

## The Perfect 10.....

By Ewan Pearson

**O**ur last newsletter had an article about 'delivery' (we also called it 'style'). At the end was a table of traffic lights to score your own or someone else's presentation. We promised you the second in the brace, the ying to the yang this time. So here it is: 'Content' or 'substance' as the journos like to call it when referring to its absence from many politicians' speeches. When trying to persuade others (of an idea, a product or a service), research has shown that you have to appeal to both the Central (logical) and the Peripheral (emotive) routes to persuasion. See also the papers by Petty and Cacioppo: Attitudes and Persuasion, 1981 and afterwards.

Just like our last newsletter, we have put a checklist on a separate page for you to be able to print off to help you when preparing your own, or helping someone else's presentation. Do you get a perfect 10 every time?

We have all for many years known that content is important to manage. We know that most presentations go on for too long, so volume is a problem. But we have come to learn over the last few years that there are 9 other elements of content that can and often do go wrong. These are: structure, priority, complexity, clarity, abstraction, language, illustration, visuals and impact. Here's a brief description of each and the things to look out for:

**1. Quantity:** Most people's reaction to a presentation is not "Y'know, there just wasn't enough content!" but instead "How on earth am I supposed to absorb that lot?" Our research found that over 75% of presentations are either too long or have too much content.

Try to stick to the 1-3 key messages for your whole presentation. That gives it focus. Then build the content around these points only, adding information layers starting with the most important. Use a tree structure if you like. Stop adding content when you think you have not quite enough. Best to aim under. If in doubt, cut it out!

**2. Structure:** There are few rules: we've seen great presentations that have unique structures. But generally logic should run unbroken from start to finish. The presenter is poorly placed to test this as they can easily jump any gaps leaving audiences floundering. So get someone else to test this. Otherwise, a time sequence can work well, as can 'conclusion-then-evidence'. Avoid tangents, dead ends and puzzlements.

**3. Priority:** Bizarrely, our research also shows that often key points get buried whilst irrelevant minutiae take centre stage. The presenter may be blissfully unaware that the audience dwelt on distractions such as a typo on a slide, an odd or funny phrase, a mannerism, or the flatness in the voice. To get priority right you have to 'focus on a few key points' - much better than 'a presentation about a load of stuff'. Stick to these few points and be very disciplined about not adding extras; they're easy to fall for.

**4. Complexity:** Our research also shows that most presenters pitch at too complex a level. They assume too much audience knowledge, or use awful English that turns simple stuff into 'nightmare soup'. The audience is confused and yet too embarrassed ('I should understand this') to say so. The presenter usually knows the most in the room about their presentation; the audience's knowledge varies, even if there are only two of them! So start at a modest level, and, build complexity logically and in linked steps so that everyone learns from you. You are there to educate, not show off. Impress people by how easy you are to understand, not how difficult. Even 'experts' appreciate that.

**5. Clarity:** A presentation should be easy to understand. If not, it's the presenter's fault. Always. To be clear, use the simplest and shortest way to describe your point, using words or phrases that are easy to understand. Don't pad with unnecessary repetitive tautologous long-winded verbiage (like this). Churchill had the gift, do you?

continued on page 2 . . .



### Contents

Ten out of Ten, once more directing the traffic:

Ewan Pearson writes the second article in the brace on how we score and feedback on the 10 top elements of presentation content. You also get a handy A4 sheet to use for your own or a colleague's presentation. With traffic lights.

What's Diversity got to do with Pitching?

Lots, says our guest writer, Matthew Gregory, of KPMG, who also touches on boiling humans alive, ageism, gender, race, and disability, and rather usefully tells you what to consider here when preparing for a pitch.

"Pleased to meet you Mr Bond!"

Tim Farish continues his look at building and destroying rapport, how to skirt round the pitfalls, looking back at some of Albert Mehrabian's research.

Cicero vs. PowerPoint? There's no contest!

Alastair Grant says the well-established PC worker's tool is no match for the verbal blows received from one of the world's greatest speakers. The word is mightier than the keyboard!

# The Perfect 10.....

## Advice squeezed straight from the experts



continued from page 2 . . .

**6. Abstraction:** Being abstract means using meaningless phrases, often several in sequence. See also Lucy Kellaway's articles in the FT here in the UK, she is very hot on this and takes no prisoners! People can understand the concept 'Daisy the cow' (Tangible) much more easily than 'multicoloured quadrapedal bovine organism' (Abstract).

