



Penny Dash

## The New Alexander Technique

Penny Dash has worked at The Daily Mirror, The Sunday People, The Independent, The Observer and The Guardian. She now runs a media consultancy, Deeper Media, advising companies on their multichannel media campaigns at the highest level. She responds to the article by journalist Simon Boughey, in our previous Journal.

Remember Alexander the Great and the legend of the Gordian knot? When presented with a knot of impossible complexity that had defeated all previous attempts to unravel it, he simply cut through it with his sword – and then went on to conquer the entire known world.

That's what companies should do with the thorny knot of their media budgets and Press relationships. Cut through the media handlers, PR agents and spin doctors, and instead direct their own campaigns like generals, direct from the boardroom. Relying on the PR interface is, as Simon Boughey said in GBP's Journal 42, a hit and miss business at best.

Hiring a PR to churn out press releases and cultivate journalists is a very Luddite solution to media relations. The old method of counting 'column inches' to justify the PR department payroll is as far away from modern media ops as typewriters with spools. The media interface for larger companies is a big and complex business. Management must discard their attitude that media is there to thwart and expose them, and instead embrace the idea of a partnership that allows them to get their messages across effectively. The glue? Money. Establish a large enough corporate war chest for 'Innovation' aka 'paid-for messaging' and you can command the mass media with all the ferocity of Alexander in his Persian campaigns.

Let me explain: Companies often have marketing departments and both internal and external PRs. They place stories with top journalists, which is risky given the current revolving door that all senior Press appointments are subject to. These stories may launch new products, present a 'vision' or introduce management.

The journalist's disinterest and poor understanding of what is important, the dryness of the technical material and the cheap packaging limit their success. It is up to the busy senior desk editor to find and polish the corporate diamonds and, all too often, important messages are cast aside in the heat, bustle and frantic pace of the newsroom.

Many companies then hire a number of green (i.e. cheap and untried) young graduates to write and run their website, Twitter, and Facebook accounts. Lots of running-around-meetings later they churn out not very proficient web copy. There's little contact with the separately briefed outside PR and media agencies or intelligent consideration of the big picture that they are supposed to be presenting.

Finally, the company spends its biggest budgets with top media agencies such as Mediacom and Carat, or with well-known advertising agencies who in the past controlled media spend like emperors.

**Continued on page 2**

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**The Presentation & Business Development Specialists**

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



In this edition:

**The New Alexander Technique** by Penny Dash  
Penny responds to Simon Boughey's media article with some general advice

**Who mirrors, who matches?**  
By Ewan Pearson  
Adaptation of salespeople to their clients is often far from ideal.

**Body Talk**  
By Tim Farish  
How the right type of emotion can win business

**PowerPoint competitor?**  
By Alastair Grant  
Prezi is a new present for presenters. Alastair introduces this rival and explains how it works

**New member of staff**  
Lynda Russell-Whitaker joins GPB

# The New Alexander Technique

## ...continued

The balance of power is shifting, with media agencies taking on a more effective creative and consulting role, moving far beyond their traditional role of buying and selling blocks of media. They have recognised the power of large-scale multichannel innovations, and are cheaper than advertising agencies at getting them done. They also work well with the newly-created 'Innovations' departments of the big newspapers to help create campaigns, as do a few large-scale PR companies of the Hill and Knowlton variety.

With advertising agencies on the defensive, the real tragedy is that the key voices of consumers and shareholders lose out to the competing interests for the multi-million budgets. No independent consultant has asked 'will the consumers and shareholders like this?' or 'can they see key messages across all the campaigns?' If the answer to either is a clear 'no', the first the CEO usually hears about it is when the numbers fail to add up or when the advertised messages are clearly wrong. He will drill down on the detail, fire the Marketing Director, and the whole unwieldy Frankenstein's monster of a corporate media structure will lurch forward again – with none of the underlying issues addressed.

