

# law practice management

newsletter

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DEVELOPMENT COUNSEL

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## Getting your message across

When confronted with complex, detailed information, it's frequently necessary to simplify in order to communicate effectively.

Whether in a proposal, in a tender or at a presentation, clear and simple information will make far more impact.

Here are some tips and techniques which you will find work well to simplify complex information and convey your meaning unmistakably.

### Flowcharts

High level, simplified and generalised representations of complex and detailed processes not only help you get your message across, but also position you as an expert who sees not just the trees, but the forest.

### Diagrams

A simplified, diagrammatic representation of an issue or problem is a great technique to convey your message.

Pie charts, quadrants, Venn diagrams and so on are really useful ways of extracting important concepts from the detail, and presenting information in a way people will understand. Plus, diagrams offer more visual interest than slabs of text.

### Graphs and charts

Graphs and charts are also great ways to simplify numeric data — visual representations help your audience to understand the meaning rather than becoming lost in the data.

### De-clutter figures

Clean up and focus your message by reducing complexity — eliminate unnecessary decimals, currency symbols and round numbers, and calibrate columns into \$ or '000s rather than presenting clutter.

By reducing the complex to the simple and minimising visual 'junk', you will be vastly more effective in getting your message across.

Your quest is to reduce the number of characters your audience has to process to extract meaning.

### Simplify PowerPoint slides

Reduce the verbiage and keep text to a minimum. Use 10 to 40 words and a maximum of eight lines as a guide.

### Make the client the subject

Rather than boasting about what you do and talking about your firm, try to frame your message to make the client (or prospective client) the subject in relation to your firm.

### Plain English — what is it to clients?

We've all heard about the importance

- reducing nominalisations (for example, 'we discussed ...', and not 'we had a discussion ...', 'the board decided ...', and not 'a decision was taken by the board'); and
- emphasising the positive.

### Why do it ?

- it's faster to write (once you know what you're doing);
- it's faster to read;
- your message is understood more often, more easily and in a friendlier way; and
- you will sound like the professional

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of writing in plain English. However, to a client, what matters is modern business communication.

Plain English and business language are not:

- oversimplification of the language;
- a patronising tone;
- about banning new words or eliminating all long words; and
- necessarily easy!

Plain business English uses modern language and communication techniques, characterised by:

- shorter sentences;
- more active verbs rather than passive expressions;
- using 'I' and 'we' rather than the third person;
- easily understood words;
- eliminating useless or superfluous words;

a client will want to hire.

It's worth taking a look at your firm's client communications and putting them to these tests. Getting your message across effectively will make you much more attractive to clients of choice. Also on this subject, my article 'Business development beyond bounds' in the July issue, (2005) 4(8) LPM 113, has suggestions for making your communication client centric, making the client the subject and imbuing your pitch with benefits. ●



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