**7. Language:** Not English v. French or Spanish, but which bit of our huge English dictionary? Our language has equivalents that range from very formal, through colloquial to slang. An 'internal combustion engine powered four-wheel passenger vehicle' becomes 'car' becomes 'jalopy' becomes 'jar' or 'wheels'. Normal English (car) is much the best.

**8. Illustration:** Not doodles, artwork or photos, but spoken language descriptions that allow the audience to understand the point more easily. So, use an example, anecdote or case study, metaphor or simile to bring dry content to life and make it powerful and memorable. You might even try some humour: 'as useful as a chocolate teapot' comes to mind.

**9. Visuals:** Some presentations are better with no visuals, some need a few, but very few need many or as many as are created. So look to cut the number of visuals down to only what's necessary, simplify what's left, increase the ratio of pictures to bullet points and make sure there's good colour contrast. Red on Black and Green on Blue are usually no good!

**10. Impact:** I've saved the best for last. A presentation should educate and/or persuade. To do either it must be stimulating, curious, attractive (for attention), possibly provocative or punchy. As the points of maximum impact are up front and at the end, pay special attention to getting this right at those times. Try to minimise the flannel factor, or 'wobblegob' as one client recently called it.

So there, 10 areas to check and improve your presentations. Now sally forth and make an impression – a good impression that is.

continued on page 3 . . .



# The Perfect 10: content

continued from page 3 . . .

Traffic lights: GPB's presentation coaching 10-point checklist. Score the presenter by circling a blob or two in the traffic lights in the column on the right to mark each point. Feed back some constructive comments to improve the presenter's content.

	Point*	What goes wrong	What goes right	Red, Yellow or Green?
1	Quantity	Too much content, either for the space available or too much detail fogs the messages	Contents easily fit the space available, with some space left for questions, additions and unexpected delays	
2	Structure	Can't follow the supposed logic; feels like a random walk	Well laid out from the start (e.g. with agenda that is followed). Easy to follow	
3	Priority	Loads of messages, important ones lost in a crowd	Clearly focussed on a few key points	
4	Complexity	It's English, but not the sort we understand, head blows up with difficulty, feel the need to lie in a quiet place for some time	Took something difficult to understand, and made it easy by the way it was done. Got us to understand, possibly for the first time	
5	Clarity	Foggy English, hard to understand because of poor word selection. Made an easy subject sound difficult	A breath of fresh air; nice word selection so the easy subject is easy to understand	
6	Abstraction	Vague concepts that you can't readily relate to. Dry technical abstract language	Use of everyday examples and comparisons to bring the content to life	
7	Language	Use of unknown acronyms; jargon and/or slang that we don't understand. E.g. calling a spade a 'personal domestic gardening implement'	Nice easy words to describe ideas and concepts. Calling a 'spade a spade'	
8	Illustration	Can't picture the ideas, messages and concepts	Easy to picture the ideas, messages and concepts through visual language	
9	Visuals	Too many, too detailed, too many are bullets, lack colour contrast	A few well-chosen colourful and easy visuals to support ideas that benefit from such visual support; nothing else	
10	Impact	Washes over us, leaves us numb, asleep or ready for a stiff drink	We go 'wow' or something similar. A few really powerful points hit the bull's-eye	

\* See also our other articles on various of these topics.

## Advice squeezed straight from the experts



# Diversity and Pitching



## Matthew Gregory

**I**n the late eighties Charles Handy published a book called 'The age of unreason'<sup>1</sup>. In the book he claims that if you put a frog in water and slowly heat it, the frog will eventually let itself be boiled to death. Handy also claims that we humans, if we are not careful, can respond to gradual changes that impact upon us in the same way. Since he wrote that book, most commentators would argue that the pace of change in our world has undoubtedly increased.

The contention of this article is that there are a number of people about to be boiled alive – caught out by a massive change that is taking place before our very eyes!

That change is the massive growth in importance of diversity and inclusion. By diversity, we mean the fact that people are different. Those differences may be visible, such as skin colour or invisible, such as the beliefs we hold. Diversity and inclusion is about the approach we take to those differences. What, I hear you cry, has that got to do with me – someone who presents and regularly pitches for work?

The answer has a number of strands:

1. The one that potentially hits the hardest is the point that in pursuing the diversity holy grail, many organisations have realised that their greatest point of leverage in driving change is when they decide to buy something from another organisation. Consequently, many – certainly the ones that are leading the way in this domain – are now incorporating diversity into their list of purchasing criteria when buying services. Government departments have long done this, but private sector organisations are increasingly adopting this practice. For example a global professional services firm recently took an idea to a global oil company in the UK and were told that they loved the idea but when they presented to the Board they should not bring the same team. What was the problem, they asked? The team was three white, middle-aged, middle-class, straight men (male, pale and stale!), who happened to be extremely good at what they did, but nevertheless, one of the oil company's purchasing criteria was that any service providers needed to match their diversity standards as well as mirroring the audience they would be working with. If they had ignored the diversity issues, it

was made very clear to them that they would not have won the work. In one sense they were lucky, because they found out about the criteria they were being judged against. How many clients have you pitched to where you were judged using standards you knew nothing about? This leads onto the second reason why any self-respecting work-winner can no longer ignore the diversity issue.



