

THE EUROPEAN LAWYER



THE QUEEN'S AWARDS FOR ENTERPRISE.

ISSUE 97 JUNE 2010

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

COMMENT	5
HEAD TO HEAD	6
TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE	14

KNOWLEDGE ZONE	35
FOCUS EUROPE	43
LAST WORD	51

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THE QUEEN'S AWARDS
FOR ENTERPRISE
INTERNATIONAL TRADE

ISSN: 1470-9279
Printed in England
by Wyndeham Grange
© FutureLex 2010

Published 10 times per year by FutureLex Ltd, Hereford House, 23-24 Smithfield Street, London, EC1A 9LF London, and distributed by US Mail Agent, Clevert Worldwide Mailers LLC, 7 Sherwood Ct., Randolph, NJ 07869. Subscription Price \$680 per year. Periodicals Postage Paid at Dover NJ, 07801. Postmaster: Please send address changes Title, 19 Route 10 East, Bldg 2 Unit 24, Succasunna, NJ 07876. While all reasonable care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the publication, the publishers cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. All rights reserved. No paragraph or other part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, including photocopying and recording, without the written permission of FutureLex Ltd or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1988 (as amended). Such written permission must also be obtained before any paragraph or other part of this publication is stored in a retrieval system of any kind.

Comment

- 5** European citizens should be aware of their rights. The EU is planning to roll out a raft of reforms to help improve citizens' understanding of their legal entitlements.
Vivian Reding

Head to head

- 6** Two CIS lawyers discuss the different approaches in Ukraine and Russia to attracting international investment. *Alex Frishberg and Vassily Rudomino*

In brief

- 8** Orrick has broken rank to declare a ban on releasing PEP figures. There are mixed feelings on the financial benchmark. *Antony Collins*

Transatlantic dialogue

- 14** Europe's decision to mull class actions comes at a difficult time for oil giant BP. Business is going well in DC. *Jeremy Fleming and Stuart Stein*

Analysis

- 16** English is the language of law, even in German courts. *Antony Collins*

18 Lex Mundi summit

Top in-house counsel and international lawyers got together in Amsterdam to review how best to mutually improve relations.
Antony Collins



27

21 CCBE

The bi-annual conference of Europe's umbrella bar association focuses on e-justice, although little movement is made.
Jonathan Ames

Features

- 23 Professional privilege**
Cases involving AkzoNobel and Prudential are threatening to push the limits of legal privilege for corporate counsel and non-lawyers. *Antony Collins*

27 Eurozone

The Greek tragedy could have spread across Europe. How badly has the euro been hit after the tempestuous past few months? *Antony Collins*

26 Flexing muscles

The top brass from the ACC in Europe review the big issues that in-house counsel are currently grappling with. *Jonathan Ames*

31 Iberia

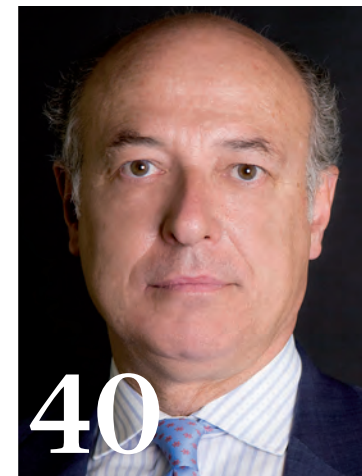
As Spain and Portugal face financial problems, it is an interesting time in Iberia
Jonathan Ames

Knowledge zone

- 36 Boardroom perspective**
General counsel may be the leaders of the legal function but they are still finding themselves overlooked for boardroom positions.
Jonathan Ames

39 At the sharp end

Lawyers are often lacking in the oratory skills needed to woo large audiences. One expert explains how to be a quick-witted speaker.
Jack Downton



40 Leadership zone

As one of Uría Menéndez's co-managing partners, José María Segovia discusses the challenges facing Spain's premier legal brand.
Jonathan Ames

Focus Europe

- 43** Updates on: the UK; Ireland; Italy; Russia; and Ukraine.

Last word

- 51** After a nine-year wait, an appeal court in Italy has doubled the number of police convicted after a G8 protest.
Louis Charalambous

- 52** Index

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

Television 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.