

Charisma will be appearing on a multimedia screen near you soon

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Charismatic lecturers who eschew technology should take heart. Will Hutton's talk based on his book, *The State We're In*, was warmly received by a combined education and business audience at the Toshiba Seminar, Making IT Work, at the Royal Lancaster at the end of February. Unassisted by charts, diagrams and illustrations he engaged his audience in a fluent debate about the economic state of the nation. Not a promising subject for most speakers, but audience comments included 'brilliant', 'thought provoking, entertaining and visionary', 'interesting and provocative', 'a genuine critique'.

How did Will Hutton, a journalist no less, achieve this 'marriage of minds' between audience and speaker? He gave a multimedia performance of course without taking refuge in the lecturing technology that Toshiba offered- no screen bullet points, no notes, no handouts. But, a passionate author and a born wordsmith, he wove throughout his text, the linguistic metaphors and images that a mature and educated audience value.

Unlike Will Hutton, few lecturers would proceed these days without overheads, photocopied illustrations, graphs and notes. Charismatic performances are not easy to reproduce to order every day. Research in progress also indicates that this growing process of exemplification is rather more than just slipping in a few pictures. Professor Gunther Kress at the Institute of Education, London discusses the shift in communication towards visual forms which he sees as a fundamental challenge to the hitherto unchallenged centrality of written language. For example when illustrations were first introduced into 'A' Level science text books in the thirties they were additional to the text. Progressively the illustrations have become explanations in themselves, unaccompanied by written commentary.

Anthea Pinnington, an editor from Dorling Kindersley is approaching these features of multimedia communication from the visual angle and calls the same phenomenon lexigraphics.

Whilst Gunther Kress is looking at the links between text and illustration in teaching, his colleague, Margaret Meek, has been exploring the value of CD-ROM. She concludes most factual information is better understood in the form of animated models, sound, graphics and high resolution colour photographs than in written text alone. The opportunities for interaction with the data are also important in learning.

A CD-ROM has defined limits. The impact of widely accessible multimedia resources from the onconfined Internet will increase the shifts in modes of communication. Multimedia surfing demands sophisticated navigation techniques to identify where good learning resources might be. The learner will also need high level language skills to sort information from data if textual material are retrieved. An understanding of Boolean logic is essential if an initial hits are to be refined and reduced to a manageable number.

Young children, unconstrained by the linearity of current education, seem not only to be able to retrieve information stored in multimedia form but to create it as well. For

example, the 1995 multimedia essay prize was won by a team of six year olds in the NCET National Multimedia Interactive Awards. They had an intuitive understanding of the hypermedia connections that characterise the best multimedia compositions – connections that more closely resemble the free flow of human ideas in the mind than books do. One of the key to their success is the use of graphics and pictures as narrative. (see illustration – You can get the free CD-ROM from NCET 01203 416994)

Using pictures as an essay stimulus was still quite avant garde twenty years ago in GCSE English exams. The curriculum boundaries have been firmly fixed to divide picture from words – whenever were secondary children encouraged to illustrate their prose and poetry? Only desktop publishing has made this a more common practice. As for sound or animation, using the multimedia aspects of real life is still suspect in the classroom. It is because of the heavy emphasis on text in their won education that many lecturers find it hard to do more than add a picture here and there by way of light relief.

What do you need to start?

A holistic approach to communication is demanded by multimedia software tools. The exploration of these a new presentation environments might be helpful as they are so useful in preparing lectures as well as providing an opportunity to experiment with integrated picture, words, sound and animation. Software that is easy to use includes: Microsoft PowerPoint, Claris Impact and Adobe Persuasion. Simple cutting and pasting techniques are all that is required.

I can import word-processed and desktop published text as well as pictures, clip art and video clips. I use a scanner for my own photos and images. Bullet points can be timed and graduated. My talks are stored in PowerPoint files, just as my papers are stored in PageMaker files.

I find the framework templates increasingly useful as a means of marshalling my thoughts. Screens are smaller than overheads and they provide a discipline I have come to rely on. At a basic level well designed overheads can be printed. Customising my talk for local conditions is easy when I carry my mobile PC. As long as the organisers on site can provide me with a connection from my mobile computer to a large screen I do not need overheads. My presentation will be in colour and if a printer is available I can supply quality handouts on the spot. Several screen layouts are available. I have also used my internal modem to print out on the hotel fax. The mobile computer means the teaching material are more adaptable than slides.

A mobile computer is useful because most of my presentations now contain video snippets, pictures and graphics which take too much space for one floppy. However, an edited presentation fits a floppy easily. Microsoft PowerPoint also provides a Viewer so that the speaker does not have to carry the full software package. The Viewer will not allow alterations, but this inconvenience is more than offset by the advantage of having your presentation in your pocket. PowerPoint presentations will also work on Apple or PC hardware.

Travelling abroad is rarely a problem as most universities now have standard applications and appropriate connections on screens. Last year at the World Conference of Computing in Education in the new Conference Centre at Birmingham all 3,000 academic delegates

were sent a copy of PowerPoint and expected to use it. This will probably become a growing practice since it reduces the organisational headaches for conference organisers. Business speakers now carry a cased crystal display screen as well. The prices are coming down.

