

# NlightN Multimedia -

## A Real World View



### eCommunication: making it work

### Part 2 – get the message right

Step 1 in the process of developing eCommunication is to work out exactly what it is you want to say.

Sounds obvious doesn't it? But so much eCommunication fails because the message is garbled. Without a solid, clear message underlying the communication, you don't stand a chance.

The key to getting the message right is to strictly limit the number of distinct points you're making. The fewer the number of points, the better chance you have of getting them across effectively.

For example; let's imagine you want to send out an eCommunication with the aim of raising awareness about an event. This might be a corporate event, a charity event or whatever. Clearly the key information you want to get across is the date and location. The communication may also be about persuading people to attend the event: indeed, if it isn't, then it might as well be sent by email or letter.



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So, anything that doesn't contribute to persuading people to attend or making it as simple as possible to enable them to attend shouldn't be included.

Again, it sounds obvious but so often, eCommunicators feel the need to fill up the space. If you are communicating, you must have a message. Get their attention, communicate your message, get out. That's it. Nothing more.

For example, if you were a charity sending CDROMs or using an online presentation to attract people to attend sponsored events, the aim would be to start the presentation with something to grab their attention. An example would be a video of last year's events with vox-pops of attendees. Alternatively, it could be an animation or a pictorial description of how the charity helps. Next, the presentation would tell them why their contribution is needed and how they can help. This is the message: say nothing else. Finally, thank them for their time and close down. You can then give optional links to more information but, by putting the viewer in control, you are ensuring that those that do click for information, are doing so because they really want to hear what you have to say.

### Elearning and CBT

With elearning and CBT, the maxim "less is more" is even more important. Unfortunately, most elearning and CBT is exactly the opposite.

Let's take an example. You have an application to train: let's imagine it's a word processor. Most CBT will train by going through the application in minute detail menu by menu, dialog by dialog. This isn't CBT, it's HELP. The best CBT will be split into sections that relate to real-life tasks. So, in the case of a word processor, whereas the traditional approach would tour the interface, show you the file-open dialog and then the file-new dialog etc, the minimalist approach would have "Create a report or letter" as a menu item.

Again, it seems very obvious and simple doesn't it? And yet hardly anyone does it! Using this minimalist approach has a number of advantages:

- It means that everything the trainee does is relevant to them and their job. This means that they will be paying much more attention and be more motivated.
- It makes the training MUCH shorter. This is good news all round: it costs less to create, has zero wasted time and trainees are much more likely to reuse it to refresh their memories.

I can't tell you how important this is. Imagine the millions of hours that must be wasted each year studying CBT that is largely irrelevant, boring, inefficient and

demotivating. Focused, targeted, elearning and CBT is amongst the most effective forms of learning available today and will become increasingly important over time. Sadly, very little elearning falls into this category.

### The Medium IS the Message

Bear in mind that the message you're seeking to communicate is as influenced by the WAY it is delivered as by WHAT it says. When you overtake a van whose company logo is a piece of recognised clip-art, how does that influence how you feel about the company? It's byline might be "Quality Installations" but your subconscious impression of the company may be that it's amateurish because of the presence of that clip-art.

The same applies to e-communication. Let's look at a few examples of choices that might undermine your message:

1. **Clip-art:** you didn't expect me to let that one lie did you? If you must use clip-art, it should be high-quality art from an online provider such as clipart.com that has a unifying theme. In other words, all the art should look as though it has been created by the same artist.
2. **Packaging:** however your message is delivered whether that's paper, CDROM or on the internet, you need to pay attention to the first impression your work creates. If it's paper or the internet, pick a simple, professional layout: either get a designer to lay it out for your or adapt a design you like. If it's CDROM, make sure the design for the label is of high quality or that you use a simple, black on silver approach using a CD labeller. Remember, if you get this wrong, your audience is unlikely to even get to the message itself!
3. **Sound:** only use professionally recorded narrations. You should almost always use a professional voiceover artist: the only exception to this is where the message would benefit by being delivered by an expert. For example, a message from the chairman should be voiced by the chairman. Similarly, a software walkthrough may use the voice of an expert in the software, although this only really applies to technical software; if you're training Word, for example, then a professional voiceover is by far the best choice.
4. **Fonts:** stick to no more than a couple of fonts throughout your communication. For example, one font for headings, one for body copy. Traditionally, a sans-serif font (such as this one) is used for headings, and a serified font (such as Times New Roman, heaven forbid) is used for body copy. However, for a modern

look, choose sans-serif. Avoid Arial and Times New Roman: neither are particularly stylish and both are as common as muck! NEVER use Comic Sans; it screams “amateur” from the rooftops.

5. **Colour:** as with fonts, with colour follow the maxim “less is more”. Background colours should be muted and all colours should work together. Colour theory is a subject in itself but you can create a palette of colours quite simply by bringing up the colour picker from any application and choose different colours but keeping the Saturation level the same. These colours will work together.
6. **Spelling and grammar:** Don't rely on your word processor's spell check. If your message is important, check and re-check your copy for spelling mistakes. Similarly, work hard on your grammar. A split infinitive doesn't matter (Star Trek's “to boldly go” is the best example: it “should” be “to go boldly”) and only a pedant would feel that your copy suffered by this. However, enough people do know how apostrophe's work to ensure that a significant proportion of your audience will notice if you don't ! In brief, apostrophes are only used to indicate that one thing belongs to another or to indicate missing letters. So, John's iPod is correct. The only thing to remember is that it's is short for it is and doesn't indicate ownership. If it owned an iPod, you would say its ipod. If you said it's ipod you'd be saying it is iPod. The main thing is not to add apostrophes unnecessarily: that's the main giveaway. Lots of people, including “professional” sign-writers, add apostrophes to words that end in vowels. So, you'll see video's, tomatoe's and apostrophe's when, in fact, none of these should have an apostrophe. If in doubt, leave it out! Read Lynne Truss's “Eats Shoots & Leaves” for an entertaining and short guide to writing english.

**COMING UP IN PART 3:** *The cost of getting it wrong*