

FIVE STEPS TO SPEECH-WRITING SUCCESS

Whether you're writing a speech for yourself or your CEO, finding the right words is just the start; you must also learn to connect with the audience

by Fletcher Dean



It can strike fear into the heart of even the most seasoned communications professional. You've been asked to write a speech. The first reaction is usually flattery that someone thinks so highly of your writing skills. Then there is panic. Then mind-numbing, blank-page introspection. How do I start? Should I try for humour? Does my speaker need to sound like President Obama? Or should he just try to be himself? Is it too late to find another job? Why me?

Never fear. What to others may seem like a mysterious, arcane endeavour can actually be a very straight-forward and successful task. So what is the secret to writing a successful speech? It is quite simple: a successful speech is one the audience will listen and react to. Yes, there are entire shelves of books on speechwriting. And yes, people go to conferences and get training to become better speechwriters. But all of the books and all of the training essentially land on this single point: will the audience listen and will it react the way you want it to? So here are five must-do tips for ensuring the next speech you write is must-listen-to material.

ONE The first tip is to begin every speech by focusing on the audience itself. If this is the only tip you follow, the next speech you write will be better than most. When I first began writing speeches, an older and wiser speechwriter took me aside and explained this

very bluntly. Like a lot of younger writers, I wanted the speeches I wrote to sound grandiose and soaring. I wanted the language to be lyrical and every speech to get a standing ovation. "Listen," he said, "all audiences are the same. They just want to know how to be healthier, wealthier or happier. If you can give them even one of those, you'll do just fine." In fact, every audience member is asking the same thing when your speaker stands at the podium: what is this speaker going to say that is going to make my life better? Answer that first before you begin to draft your own messages.

Too many writers turn the speaker/audience paradigm around and begin with what they want to say. The result is that speakers seem out of touch and boring because they have not identified a common problem. So tip number one is to focus on the audience and solve their needs. If you write a speech that could make them healthier, wealthier or happier, they will be interested in what your speaker says and you have got the beginnings of a great speech.

TWO The second big tip for a successful speech is to rely more on emotions and less on logic. I was listening to a radio programme last week about an effort by photographers in the United States to show the new face of poverty in the country. The interviewer asked why it was important to get these photographs in front of everyday people rather than simply

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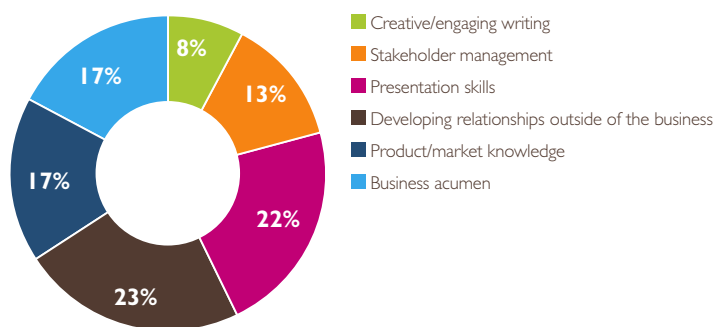
FACTS & FIGURES

Although every industry faces its own set of communication challenges, it can be useful to draw parallels between the communications function in one field with those in another. That's why we've decided to focus on a recent survey by the VMA Group ("Specialists in PR recruitment, HR recruitment and Communications jobs") on the role of communicators in the financial services industry: the intense scrutiny undergone by the industry in recent years underlines the need for increased professionalisation, and the sector's communication function could serve as a litmus test for communicators in other sectors. VMA's surveys are consistently incisive and clearly presented, and this one is no exception. Focussing on the global centre of the financial services industry – the UK – the survey touches on issues such as reporting (it finds that "job titles often fail to reflect the full range of work being undertaken"), the relationship between communications and marketing (there is a "surprising degree of neutrality" on the is-