2. It is widely said on selling skills courses that "all things being equal, people buy from people they like. All things being unequal, people buy from people they like!" Liking someone is closely connected to them being like me in some way and at the very least feeling some sort of connection or mutual understanding. If you have little in common with the people you are pitching to it will be very difficult to create that sense of connection and understanding. Because of momentous changes taking place in our society, the people across the other side of the table are increasingly likely to be different from you, such as in the following areas:

- Age – in the UK there are one million fewer people in their 20s than ten years ago. There are now more 55-64 year olds than 16-24 year olds for the first time. 45-59 year olds now form the largest group in the labour force
- Gender – increasingly organisations are measuring the numbers of women in senior management positions and setting targets to increase their representation (Financial Times, 18.11.06 'A contested question of quotas')
- Race and ethnicity – if you are white and live in Birmingham or Leicester, it is predicted that you will be in the minority within six years

continued on page 5 . . .

<sup>1</sup> Handy C (1989) The Age of Unreason. Arrow Books, London

# Diversity and Pitching

continued from page 4 . . .

- Sexual orientation – 6% of the UK population is gay, lesbian or bisexual and under the Employment Equality (sexual orientation) Regulations 2003, people have full legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation
- Disability – around 19% of the UK labour market is known to have a disability. Whilst the definition of a disability is a broad one, under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) anyone with a disability enjoys full legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of that disability
- Working patterns – supported by various pieces of legislation – are changing. People are working ever more flexibly (part time, job share, remote working etc) and in case you think this is just for junior people, senior people are embracing these options as well, for example one of KPMG's board members works part time and another champions their work on flexible working (Sunday Times 11.3.07)
- Whilst all of the differences mentioned above fall largely into the category of visible differences, there are a whole host of often related invisible differences, such as background, education, beliefs, personality etc. So, whilst on one level we are all different to each other, the extent of those differences is growing.

If you're someone who is regularly presenting and pitching for work, what do you need to do about this?

When putting together pitch / presentation teams, you can:

## *Advice squeezed straight from the experts*



- Consider, and if appropriate, ask the client what criteria they will be using to select their suppliers for the service in question. You may want to explicitly ask about the importance of diversity
- Ask about who will be in the audience and where possible try to match, on some level, the people on the other side. There is a risk here that you look at visible differences and make



all sorts of assumptions about what that means, for example one pitch team was presenting to a team who were all Asian and they therefore thought it would be good to have Asian people on their team. The client expressed reservations about this because the local Asian community was particularly tight knit and he was concerned about confidentiality issues

- Brief the team on any diversity issues
- Consider any issues of difference when developing the presentation, for example, I recently did a presentation where we used a CD of people talking. The speakers we used were supplied by the venue and were poor quality. At the end of playing it one person in the audience said he had a hearing impairment and did not hear a word of what was said! He actually told us, but most clients don't. The effect for him was that he felt excluded which is hardly the frame of mind you want somebody to be in when they are thinking about whether to buy your services. Had we checked in advance, we could have averted this situation.

In closing, if you are committed to be a world class presenter, diversity is something you can no longer close your eyes to. If you do, you will become like Handy's frog – eventually boiled alive!



## 'Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bond!' – The Physical factors of building rapport



### Tim Farish

**W**ho have you met recently for the first time? Did you remember their handshake? Did they smile? It's probably a safe bet to say that if they failed to give you a firm handshake or a warm smile then they didn't make much of an initial impression on you. In fact, they probably created a negative impression (if they gave you a weak handshake or didn't smile at all!). I've lost count at the amount of times I have met someone at a meeting and they have gone to shake my hand while looking away. 'How rude!' I hear you cry. Well, remember that most people are completely unaware of the physical impression they create with people they meet. If they knew how often they were being negatively judged because of the physical impression they created they would be astounded. The fact is that we are highly influenced by our first impressions when we meet someone and it takes some time for these initial judgements and observations to change. It's also a fact that most of this judgement is subconscious but it can all add up to a feeling that creates an unfavourable impression.