Macromind Director is the professional tool used for the Toshiba seminars. Results can be stunning in the hands of a professional media agency. I also know a class of ten year olds in Wickham Market, Suffolk who use Timbuktu, a screen sharing facility, to create collaborative multimedia essays with a school in Wales. HyperCard for the Apple and Toolbook for PC were the original authoring packages for multimedia production but there are now several packages used by children and adults alike. One of the easiest to use is Hyperstudio which is distributed by TAG.

Learning institutions keen on developing presentational skills are resourcing a studio and supplying technicians to help create staff and students' multimedia stacks during sessions. Not only does this introduce the whole institution to high level IT skills, but promotes thinking about effective teaching and learning methodology. For example, Halton Community College in Cheshire has already has impressive facilities that includes 20 PCs, a scanner, a CD Tower and a CD writer. Resource centres will already have some of the kit for implementing multimedia authorship:

- A fast desktop computer
- Large high resolution monitor
- Good colour printer
- Ample disc space and RAM
- A CD-ROM drive
- A sound card, speakers and a microphones
- A flat bed scanner and software for image and text
- An integrated software package like Claris or Microsoft Works
- Authoring software like PowerPoint, Director or Hyperstudio
- A colour digital stills camera
- Video camera and editing facilities
- Video capture hardware
- A CD recorder unit
- Quad sound speaker
- Video compression MPEG hardware.

But wait until next Christmas to buy – Howard Seabrook, Toshiba's marketing programme and planning manager, explained at the seminar the storage capacity of the Super Density Digital Video Disc (SDDVD) which will increase the use of multimedia facilities in homes exponentially. SDDVD is a low cost standard agreed by all the main commercial players. Sound and picture quality will be greatly enhanced and the double thickness CD-ROM size disc will hold a full feature film with eight spoken soundtracks and subtitles in 32 languages or the contents of twenty seven old CD ROMs. Cross platform products will be in the shops by the end of the year...meanwhile keep chalking.

In my years of lecturing, my theatrical training was my most effective presentation aid in school. Not only could I add cadences of excitement where there was little of true value, but I could transfix the somnolent student with a piercing tone that ricocheted from head to toe at the decibels of a dog whistle. Later, while directing educational videos, mine was the voice that penetrated the sound-proof booth and landed on the sound track. This facility to speak loudly in public compensated for my chalk board technique. My handwriting was poor enough on the flat, never mind on vertical slope. I was better with a white board, though my arm still ached on the tilt.

Visuals and animation as teaching aids are not new. Thirty years ago, I achieved a distinction in audio visual aids proficiency allowing me to use tape recorders, video cameras, record players, slide and film projects. As young teachers our hopes for these multimedia devices were as high as our predecessors expectations of the mechanical magic lantern. But there were far more pitfalls in using these electronic tools. There was an inevitable time lag whilst I moved from one device to another or decided who could be relied upon to return with a projector bulb or an extension lead. I avoided dependence on these presentation modes. Posters and illustrated text books were more trustworthy.

We need to return, however, to Will Hutton's well honed traditional presentational skills. Good multimedia packages and powerful kit will help to create a slick screen but this will not make up for a merely adequate presentation from the speaker, nor for better designed bullet points. This is still one dimensional overhead projector thinking.

It can even be harder to deliver well using one of these packages. Frequently the screen projection requires that the hall is dark and the speaker loses eye contact with the audience. Autocue at the Toshiba conference indicated that technology can free the speaker from physical restraint, although finely tuned speakers meant that the presenter was not encourage to move from the lectern.

More importantly most of the maturely educated and practised speakers from industry and education read a speech accompanied by bullet points that appeared on the screen. Not only did this method not use the fluency of oral prose but it also negated the power of the medium. Information-rich imagery on the screen should be a catalyst for eloquent rhetoric from the platform. A bullet-point style of presentation simply ducks the artistic question.

As I worked on my own multimedia presentation I realised that I was not drawing on my academic writing ability, but my experience as a film and theatre director.

Having a professional designer was like having a set designer and sound engineer in one. Timing was important. I phased my bullet points to appear at the most dramatic cadence and punctuated them with a gesture. I could trace down a map of Chile, hot buttons showing pictures of desert, lake district and Antarctica as I passed the appropriate regions. I could click and point on the colourful software interface a Chilean teacher or student sees when they log on- the village square- a visual metaphor for network communication. I could show how the user clicks to visit the museum, the post office and the cultural centre whilst on the telephone linked to other towns all over the country. Snaps of the remote villages I had visited, scanned onto the screen, included a view of a playground on a mountain where the Mapuche totem pole stood next to a microwave aerial. Part of my talk was about the teachers who had won a Toshiba notebook at

Tolworth school in Surrey, so the insertion of a videoed interview with two scholars was particularly appropriate since they could not attend the seminar themselves. A video conference which was feasible might have been more lively however.

Lastly another layer of visual control. My project, Miranda, already has an art nouveau house style which encouraged the designer to personalise my screens with stylised roses in a Rennie Mackintosh pink. There will still be some academics who found this approach not quite cerebral enough ... is the communication through pictures less intense and profound or have we simply not been taught to value this form of reaching out to our fellows?

Shakespeare had the right approach to multimedia. Use words where you do not have scenery or pictures. Stick to good acting where you can find it. If your lectures are anywhere in-between most of the time then multimedia presentation might just be what you are looking for. You will need multi-talented trainer to explain the rudiments – or a six year-old at a loose end.