

The Indispensable Power of Great Writing



*How compelling stories
can capture the elusive 2%*

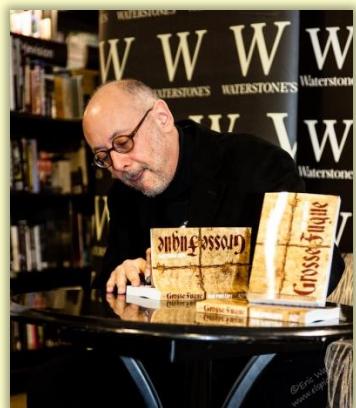
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“Who are the 2%?”

We're inundated by messages. One board member of a global client reckoned that his people engaged with just two percent of what they receive. *Two percent!* So the demand on everyone's lips? “Get me into that two percent!”

How? Commit absolutely to ensuring your stories take flight, all the way to the minds and hearts of those you wish to influence, inform and inspire.

So we find our short-sighted, balding writer hunched over some raw data, the words of the client ringing in his ears. “A speech.” “A website.” “A think-piece.”



His heart leaps. All that complexity needing to be unravelled. And then the frisson of finding a narrative stream and the right words.

In these few short pages, you can take a quick trip through a selection of media, clients and subjects. It should prove diverting and informative. But, above all, it will hopefully leave you energised by the prospect of having the power of great writing at your side.

“How can we change the world?”

What should Europe's most influential business leaders do when they fear for the competitive future of their continent?

The first thing they realise: this is not a battle to be undertaken alone. There is strength in numbers. Emulating King Arthur,

they gather at a round table which they call, with understandable pragmatism and an absence of romance, the European Round Table of Industrialists.


“Energizing a Continent –
How Competitiveness Will Drive
Europe’s Future”

A Lecture to be given by its individual members
2011-2012

And they know that the more urgent a message, the more the voice must ring with authority and the language with clarity.

A lecture, rooted in robust thinking, supported by solid research and leavened by engaging slides, gathers together the strands of the message they must send to the leaders of today and tomorrow: Act now to make Europe competitive, before it is too late.

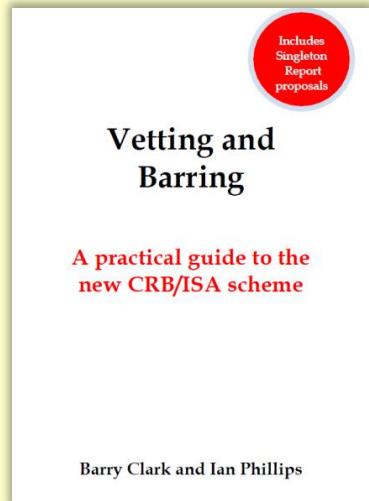
“What the hell does *that* mean?”

Phones were ringing off the hook. A new law was approaching and no-one understood it. “What can I do?” bemoaned a small (business size, not stature) client. “I get the gist but need to spend hours explaining it.” “Time for a book.”

Speedily, statutes and government explanations were pored over and the architecture of a narrative emerged.

All those years of editing law books rushed from deep background to the fore. Inaccessible legalese was turned into a text that laypeople, profoundly affected by a major new regulatory system, could – at last – begin to understand. Inconsistencies and uncertainties were exposed and dangers sign-posted so that the full impact could be grasped.

Not long after, a new government scrapped the whole scheme! But at least, for a while, some worried brows were soothed.



“Can we speak to them without effing swearing?”

Exactly how do you seize – and hold – the attention of an audience which is young and impatient, used to quick-fire messages and with a penchant for earthy language?

“Er, we know”, suggested the trade union for professional soccer players.



“A 20-minute video that tells them all they should know about all that we do.”

“We don’t think so” came our reply. It has to be short and sharp, with immediate, unambiguous impact.

To a soundtrack pounding out Prokofiev’s Dance of the Knights, a montage of dramatic photos was captioned to capture the strands of their service, all of it compressed into one compelling minute.

And our new positioning line encapsulated the union’s relationship with its members, their families and representatives. They were over the moon.

“How do we simplify our simplification?”

C ue double-take. “You what?” “We have this very complex business excellence model. Our new simplicity culture means it’s sort of being de-cluttered and made more user-friendly - possibly. Now we need to tell people – simply.”

The key question? “What does success look like?” It turned out that they needed a clear and clean articulation of a hierarchy of disciplines, along with the leadership’s reaffirmation of the function’s importance.

Interviews with the top two tiers of global management elicited varying attitudes towards the model and scepticism about the likelihood of a successful ‘stripping-down’.