When we meet someone for the first time the physical factors of that person play a large role as to how we perceive them. At GPB we call these physical factors the 'music' (sound of voice) and 'dance' (body language) of rapport and if there is a mis-match between the 'words' (what's being said) then rapport will be negatively affected. Albert Mehrabian\* famously discovered that the impact of facial and bodily expression is greatest, followed by vocal expression and finally that of words. His studies showed that when there is a contradiction between what's being said and facial, body or vocal expression, it is the expression that prevails and holds more influence.

So how does this help us to understand rapport better? Firstly, it raises our awareness and reminds us that how we combine the words, music and

dance can have a profound effect on how we influence others. Secondly, when presenting yourself remember that you are being judged, consciously and subconsciously, by the following: facial expression, handshake, level of eye contact, vocal expression and by physical posture and gestures. This can be particularly useful for when you meet people for the first time in sales meetings or new business pitches.

So here are some tips to maximise the chances of creating the best rapport possible with the people you meet.

1. Smile!
2. Present a relaxed body posture; keep your back straight, try not to slouch and keep shoulders open.
3. Give a firm (but not too firm) handshake and look them in the eye at the same time. It can also help to nod in acknowledgement while you do this.
4. Match vocal expression by speaking at the same pace, volume and pitch as the other person.
5. When talking don't hold eye contact for longer than a few seconds. It helps to break off regularly and often.
6. Do hold eye contact on key points, especially ones that convey ideas, opinions and feelings.
7. Use regular pauses in your conversation. It's good practice to pause in between ideas.
8. When being asked a question you can nod in acknowledgement to show you understand what's being asked.
9. It's also a good idea (and a sign of respect) to pause when you've been asked a question. This shows you're actively listening to the question and it gives you time to think of a good answer. It also prevents you from speaking over the other person.

So, next time you find yourself entering a casino and happen to strike up a conversation with a beautiful woman or (for the ladies) handsome man, arch-villain, business associate, other secret agent etc. you'll have some idea of how to make a favourable impression. But, remind me, what type of olive do you like in your Martini?

\*Mehrabian, Albert (1971) – 'Silent Messages' was published by Wadsworth, Belmont, California

# Cicero – in place of PowerPoint?

**Alastair Grant**

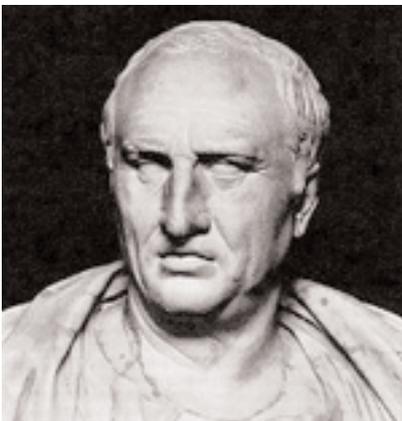
**T**here is a lovely quote by J F Kennedy about Churchill: "During England's darkest hours.....he mobilised the English language and sent it into battle".

In a rather more modest way we have been mobilising Cicero to lift the speaking performance of our clients. To our surprise we have found that the words of a man uttered in 63 BC have the ability to inspire modern day performance well beyond our expectations.

I was put up to this by a young classics scholar, Emma Chesterman who had been assisting me on a project and now this article.

So what is Cicero all about and why are his skills so relevant in the age of PowerPoint?

Some words about Marcus Tullius Cicero: He lived 106-43 BC, through one of the most volatile and violent times in history. He watched the bloody power struggles between men who wanted to seize ever more personal control, and men who fought to maintain the old political structures which could no longer cope with the demands of a growing empire.



He would be at home today in Iraq or Zimbabwe.

Cicero may be described as a man who lived and died by his oratory. Born into a wealthy provincial family, he achieved the virtually impossible and broke into the closed ranks of the political class in Rome, an achievement solely ascribable to his astonishing rhetorical skills. He first came to prominence when, although an obscure lawyer, he was chosen to prosecute a friend of the temporary dictator. Wildly against the odds, he won the case. His powerful oratory saw him rise swiftly through the political ranks, and reach the top job (consul) in 63 BC. These same skills later saw him become a thorn in the side of the most powerful men in Rome, including a rising Caesar. Cicero's speeches were so troublesome to them that they had him

exiled. After agreeing to deflect the shaft of his rhetoric away from these men, he was allowed to return to Rome, where he retired from public life and wrote philosophy and other academic works (including a tract on oratory).

The extract below is taken from Cicero's first speech against Catiline, delivered to the Senate during Cicero's consulship in 63, with Catiline present. It was the moment of which he was most proud: he believed he saved the Republic from overthrow at the hands of a band of desperate and disgraced young politicians, led by Catiline. As a result of the speech, Catiline was led to his death.

