

# THE EUROPEAN LAWYER



THE QUEEN'S AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE.

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## PRIVILEGED EXISTENCE

PROTECTING IN-HOUSE LEGAL PRIVILEGE

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL FOCUS  
**IBERIA UNITED**

GREECE AND THE EURO'S FUTURE  
**TIGHT MONEY**

**GERMAN COURTS**  
SPRECHEN SIE ENGLISCH?

**NOT ON BOARD**  
IN-HOUSE LAWYERS

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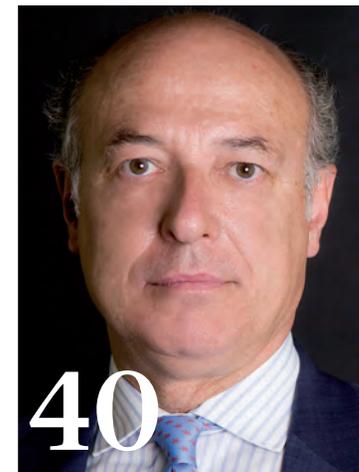
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## Speakers cornered

It is a falsehood that lawyers are inherently quick-witted speakers, at ease before large audiences, says **Jack Downton**. He sets out some core guidelines to help calm the nerves when getting on one's feet



*Jack Downton is the managing director of London-based consultancy, The Influence Business at [www.theinfluencebusiness.com](http://www.theinfluencebusiness.com)*

**T**elevision programmes such as *LA Law*, *Shark* – even *Ally McBeal* – have a lot to answer for. They paint a picture of a lawyer as a natural raconteur, able to deliver powerful, persuasive addresses to audiences that hang on every word.

In the real world it can be a very different story. The majority of lawyers I have trained inform me that presenting is not something with which they feel comfortable.

There are many reasons why an otherwise brilliant lawyer can fail to deliver engaging presentations: talking too quickly, talking too slowly, talking at your audience rather than to them, more PowerPoint than presenting and focusing too much on technical detail. But with a few tips all lawyers can improve their presenting technique.

### **Skip the detail**

Lawyers are trained to appreciate the details: clauses in contracts, the syntax in statements, phrasing in statutes. But don't assume that just because you're interested in the minutiae that so too will be the audience.

It's often assumed that the more you tell your audience, the more they will remember. This is not the case. Lawyers often bombard their audience with masses of complex information, facts and figures, tables and graphs, so as to prove their knowledge as experts. All this achieves is to leave an audience feeling overwhelmed, switched off and learning little.

The focus for a presentation ought to be imparting the information that an audience actually needs and wants to hear. The audience does not

want and does not need to know everything that the lawyer knows. What they want to understand is what all this will mean for them.

### **Less power**

I always advise using PowerPoint sparingly. Keep the technology for the bare essentials – figures, raw data, vast tables. When you use visual aids, the focus



**If they are not focusing on you, they are less likely to remember your key points**

of attention is on PowerPoint, and not, therefore, on you. This means that your audience's attention can drift. And if they are not focusing on you, they are less likely to remember your key points, or be influenced by what you had to say.

Lawyers get nervous like everyone else and one of their biggest fears is forgetting their words. However, some people assume that relying on

notes makes the speaker look unprofessional and ill-prepared. Yet notes can ease nerves and allow you to present your speech in a natural and relaxed manner without the worry of forgetting what you want to say. Use them to remember the ideas you want to convey. Never try to memorise the words. It is a bad use of your time and the results are generally disappointing.

What is really important is where and for how long you pause. The lawyer giving the speech normally fears silence. A silent room, full of faces staring back is a terrifying prospect. And so the speaker delivers a fast flowing stream of noise. But the speaker must learn that it is not only acceptable, but essential to pause.

### **Eye contact**

A pause adds emphasis. This coupled with plenty of eye contact with the audience shows conviction in what you say and allows people to think about what you have said. If they think about it, they will remember it.

You should aim to talk at your normal speed, but even that will be too fast for your audience without frequent pauses. What feels excruciatingly long to you will pass as natural for your audience. Use pauses frequently and have the confidence to make them longer than might initially seem comfortable.

Just as a case matter requires lots of preparation, so too do presentations. By working on different techniques, lawyers can improve their presenting skills and be confident that they can deliver an absorbing and interesting presentation that would make even *Ally McBeal* proud.