This is not the best way to plan media, and is the precise scenario that Deeper Media helps to avoid by creating holistic campaigns. Outside involvement is not always popular, but like Alexander's lieutenants, the Diodachi, the goal is to make the best decisions on creative spend and direction, above internal and external politics. The corporate general (cf. Alexander, see image above) is happy, both because he

has an objective sounding board to balance against the cacophony of voices, and because, using this more balanced approach, many potentially weak media concepts are weeded out before they gather steam in the frantic creative engine room of the various agencies competing for budget.



Planning is everything in media yet marketing directors frequently squeeze the timetables so tight that creative executions are done hurriedly, in a desperate panic. Yet no complaint is made to CEOs. The media agencies know on which side their bread is buttered. Instead, campaign weaknesses should be honestly identified and brilliant ideas brought to the fore. If an idea doesn't work, it doesn't work – get a better one.

### Take control!

How? Here are a few questions that any good corporate general should ask:

- Is the media spend well balanced, multichannel and consistent?
- Is knowledge, trust and engagement delivered in all media?
- Is there a mechanism for testing awareness of concepts pre & post campaign?
- Who are the brand ambassadors? If celebrities, are they worth the spend?
- Is the message better delivered from C2C or from brand to consumer?
- Is there full value for money and disclosure in TV spend?
- What are the sponsorship opportunities?
- How creative is the brand online?
- Is social networking being used effectively?
- Does the campaign mean traffic online?
- Is there an element of 'shock and awe'?

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# Who mirrors, who matches?



It is a pretty classic NLP theory that in business development the supplier needs to 'mirror and match' the client in order to maximise their chances of success. This may be in a number of ways: in posture, gesture, facial expression and/or words or voice.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that this happens in sales situations, and that it increases sales. Jedward is another, rather different, commercialisation of it. But there is very little actual scientific research on this subject, as opposed to books from consultants that is.....



First, the papers that exist are about two-way social conversation, not business sales, or presentations. The papers, such as at this year's Interspeech conference, have covered changes in *lexical entrainment*, changing words to match the conversation partner, use of cue phrases, turn-taking style, changing accent, syntax, pitch range and pace; all useful stuff.

In these papers, one speaker adapts their lexicon fully to the style of the other person, it's not to a mid-point. Typically the more junior or weaker conversation partner adapts to the more senior or stronger one, and this occurs even when the differences in 'rank' are subtle.

But do these findings apply in business contexts? In truth, academics don't look at this real life setting, preferring the controllable environment of the test lab, so anecdotal and experiential data has filled the void, and a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding has resulted.

One classic misunderstanding is the 55:38:7 "rule". This suggests that what you *look* like is the most important (55% of the effect/impact), 38% is the *sound* of your voice, and only 7% is *what* you say, the content. This purports to come from some research by Prof Albert Mehrabian (UCLA) and later reported in his book 'Silent Messages'. In fact he was writing about 1-way communication lasting six seconds but only where the communication was discongruent, i.e. the words, voice and visual elements did not match.

A while ago, I asked Prof Mehrabian about the fame he had found from this publicity, and he was scathing. It totally misrepresents what he found, which only applied to discongruent, brief sound-bites shown on a video tape. I then asked what he thought the balance of impact would be for congruent communicators, and having admitted he'd never researched it but that he ought to some day, he guessed that they perhaps equal impact on average. I would agree. This means that the three aspects of *what* you say, the *sound* you make, and what you *look* like are all equally important.

But that is all academic. I want you to know what happens in business development settings. I can only share anecdotal evidence with you, from 20 years of observations in real business meetings, in coaching workshops, and in a career in investment banking before that. None of this is written up, is not been peer group reviewed, so is not statistically significant!

Who mirrors who? And which of the 3 aspects to they mirror with? Well, I see the science confirmed here. The experienced salesperson usually matches the words, adopting a slightly deferential and junior but not obsequious role.