No doubt modern day (and civilised) politicians would wish their presentational skills had such power! But to set it in a modern context one might imagine such a situation in a war torn country such as Iraq. Perhaps a Sunni politician un masks a Shia for orchestrating acts of barbarism (or of course the other way around).

So why is coaching 'the Cicero technique' so effective now?

The start of the answer is to look at what I and my colleagues are already doing and what is working well, one aspect of which is teaching the art of oratory. This is about talking in short phrases separated by silence and eye contact. We might typically use a punchy modern-day business speech. It works but the emotional commitment to the words is minimal. In an effort to overcome this we have used fine speeches from Churchill, Lincoln and even more recently from Clinton and Blair. The problem is that we all have a view on these modern speakers and feel rather false – even self conscious – mouthing their words. But Cicero was long enough ago. The sheer elegance of his language makes it hard not to be caught up by what he wanted to achieve.

We have clients who find it difficult to encode emotion in their voice, or who talk without modulation, or who never vary their volume, suddenly being set free. We record them on a voice software programme which immediately shows a marked difference in their intensity, pitch range and modulation. But where does this lead us? Most business presentations do not lend themselves to this level of power, but taking people from a flat foot-note style of speaking to something that sounds more like an actor quoting Shakespeare is a liberating experience. If one then brings into play

*continued on page 8 . . .*



# Cicero – in place of PowerPoint?

continued from page 7 . . .

other ideas such as putting PowerPoint into a subservient position, then the overall effect is significant.

Here is Cicero's speech against Catiline, translated and with some words modernised to make it easier to read. Have a go!

*For how long, Catiline, will you abuse our patience?*

*How much longer will your madness make fools of us?*

*When will your unbridled effrontery stop vaunting itself?*

*Are you not impressed that the Palatine has a garrison at night, that the city is patrolled, that the populace is panic-stricken, that all loyal citizens have rallied to the standard, that the Senate is meeting here behind stout defences, and that you can see the expression on the faces of the senators?*

*Do you not appreciate that your plans are laid bare?*

*Do you not see that your conspiracy is held fast by the knowledge of all these men? Do you think that there is a man among us who does not know what you did last night or the night before last, where you were, whom you summoned to your meeting, what decision you reached?*

*What an age we live in! ("O tempora! O mores!")*

*The Senate knows it all, the consul sees it, and yet – this man is still alive.*

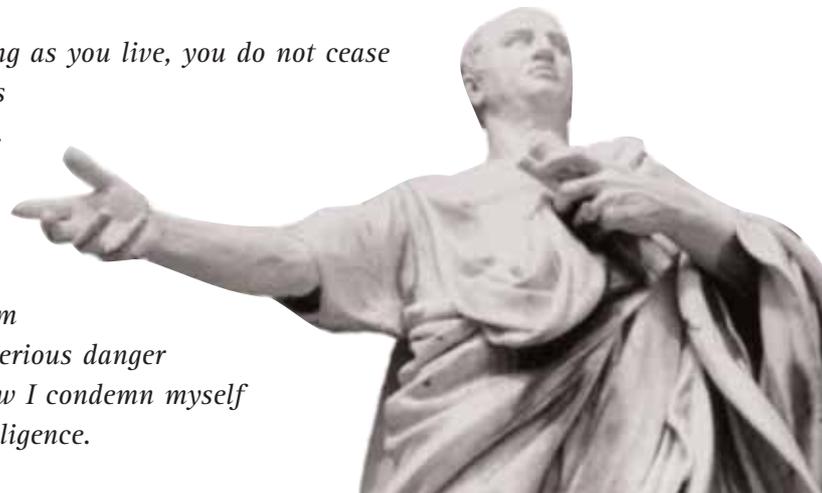
*Alive, did I say? Not only is he alive, but he attends the Senate, takes part in our debates, picks us all out one by one and with his gaze marks us down for death.*

*We, however, brave fellows that we are, think that we are doing our duty to the Republic if only we avoid his frenzy and his cold steel.*

*You, Catiline, should have been led to your death long ago and on a consul's orders.*

*You still live and, as long as you live, you do not cease your acts of recklessness but add to their number.*

*It is my wish, gentlemen, to be a man of compassion, it is my wish not to seem easygoing at a time of serious danger for the Republic, but now I condemn myself for my inaction and negligence.*



## Advice squeezed straight from the experts



## 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 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 and Telephone Calls.

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 Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the GPB Virtual Classroom.

Designed by ruckindesign.com