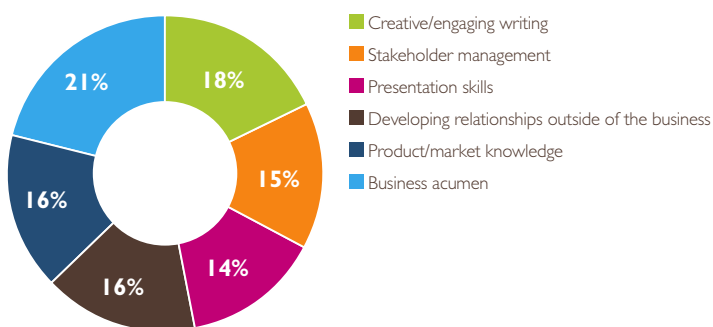
sue of the convergence between communications and marketing teams), remunerations and career development. Perhaps most interesting are the survey's findings on skills and training: just a minority of respondents (five per cent) felt no need for any training or development; pursuing relationships outside of the business was of most concern for respondent's own development (23 per cent), closely followed by presentation skills (22 per cent). The survey also asked respondents to rate their colleagues' development: the skill that colleagues should develop the most was business acumen (21 per cent), closely followed by creative/engaging writing (18 per cent). The survey is worth reading in full, not least because it is a chance to reflect on how you would answer the questions it poses. Regardless of the industry you work in, your answers could be a starting point for a wider conversation on the state and development of your communications.

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Skills you would like to develop



Skills your colleagues should develop



Taken from VMA Group. Financial Services Survey, September 2011

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Matt Hotson
(Director, Investor Relations
& Group Communications)
Institution: Cable & Wireless
Start: January 5, 2012



GB: Cable & Wireless appoint IR and communications head

Global telecommunications company Cable & Wireless Worldwide has appointed MATT HOTSON as director investor relations and group communications. Hotson joins from multinational financial services company Legal & General where he was most recently the group director of investor relations and strategy.



Caroline Kamerbeek
(Director, Corporate
Marketing & Communications)
Institution: KEMA
Start: January 4, 2012



NL: Caroline Kamerbeek communicates for KEMA

CAROLINE KAMERBEEK has joined KEMA, the independent energy authority, as director corporate marketing and communications. In her new function, Kamerbeek will further build the global KEMA brand and reputation and shape the global integrated marketing and communication policy to support the strategic and operational growth objectives of KEMA. Kamerbeek has more than 20 years experience in strategic marketing and communication.



Francesco Delzio
(Director, External Relations,
Institutional Affairs and Marketing)
Institution: Autostrada per l'Italia
Start: January 4, 2012



IT: Senior role for Francesco Delzio at Autostrada

FRANCESCO DELZIO has been appointed director of external relations, institutional affairs and marketing at Autostrada per l'Italia, Italy's concessionaire for toll motorway construction and management, and for related transport services. Delzio joins from the Piaggio Group where in the last three years he has served as director of institutional affairs and external relations.

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EVENTS



18 - 19.01.2012 Qualitative Online 360°

This event will bring together senior level corporate insights executives, market researchers and academics to discuss cutting-edge qualitative research techniques and how they can be used effectively to deliver actionable insights for brands.

► Merliern Institute, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan

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25.01.2012 Beyond Enterprise 2.0

Previous Communication Director contributor Valerie Perruchot Garcia (left), director internal communications at ACXA Group, will be among the speakers at this summit that will look at key issues for maximising internal communications through social media.

► KGS, Dorint Hotel, Amsterdam Airport

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25 - 27.01.2012 PR the Media & the Judiciary: Media Relations for Courts, Magistrates and Lawyers

This event will bring together senior level corporate insights executives, market researchers and academics to discuss cutting-edge qualitative research techniques and how they

► European Institute of Public Administration, Luxembourg

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01 - 02.02.2012 4th Annual Employee Engagement

Speakers from Unilever, Google, Coca-Cola, Panasonic and many more will participate in this two-day conference on the importance of employee engagement in giving your business a competitive edge.

► TENEO Events, Hotel Condes, Barcelona

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