



# Multimedia Communications

## The pitfalls and potential

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### Synopsis

How to communicate effectively via a computer screen.

Communication is a vital part of every business, for selling, training and support etc. Multimedia software provides another way of communicating that can bring significant advantages.

This report is intended to show how to achieve the potential without suffering the pitfalls.

## Background to Engineering Adventures

We started our first multimedia CD-ROM in 1995 and worked closely with two of Europe's leading CD-ROM developers. This provided the opportunity of working with an educational psychologist who specialised in multimedia learning and we gained access to the results from the research carried out by the educational games industry and others.

We now produce websites and CD-ROMs for retail and business customers. Our target market is for specialist engineering training programs but our design capabilities allow us to cover the whole range of websites and CDs.

We have lived through the boom and bust of the early CD-Rom and .com industry and learnt from the successes and failures of the many ways people have tried to communicate to others using computers.

## Comparing two different approaches

### **Games Industry Approach**

Children's games have had the most money, research, testing and development. Now said to be worth more than the film industry.

They have stayed with CDs and concentrated on 3D graphics, speed, sound, power and generally all now use simulations of some kind.

WHY. Because initial 'talking books' were not liked by children or educationalists. They need to offer more for kids to buy them. We know they work because most young children have played maths and English games, often for long periods and with their friends.

### **Business Training/eLearning Approach**

Business eLearning has mostly followed the browser based model with a strong push to go online and using LMS. I personally have yet to see a really good business training program although we are now just starting to produce web based training because the new international IMS standards have been agreed.

There has been a major shake up with the major eLearning suppliers recently with many losing large sums of money.

## How to communicate effectively

### What works in real life works on a PC

Books are the fountain of all knowledge but reading a book is not the best way to learn.

Most websites for example simply display text and pictures are probably less easy to use than a book.

A presentation will be much better with someone talking to you.

Adding sound to a program makes it much easier to use.

Experiments, tests or exercises have always been the best way for trainers to get their message across

Simulations of real situations or interactive decision-making work best on a computer

Generally the 'old schoolmaster's' dictate

I see - I forget

I hear - I remember

I do - I understand

Like its human equivalent there are lots of features that will make your software perform more like a professional salesman than a garage attendant but unless you implement sound and simulation your software will never be really effective.

## Can eCommunication ever be as good as the real thing?

NEVER. But it can be quicker, cheaper, and much easier to administer and this will allow you to gain benefits such as increased training that were never possible before.

At its best multimedia software has saved lives. Flight simulators can teach 1000s to fly for £30 instead of one pilot at £100,000.

It would be ideal to have your top sales person and technician available 24 hours a day for every customer, but not possible. However, program Lara Croft with their knowledge and give her a simulation of your product and you can almost achieve this.

She recognises every visitor and remembers their previous enquiries.

She speaks 10 languages and is always friendly and enthusiastic.

She is programmed to respond with the experience of your top sale person and best engineer.

She will investigate the needs of each potential customer and demonstrate your product's capabilities with a working simulation.

Within seconds she can have a report of your visit on the MD's desk.

This is all possible with today's technology and will be commonplace one day.

## Additional ways to improve communication

### 1. Operation and Navigation

Everyone uses a computer differently, no particular way is correct.

Windows works because people can configure it to suit their needs.  
Software should be designed so that it can be used in different ways by different users.

Follow the accepted standards that everyone knows. Websites are the newspapers of IT

Top or side menu buttons on a web site + tape style buttons.

New users will need to be guided through basic information while experienced users must be able to move quickly to wherever they require.

For example, cut videos into small clips so that people can quickly navigate to the point they require.

PowerPoint works for presentations but as a one to one training it will nearly always work at the wrong speed for that user's ability.

### 2. The content is the most important part

Make sure the subject experts write and control the content. Don't leave it to a softie.

Storing information in external files will allow the content to be changed or updated by the subject expert.

### 3. Good Content Design

Storybooks didn't work because they simply presented information in a different way.

Avoid wasting money with elaborate ways of presenting information.  
People usually prefer a book.

Flash animations or artistic designs may impress or entertain but they will probably detract from the purpose of the program.

For example if you wish to highlight a benefit of your product but have a moving logo in another corner, the viewer's eyes will move to this. Only emphasise the parts you wish to highlight.

Keep similar text in the same location.

People do not want to spend time looking for information that is located in different areas around the screen.

### 4. Software Formats

Good multimedia is possible on every Y2K compliant machines and C++ based programs can work on every computer without the need to install special drivers.

If you are trying to sell something the software must work instantly or it will just be thrown away. Not everyone is computer literate so the latest software standards can only be used if people really want to see what you have produced.

The Internet (pre-broadband) was too slow to do very much and Browser based technologies generally cost 10 times as much to get 1/10 of the program quality.

eCommunication software support does not tend to cost anything, if it does not work people just go elsewhere.

## 5. Software Delivery

Design the best content and build a resource of many different eCommunication applications; distribute everything by CD-ROM; deliver what you can over the Net.