They do the adapting to their client in just one of the 3 aspects, the communication

**Continued on page 4**



**Ewan Pearson**

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## Who mirrors, who matches? ....continued

works, and business is won. Yippee, we can all go home happy.

But that is not common. Instead I see salespeople adopt an equal or more often dominant position with the client. I see whole teams doing this too. Most common of all, I see uninformed sales people amble into communications totally unaware of what is or should be happening.

When the salesperson does not think about the person they're selling to, the relationship becomes random walk. It may work out ok, it may turn into a fight, and there is no skill involved. It's the state of subconscious incompetence, or as I prefer to call it, 'no good, and no idea they're no good'. The communication involves ineffective transmission and receipt leading to lost opportunities, and the occasional random and hence over-valued success. The salesperson returns and their manager asks 'How did it go?' to which they respond, 'pretty well, I think'. Six months later the prospect has not become any closer to becoming a fee-paying one. When the position taken is an equal one, (see cartoon below), ambiguity ensues. No-one is quite sure who is leading and who is following. But it can work well enough, and certainly better than blind ignorance does.



But this conscious position taking is rare. When the position is the more common dominant one, you as the client become irritated from their arrogance, as they continue to hang themselves, using an un-sensing, transmit-only mode.

The picture below of the Pope and George W Bush illustrates a postural match, if

nothing else! I doubt it was intentional, and adds nothing to the effectiveness of the communication.



If the salesperson takes a dominant role, the client is pushed into 'waiting to object' mode, listening to irrelevant sales garbage, and the clock seems to tick ever slower. You know the sort of thing well from those cold calls from salespeople trying to sell everything from financial services to photocopiers to finger-print technology. They start with a 'yes' question, then say something they made up or have been told to say, they don't pause, listen or check if we are even remotely interested. An invasion of your work flow becomes an invasion of your attempts at stress management, and you get them off the phone as soon as possible. Everyone has wasted their time.

We don't believe in cold calls, and you can see why. If you have a brand to protect or develop, there is little worse you can do than to annoy your potential client. We *do* believe in making calls, but we have a strict rule that there must be a relevant reason for the call, then the receiver of the call may welcome it. It needs preparation and calling skills, and is what we coach business developers to do.

It's well worth the investment in making it happen. Business developers can either get a negative return for hours of effort on lots of calls that just result in brand damage, or they can get a decent positive return on the preparation they put in before the call, and the skills used in that call. Your call.

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# Body Talk: The power of facial expressions



In my last article, I introduced the FACS (Facial Action Coding System) system first devised by Professor Paul Ekman which is widely acknowledged as being the most effective facial recognition system in the world. It is possible to read people's emotions accurately and in most settings using his approach.

This has profound implications on how communication is going to be conducted in the years to come. An extreme form of this can be seen in the fictional 'Lie to Me' TV series on Fox USA, where a Professor Cal Lightman uses FACS to tell if people are lying. He runs a lucrative consultancy with the US Government and various Federal agencies among his clients. When the credits roll, one notices that the programme's 'expert scientific consultant' is no other than Paul Ekman. Being an obsessive in this area, I bought the DVD box set of both seasons and yes, Professor Ekman is seen being interviewed on the quaintly titled 'bonus featurette' admitting that while it really is possible to tell if people are telling porkies with 95% accuracy – it is not where we should be focussing our attention. Mm. Quite so but tempting nonetheless.

Now, I am not suggesting that each organisation is going to have an in-house FACS detective for rogue employees but I will go as far as to say that most people's values and judgments of body language, and facial expressions particularly, could change considerably. This, in turn, is likely to have a transformative effect on the behaviour in every boardroom. I can almost imagine new types of mirrors with FACS template outlines on them for feedback..... 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, do you think they will go for my new EMEA strategy?'

