

NlightN Multimedia -

A Real World View



eCommunication: making it work

Part 5 – The quality question

Quality is paramount with eCommunication and it's a theme I'll return to time and time again. Quality influences how well the message is communicated but, most importantly, it influences the perception your audience has of the message.

A poor quality eCommunication product sends a message that can seriously undermine the intended point of the communication. All eCommunication is important (or why bother?) so ALL eCommunication must be of high quality. If you want your audience to believe in your message then demonstrate your belief in it by delivering it using high quality materials and design.

It's important to understand that high quality does NOT mean high cost. A low-cost minimalist design can be of much higher quality than a high cost full colour explosion!



Kevin Partner writes a regular bi-monthly column for **PCPro** (www.pcpro.co.uk), the UK's leading IT magazine and is an expert in eCommunication in all its forms. He's worked in the field since 1989, has seen fads and technologies come and go but the fundamentals of good practice remain the same.

You need to think about quality in terms of:

- design
- build quality
- production values (eg audio, video and graphics)

Design

Design includes everything from the packaging to the eCommunication itself. The impression that you need to give to your audience needs to be of professionalism because your audience will then, subconsciously, value the eCommunication since you valued it enough to have it done professionally. Whether or not you actually use a professional designer depends on the nature of the product itself: normally I would recommend doing so as poor design is immediately evident and undermines the entire production.

Whether or not you use a designer, you can save money and time by looking at eCommunication that you like and basing the new design (or brief) on that. For example, if you're developing a web-based presentation, then take a look at other presentations that you like from across the world and adapt that design to your own purposes. In the case of CDROM, again, look at good quality CDROMs and see how they handle issues such as screen layout, features and navigation. Even if you do use a professional, this can save a lot of time by improving the brief to them and giving them a better chance of getting it right first time.

Design also includes the packaging of your eCommunication. Don't let yourself down by scrimping here: this is the first thing your intended audience sees and has a vital role in getting them to view your communication or at least to motivate them.

Build Quality

Every physical element in your communication whether that's a CD inner, leaflet or covering letter, needs to have the feel of quality. This is what I mean by Build Quality : design is what the user sees, build quality is what they feel. Paper should be of a good weight, not flimsy; CDs should be printed on their surface and glossy; every component should be of good quality and unlikely to fall apart in the hand.

Production Values

This relates primarily to the quality of the graphics, audio and video resources. If you're going to use any of these, make sure they're of high quality. Obviously there will be slight compromises to be made if you're presenting on the web but your users will allow for this. The maxim "rubbish in rubbish out" applies here: even if the video is going to end up on the web, it must be shot professionally because this will still produce a far better end result than a hand-held camcorder.

If you are including audio (and you nearly always should), it must be professionally recorded: it's unlikely to be as expensive as you'd expect. Again, whilst the end results will be compressed for internet delivery, having a high quality original recording will result in a higher quality compressed version.

Graphics should either be custom-drawn by an artist (not expensive) or, at a pinch, drawn from a good quality clipart library with a unified theme.

Video must be shot professionally. It is relatively expensive but can add hugely to the impact of a message. Whilst the technical side of shooting a video is not as difficult as it once was, you still need to understand how to effectively light and film a video in order to get good results. Simply buying a piano doesn't make you a pianist!

COMING UP IN PART 6: *Relevance*