

## Getting your message across

By Linda Julian

When confronted with complex, detailed information, it's frequently necessary to simplify in order to communicate effectively.

Whether in a proposal, tender, or at a presentation, clear and simple information will make far more impact.

Here are some tips and techniques which you will find work well to simplify complex information and convey your meaning unmistakably.

### Flowcharts

High level, simplified and generalised representations of complex and detailed processes not only help you get your message across, but also position you as an expert who sees not just the trees, but the forest.

### Diagrams

A simplified, diagrammatic representation of an issue or problem is a great technique to get the message across.

Pie charts, quadrants, Venn diagrams, and so on - each is a really useful way of extracting important concepts from the detail, and presenting information in a way people will understand. Plus, diagrams offer more visual interest than slabs of text !

### Graphs and charts

These are great ways to simplify numeric data - visual representations help your audience to take aboard the meaning rather than becoming lost in the data.

### De-clutter figures

Clean up and get focus on your message by reducing complexity: eliminate unmeaningful decimals, currency symbols, round numbers, calibrate columns into \$ or '000s rather than presenting cluttered complexity.

By reducing the complex to simple and minimising visual "junk", you will be vastly more effective in getting your message across.

Your quest is to reduce the number of characters your audience has to process to extract meaning.

### Simplify PowerPoint slides

Reduce the verbiage and keep text to a minimum. Use 10 to 40 words and maximum of eight lines as a guide.

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### **Make it client-centric !**

Whether proposing, writing an executive summary, presenting, pitching, or simply trying to persuade a prospective client to entrust you with their work, you will present a much more compelling argument if you make it "client-centric" rather than "your firm-centric".

### **Make the client to subject**

Rather than boasting about what you do, and rather than talking about your firm, try to frame your message to make the client or prospective client the subject in relation to your firm.

### **Turn it into client-centric communication**

Rather than writing about yourself in terms of "we have twenty lawyers ..." try the more effective approach of "you, client x, will have access to a team of twenty experienced lawyers, each of whom knows your industry".

Rather than saying "our legal team will be headed by Kim Smith" it's better to say "the client x legal team will be led by Kim Smith" or "your legal service team will be led by ...".

### **Imbue your pitch with benefits**

Better than simply claiming "we have great expertise" say "you will benefit from our expertise in these ways...".

### **Show your commitment and what you promise**

Rather than the general claim that "we keep up-to-date with all developments in the field" it's far more persuasive to say "you, client x, can depend upon us to keep fully up-to-date with all developments in the field".

This "client-centric" approach, rather than "your firm-centred" approach, you will be far more persuasive, have greater impact, and is much more likely to succeed.

### **Plain English - what is it to clients ?**

We've all heard lots about the importance of writing in plain English. However, to a client, what matters is modern business communication.

Plain English and business language is not:

- oversimplification of the language
- a patronising tone
- about banning new words or eliminating all long words
- necessarily easy !

Plain business English uses modern language and communication techniques, characterised by:

- shorter sentences
- more active verbs rather than passive expression
- using "I" and "we" rather than the third person
- easily understood words
- eliminating useless or superfluous words
- reducing nominalisations (e.g. "we discussed ..." and not "we had a discussion ...", "the Board decided ..." and not "a decision was taken by the Board")
- emphasising the positive.

### **Why do it ?**

- it's faster to write (once you know what you're doing)
- faster to read
- your message is understood more often, more easily and in a friendlier way
- you will sound like the professional a client will want to hire.

It's worth taking a look at your firm's client communications, and putting them to these tests.

Getting your message across effectively will make you much more attractive to clients of choice.