Jesting aside, one thing is certain: top management and their executives will be queuing up to understand how they can be – and be seen to be – as more trustworthy and credible. So what are the signs? Well, there are several but the main ones have to do with fear, sadness and anger (see figs). Why? Simply because these expressions are typically displayed when someone is feeling nervous or uncomfortable, such as when they have to give a key presentation in front of a large and

influential public audience, or a group of colleagues. In other words, they are either scared senseless or do not want to be there, or both!

Sometimes, it is completely appropriate to display these emotions but most speakers display these far too often and in the wrong places. Sometimes they can last for the majority of the presentation!

The book '*And death came third*' came out of research conducted in the USA, and gives us an insight into the top things which terrify the average executive. Public speaking came, you guessed it.....first. In second place was 'networking' and then, somewhat bizarrely, came 'death'. So, is it any surprise that people can look completely terrified when they have to address an audience?

Here are two photos of the same person in the same public presentation: The photo in Fig 1 was taken whilst the speaker said "We had two fatalities in Libya". It is a good example of where the speaker is being totally congruent between his visual communications and his content, as he is discussing sad news with a sad face.

Figure 1: "We had two fatalities in Libya"



Tim Farish

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Continued on page 6

## Body Talk: The power of facial expressions...continued

But the same sad expression stays on his face for Fig 2, taken later on when he is trying to convey pleasure: "These are great results". The latter is discongruent between the visual communication and the content, and regrettably it's a common observation for us to make.

Figure 2: "These are great results"



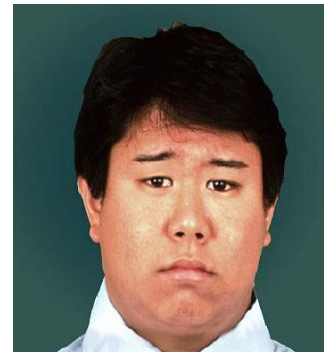
From the last article you will recognise the three photos below which show the emotions of *anger*, *sadness* and *fear* from Ekman's FACS system.



As you can see from Fig 3 (left), anger is clearly demonstrated by a pinching of the lips and a contraction of the corrugator (forehead and all eyebrow) muscles.



Fear (Fig 4, left) is shown through a flaring of the nostrils, whitening of the eyes around the tops of the pupils and a downward triangulation of the mouth.



Sadness (Fig 5, left) is shown as a downward depression of the facial muscles, especially the mouth and eyes.

While perhaps inevitable when nervous, the frequent displaying of these emotions could badly undermine any positive emotion that might have existed before the presentation. Considering that most executives display these emotions on an alarmingly regular basis there should be an awful lot of soul-searching.

So what can we do to avoid this? Well, the important thing is to be and to look engaged and interested. I'm sure many of you would love to know how to master this, to which we'd suggest you start with just one word: *curiosity*. If one possesses curiosity then the face becomes much more animated and engaged, displaying positive and sincere smiles more often.



It is this sincerity which is critical to the genuine smile which is shown in Fig 6, left. The top and bottom halves of the face match, showing both mouth and eyes actively engaged.

A sense of curiosity brings all sorts of benefits to communication and it is especially powerful in making us come alive in our face, gestures and our voice.

The sad truth is that children possess this quality in abundance, yet most adults, especially those working in large corporations, have had it conditioned out of them.

I think it's time for the re-set button, don't you?

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# PowerPoint has a competitor...



PowerPoint is dead - according to Chris Connick, who runs courses at Prezitrain-ing.co.uk in a product called Prezi.com. I was recently tipped off about this new piece of software by an Airbus Manager who thought highly of it. So what is Prezi?

Prezi is a software application which makes it possible to design presentations online. You can either do this online for free, or you can work entirely offline on your own computer by paying for a Pro account. When using Prezi you don't need to worry about creating individual slides. Instead you can create non-linear presentations and then you zoom in and out of a map containing all of your information.

As I assumed it would be like PowerPoint, when I tested it I didn't bother with the instructional videos. Mistake! I realised I hadn't a clue!

