does to the overall level of pitch modulation, a key ingredient of pleasantness. Slowing down is the next best on the researcher's list, but you have to be careful that the overall pace does not drag and so lose dynamism. A stretched vowel can also sound quite pleasant, unless you overdo it, as Robert Peston famously does on the BBC. His emphasis profile is most peculiar!

I have found during my studies of emphasis firstly that a good combination and variation in these three emphatic tools produces the best outcome, and secondly that everyone should try out different combinations to find their best result.

Have a go at saying one of these phrases out loud. Pick a word or word group to emphasise using the

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Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



Make the big bits stand out ...continued

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



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three tools each in isolation, then in combination, and then ask yourself (and others listening if you allow) which method works best for you.

"We have everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language." (Oscar Wilde)

"Interestingly, according to modern astronomers, space is finite. This is a very comforting thought—particularly for people who can never remember where they have left things." (Woody Allen)

"It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt." (Mark Twain)

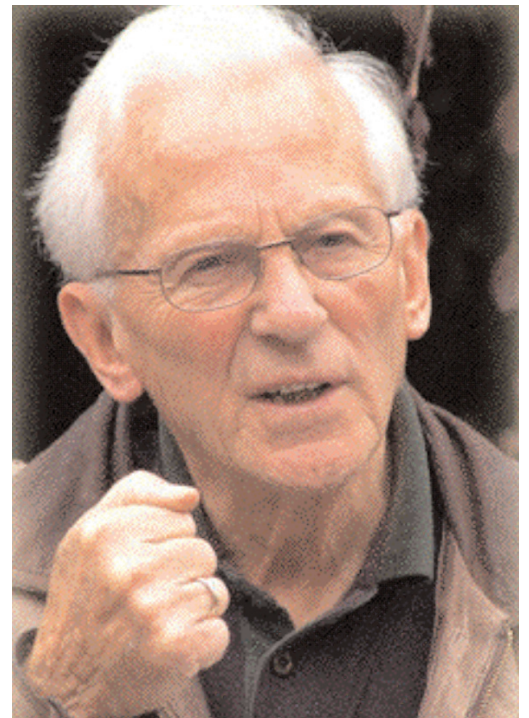
Visual Emphasis

In the visual arena, emphasis comes from gestures and changes in facial expression. Perhaps it's obvious, but the size of gestures tends to be increased for emphasis. Most people don't increase them by enough. Or you can use a particular gesture such as the 'precision' tell. And some common gestures are a bit antisocial! I have known people to thump a table for emphasis, to chop down with a hand, to wave their hands backwards and forwards. That's probably OK in most places, but you have to pay if you break something.

The range of colourful emphatic body language is almost infinite, and often it comes quite easily when you're 'in the presenting mood'. Again, I would suggest you have a go at the various body language tools. As ever, my guiding principles are that these gestures have to be natural for you, and not offensive. There are plenty of cultural bear-traps here, so it's worth trying them out with a colleague before facing the audience.

Facial expression is a good area for emphasis, but what does it look like? Is it a stern look? A stare? A smile? Probably not. Emphasis is for important things, so the face needs to look serious, but not frowning. Eye contact should definitely be there, but not a stare so much as held whilst including a sweep of the audience. The face should be upright, fronting the audience. Overall, emphasis probably comes more from body movement rather than great facial changes.

Here are a couple of pictures of visual emphasis:



The most important things about emphasis are that there should be some, it should be natural and it should be in the correct place. Or your name is Robert Peston and you do really weird stuff and a cult following develops. Your call....

Drilling to Projection

Alastair Grant

A long time ago, aged 22 years, I learnt to project my voice. I was an officer in the Marines and ordered to command a parade for the visit of Prince Philip. He was arriving by hovercraft. There was a band. The challenge I faced was to get 100 marines to carry out a 'Royal Salute'. For a week I stood at one edge of the parade ground practising my orders to a drill sergeant 100 yards away. I quickly learnt three important things. First that I had to move my diaphragm and not just my rib cage to project. Second to use elongated sounds so that the voice could increase in volume. Third to use pitch variation. Just barking out crisp commands would never be heard. In fact, despite my training it's likely that the marines would not fully hear the final executive word 'arms'. But they would hear the previous elongated word:

"P R E S E N T"

which started in high pitch and then dropped for the second syllable. They knew the executive word 'ARMS' came a fraction later and so acted on it even if it was not heard.

Similarly, Abraham Lincoln would have used some of this skill in his Gettysburg address on that cold November day in 1863 to an audience of thousands.

But how relevant is this nugget of knowledge to business people presenting across the boardroom table, or miked up to talk to a larger audience?

You might think it's of very little relevance. Of course I am not talking about bellowing or barking at people, but I do claim that poor projection absolutely affects our ability to persuade. It is also a quality issue. If we do not use our diaphragm, if we clip words short then the listener might hear the words but not the music behind the words. Our emotional involvement is lost.

In normal talking we typically use air from the top of our lungs but a projected voice uses air properly flowing from the contraction (pulling down) and relaxation (moving up) of the diaphragm. The diaphragm is the dome of muscles above our abdomen and below our lungs, and it works in partnership with the abdominal muscles to contract the 'wind pump'.

Try this: put your hand on your tummy and shout "Hi" loudly! You can easily feel the muscles move. In good vocal technique, we use the diaphragm to control vocal projection. The goal then is to isolate and relax the muscles controlling the vocal chords or larynx, so that they allow the maximum air flow from the lungs. One way to practice this is to

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Drilling to Projection ...continued

Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting is a respected adviser. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken and written word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the long term our work improves the way a firm does business.

We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

We also produce scientific voice and face analysis reports, then provide voice coaching and non-verbal communications advice.

Our clients' needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our response to deliver first class coaching and advice. Through our own innovative culture we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice & Face Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the Information Iceberg.

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simulate a massive yawn with our mouth wide open. Aaaaaaarh.

To feel the difference between raised (tense) and lower (relaxed) positions of the larynx, place your fingers gently on your throat and try to talk as if you were a child or use 'baby talk' and then go down to a deep pitch. Feel how your larynx moves and stretches.

Try saying "Hi" loudly but with the diaphragm relaxed. What happens is a breathy sound – almost a strangled rasp.

Using the diaphragm and abdomen to control the air flow in our lungs will make a big difference. But there is also our mouth. It is a cavity and a resonator.

Really try to use all the space in your mouth – it's like the hollow body of a guitar. The more space in your mouth, the more sound you'll make and the richer it will be. Try saying all the vowels (lower and upper case), exaggerating the movement of your mouth. You will find the mouth changes shape.

Last year I took part in a scratch production of The

Messiah by Handel. I was surprised to find that our choir leader made us warm up for a good ten minutes. It seemed a waste of time to be singing eee aarh oh oooh and countless other exercises but the difference was significant. Just like any other muscle the mouth needs to be exercised and warmed up. In the same way, if you have a presentation to make then try to get your voice warmed up before the first words are uttered.

How can we increase voice projection without hiring a drill sergeant? You might feel rather self conscious practicing projection in an open plan office. And indeed if you have your own office, people might rush in to find out what was happening! But this is a serious point. Apart from joining a choir – and that's not a bad idea, I recommend you practice projecting your voice whilst driving your car alone, or in a place where you can't be heard. On the open road no one can hear you and it mimics the seated-at-a-board-table posture. You can experiment flexing your voice and may be quite surprised at the change you can achieve. I repeat this is not about shouting but about the quality, the timbre of your voice.