No one method of delivery will suit everyone so just make sure you can deliver the best information in the format they require.

## Implementation of eCommunication into Business

### Initial adoption has been slow and problematic

The approach is often “we need a website, we are big company so we should spend a lot”.

Political rather than practical results in an expensive copy of a glossy brochure.

eCommunication projects must be cost effective.

## eVersions of existing communication methods

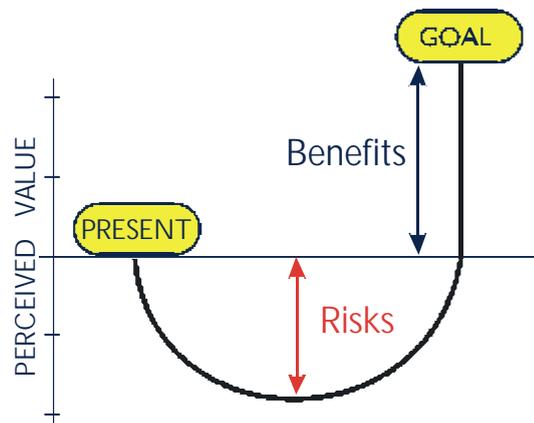
### A. Identify your mission critical communication paths

Good communication is a vital part of every business. Often around 80% of employees' time is spent on communication with suppliers, customers or other staff. Saving or improving 5% should have a significant effect on the bottom line.

### B. eSelling – Selling Robots

Sales are directly related to:

- How many people know your products exist.
- How well people understand the benefits, USPs.
- How well you support your customers.



The risk of change may stop people switching to your products.

Good sales people (and software) should listen and ask questions.

**Interactive communication can be two-way, vital for understanding what your customer wants.**

### C. eLearning, Training and support

Many benefits can be gained from eLearning and companies should simply produce eVersions of what they currently do, or would like to do.

Advantages are that:-

It costs no more to give to everyone.

Can be used at any time of day or night.

Just in time training, when you need it not when you've forgotten it.

Training screensavers repeatedly drip feed information to 'brainwash'.

### D. Cost Savings

eBusiness saves money

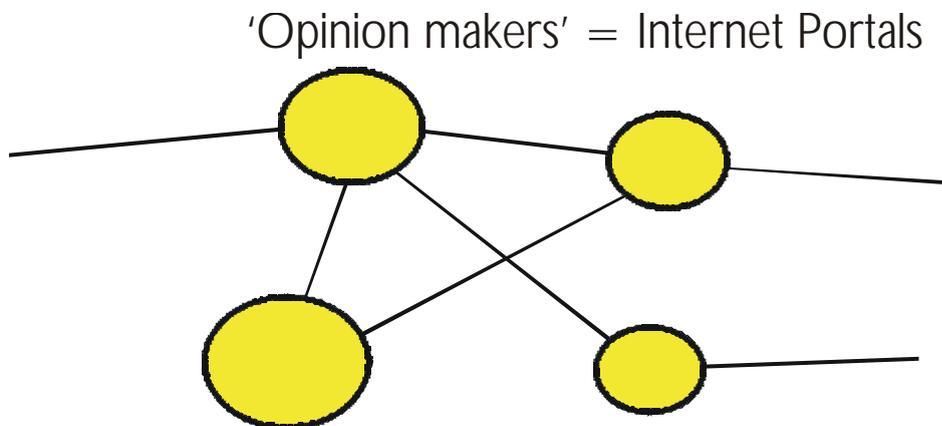
**Electronic distribution is much cheaper and faster than paper methods.**

eCommunication may not be as good as the real thing but because it is so much cheaper it may allow you to do things that budgets would not previously allow.

### E. Networking within your market sector

Traditional networking is one of the most effective marketing tools.

**The Internet replicates this communication techniques structure but operates at a much faster speed.**



### F. The salesman's mantra

Attention - interest - desire - action

Is the first hymn in the every salesman's bible. However, 'attention' is probably the most important and this function cannot be achieved by a website.

**Viral marketing tools are good way of gaining attention**

## G. Brand Awareness

Try to get your logo onto the desktop of your target market user's computers.

Screensavers, calculators or training applications are always good examples.

## H. Market research

Use your website stats to research what your customers are interested in.

## Disaster Scenarios

Great looking, expensive programs that simply present information and are worse than a book.

Programs that contain information that you cannot change and is soon out of date.

Including so much information that you spend all of your time updating it.

Programs that cost more money than you save/make.

LMS systems that cost £100000 and could be replaced by a part time secretary.

### Security

Don't make a free resource for competitors or suppliers.

Be aware of liability risks. Always keep copies of old sites.

## Summary

Great potential still to come. Look what games technology has to offer.

Look at how your business communicates at present and simply make an electronic version of this. Build a library of eCommunication tools for each area.

If you're simply presenting information then make sure it costs less than paper.

Add lots of sound to make it pleasant to use and build in interactivity if you want to ensure you get the message across.