Conceptually you have to think of Prezi.com as a single sheet of paper the size of your dining room table, or maybe even a tennis court! Prezi call it a blank canvas. You insert or create your own graphics, pictures, words, or videos.



PREZI

Where you place these items is of no importance as you later connect them all together in the order that you choose.

Then you project them onto a screen, just the same as PowerPoint. It's like throwing your ideas onto the canvas and using the tool as a mind map.

When you or anyone else views your presentation in a browser, what they see is an animated tour of the canvas, instead of a series of slides. The browser first zooms in on the first item in the path you created, then it zooms out again, then in again on the second item, and so on for each remaining item, until it reaches the end of the path. The whole effect is far closer to quality graphics on a TV commercial than a boring set of bullet-point slides.

It can be used with a remote controller in the same way as PowerPoint. As you create and edit your Prezi presentation, each item that you add to the canvas can be moved, resized, or rotated, and you can change the overall look of the presentation by clicking on a gallery of styles.

Adam Somlai-Fischer (Prezi's Founder) covers the idea of contextual relativism well in his Prezi here:

<https://prezi.com/hgjm18z36h75/why-should-you-move-beyond-slides/>

By contrast PowerPoint slide shows are rigid and predictable. Some opponents to PowerPoint argue that we are constrained in our ideas to the slide because its a uniformly sized chunk of information. Once we commit to dealing in slides, we take an immediate hit on our mental agility and the level of focus we bring to the simple act of conveying our ideas.

PowerPoint encourages us to have roughly equal amount of information on each slide - not too much, not too little. As slides can only be strung together with one-way linearity, each slide is presented without the context of the larger organization.

A fascinating study into the crash of the Columbia Space Shuttle shows that whilst the shuttle was still flying, engineers used many PowerPoint bullet-point slides in briefings to assess the possible outcome of a piece of foam striking the underbelly.

The headline bullets were optimistic but sub-headings raised doubts. These doubts were unfortunately ignored as they had a lower precedence in the hierarchy.



Alastair Grant

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continued on page 8

## PowerPoint has a competitor ...continued

The old-fashioned way of assessing the damage by a written report might have produced actions such as photographing the underside of the shuttle which would have revealed the missing tiles.

All this seems to be pointing towards the merits of Prezi.com, but I am not so sure. First of all you have to use Prezi online, in full view of all, unless you buy the Pro version that lets you work off-line.



It's free for the first 30 days, but you stump up \$159 (c.£110 at present) for the annual licence. Companies can get a discounted deal for multi-user licences,

and there's also a discount for students and teachers.

PowerPoint has experimented with a download call pptPlex, which allows you to zoom in and out with a mouse on groups of slides. If Microsoft decide to incorporate pptPlex into PowerPoint, then that too will be an improvement on what's available today.

I am not ready to recommend that you leave the warm embrace of PowerPoint and switch horses to the more racy Prezi. But I am going to try it out and get to know it rather better.

I suspect that Prezi in some situations will produce such a refreshing contrast to the norm that some will be won over by it. If you are engaged in a sales pitch using Prezi and your competitor has stuck to dull convention then you may have a precious point of differentiation.

What's my advice? If you want to raise your game with PowerPoint then at least go to Google and type in Prezi.com and use the free version. pptPlex may also be downloaded and is worth installing on 2007 and 2010 versions of PowerPoint.

### Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd is a respected adviser based in London and Oslo. 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 visual 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. In support of this we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice, Visual and Content Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the Information Iceberg.

### Breaking news—Lynda Russell-Whitaker joins GPB!



We are delighted to announce that we have recruited Lynda Russell-Whitaker to join us in our London office. She starts on 3rd October, and will initially work on developing our relationships with clients. Lynda has huge experience in presentation coaching. In her spare time she enjoys singing and salsa dancing. We welcome her warmly and look forward to her input to our advice areas and the long-term client relationships we have here at GPB. Her email address is lrw@gpb.eu.



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