The resulting brochure was a thing of elegant simplicity. It focused on the idea of vision, using pictures of just the eyes of company leaders. A personal statement and commitment to broad targets reinforced their individual ownership of specific areas of responsibility. Simple, eh?



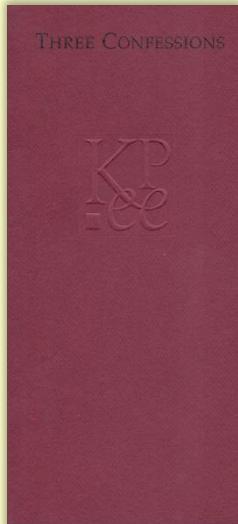
Visions of excellence

Bringing “sense and simplicity” closer – a new approach to Philips Business Excellence

PHILIPS

"People don't get our offer. What can we do?"

When you're working in a sector where vanilla is the norm, it can be difficult to get people to try tutti-frutti. Barriers to acceptance revolve around the dangers of breaking free from the common herd. This creative events boutique needed to punch above its weight and lead the rest.



The quest for engagement took the form of an enticing, tactile brochure, with textured cover, raised lettering and translucent end-papers. Idiosyncratic typography and a gentle narrative built round a concept of confessing to the truth of what the business offers took readers through a voyage of discovery. Even the response mechanism allowed prospects to 'confess' their past 'event crimes'.

Complementing the essential creativity of the business, *Three Confessions* raised not only the profile of the company but, equally (if not more) importantly, the self-esteem and confidence of those who worked in it. And so it was proved that confession is good for the soul.

"What must we do to punch above our weight?"

It's a small but important (and not very tech-savvy) organisation representing specialist state-funded colleges. In an era of budget cuts, increased competition and political volatility, the website had to reflect both the breadth of services and the climate in which the association operates.

As well as being the public face of the operation, the site also had to support members, council and committees with separate, secure sections. For resource and pragmatic reasons, it had to be easy to manage, change and grow.

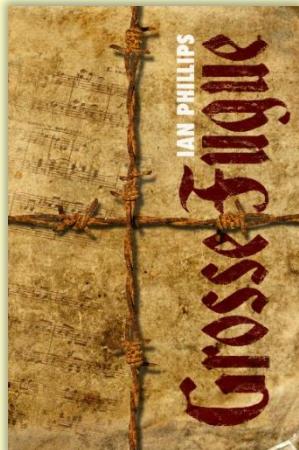
Creating the architecture and content required painstaking attention to detail; after all, these were educators being identified with the colleges they led.

The site had to be easy to navigate and deliver its messages both simply and compellingly. Built on a universally-used content management system, it was supported by experienced web professionals who could be turned on and off like a tap. The first law of great consultancy had been achieved: ensure your client is independent of you.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum website. The header features the logo 'sixthform collegesforum' with the tagline 'Leading a dynamic, successful sector'. Below the header, there are navigation links for Home, About Us, Services, Publications, Events, Council, Committees, Network Groups, Links, and SFC Finder. A search bar is also present. The main content area has a banner with three students. Below the banner, there are two columns: 'Welcome to the Sixth Form Colleges' Forum' and 'SFCF's Sixth Sense Report'. The 'SFCF's Sixth Sense Report' section includes a large blue button labeled 'Sixth Sense'. The right column contains 'Policy Updates' and 'Forthcoming Events'. At the bottom, there are sections for 'COLLEGE FINDER' and 'MEMBERS AREA'.

“Must it be? It must be. It must be!”

It might seem strange to talk about fiction in a brochure aimed at business. But it isn't. Because story-telling is the great beating heart of effective communications.



People are time-poor. So, whatever the media, communications should reward as well as engage.

They must repay the compliment of having attention paid to them. And that demands compelling words entrenched in beguiling design.

Literary fiction is not exactly the writing that business needs. But it shares essential foundations. Trustworthy research. Robust thinking. Gripping narratives. And flowing language.

At the end of his life, above the last movement of his final work, Beethoven wrote of his imminent end. Genius that he was, he embraced it defiantly. “Must it be? It must be. It must be!” Great businesses must be equally defiant in the face of the mundane – and let their stories sing out loud and proud.

“And if I need to know more?”

If you're seduced by the prospect of great writing, here are some options.

You could visit one (or more) of my various websites:



www.fishbone-uk.com is predominantly my consultancy offer

www.theword.eu.com captures my extended writing service (in partnership with others)

www.grossefugue.com is dedicated to my novel.



Or you could just get in touch.

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