

# Speaking as a writer

The sound of your voice can help sell your books, says **Moira Beaton**

If you treat your writing as a business rather than as a hobby, one of your best marketing tools is speaking in public. And, as previous WM articles have shown, this doesn't always mean having to stand up in front of a live audience, as you can also reach potential buyers through video, audio and radio. However, if the finished recording is dull or disorganised, you may do your business more harm than good.

If you take the time to organise your content and brush up on your delivery, your recordings will draw in an audience that is more likely to stay to listen, and ultimately, buy your work.

## Video

**Preparation is vital** You are stepping out in front of an audience, only this time it's on screen. Show your respect for them by taking the time and care to prepare, as if it were a live event. They will notice and appreciate it. Treat your time on air as a mini speech and aim to make your delivery as natural and relaxed as possible. Prepare an outline of what you are going to say, with an opening, a body and a conclusion.

**Structure is key** Writer and broadcaster David Calder says: 'When it comes to watching video online, people's attention span is quite short. You probably only have about ninety seconds before their interest starts to drift. That means getting your key message in early on. But, as with all marketing videos, the message shouldn't be about you or even necessarily about your book. It should be about the reader. It should focus on their wants and needs.'

You have to grab the attention of your audience in the first few seconds of any presentation. Try a startling (true) statistic, a quotation, a striking line from your book, a question or even a short personal anecdote. Just make sure it relates to the rest of your talk. The body should contain no more than 2-3 major points, supported by relevant sub points. Then, with a strong statement, relate your ending to the opening for a neat and powerful way of wrapping it all up. The conclusion is your big chance to be remembered – don't waste it.



**Practise** 'No media professional would ever go on air without rehearsal', says David. 'If you try to wing it, you've a good chance of stumbling or forgetting your lines two-thirds of the way through and having to start again. So, just as with any other form of presentation, preparation matters.' In the beginning, your words will probably sound like a written piece. Make it more conversational by reading it aloud as if you were speaking to a friend. Remove any unnecessary words, stilted phrasing and jargon. Once you have your 'clean' script, practise with it, then practise without it. It's important that you internalise your ideas rather than memorise every word. That way, if you forget the words, you won't dry up.

**Relax before you begin** Relax and get your breathing under control by inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Do this until you feel calm. To get rid of body tension, stand up and shake your hands and feet, or stretch and bend – anything that gets you moving. To exercise your voice, repeat tongue twisters (Google 'tongue twisters' for lists).

**Background** 'Use any sort of background which is not going to distract the viewer', advises David. 'The last thing you want is

a plant that looks as though it's growing from the top of your head. Avoid standing in front of a window – the light from outside will cast you in silhouette.'

Also, think of the impression you are trying to convey. For example, if you want to appear businesslike, don't film in your home 'office' in a corner of the kitchen, with the dog snoring in the background. On the other hand, if you are marketing your romantic novel, don't shoot your video in a sterile office you hired for the day, choose somewhere with atmosphere.

Before you begin recording, make sure you have any props handy, such as your book. Once you start filming, stay on screen.

**What to wear?** 'Avoid anything with too vibrant colours or patterns', says David. 'Even with HD cameras, there's a tendency for tight checks, for instance, to flicker on the screen. Keep it simple, you don't want the audience distracted. For instance, women should avoid too large earrings; men should avoid too loud ties.'

**Standing or sitting?** Stand upright and steady yourself by placing one foot slightly in front of the other. You want to appear comfortable and relaxed, not stiff and formal. If you are sitting, make sure you

## Radio

With video and audio recordings, you are usually in charge, especially if you record them yourself. However, should you be asked to take part in a radio interview, you are at the mercy of the interviewer. I asked David if you should request a list of questions before the interview.

'You can, but you probably won't get it,' he said, 'although the usual rule is that you can be told the first question. You have a much better chance on ILR (Independent Local Radio) than on the BBC. With ILR, they like any help they can get to make the interview flow.'

The BBC have researchers who will have spoken to you before the interview so you can get the gist of the probable line of questions from what they are asking.

In a radio interview, you need to be able to think on your feet, and to avoid being caught off guard, use the following techniques:

- When you are asked a question, pause, if necessary, to organise your thoughts and make sure you say exactly what you want to say.
- Repeat or rephrase the question to buy you time to provide the best answer.
- If you don't understand the question, ask the interviewer to repeat or clarify it.
- Ask your own question to make the interviewer provide more focus. Not all interviewers are experienced – some just need to ask a better question.



sit well back in the chair, and if you are wearing a jacket, pull it down before leaning back to avoid it riding up and bunching round your neck. Sitting back also makes you look less intense.

## Delivery A few rules:

- Smile warmly, speak into the lens and imagine you are speaking to one person
- Avoid the use of fillers such as *um, ah, eh, like, so, then, actually, basically, you know, in point of fact, to be honest*. They will make you sound hesitant and unsure of yourself.
- Silence is powerful, so pause occasionally to let your message sink in.
- Speak clearly and vary your voice, pitch and rate or you will send listeners to sleep.
- Be aware of nervous mannerisms – hair flicking, head tossing, adjusting your glasses, fiddling with your ring. Secure your hair and glasses beforehand and remove pens and other objects unless you are going to use them.
- If you stumble, keep going. The chances are no one will have noticed but in any case, it's ok to make a mistake.
- Smile. It will make you feel better and create a connection with the audience.
- Be yourself at all times. Just be a more alert, spruced up version of yourself.

## Audio and podcasting

As with video, you need to prepare what you are going to say with an opening, body and conclusion. If you want to use notes

during the broadcast or podcast, practise reading them beforehand so that you sound conversational on air. Put your notes onto cards rather than paper, as paper rustles.

**Your voice** David has been in broadcasting for many years and knows the importance of using your voice well, especially with a microphone.

'Your voice is the only way of attracting the audience's attention and, in media training, we point out that you should be giving 110% of yourself. Smile – the audience can hear it in your voice. Most microphones designed for speech, as opposed to singing, should be roughly where you would hold a book. Don't speak straight into it, but have it slightly to one side. This avoids your breath hitting it and 'popping'.

Whether the audience sees you on screen or hears you on audio, you are not just conveying information; you are revealing who you are to people you don't even know. If the audience like you, they will want to find out more and may visit your website or read some of your work. If they don't feel a connection with you, they will switch off and forget you.

Speaking on air is a very powerful tool to keep in your marketing toolbox. It can potentially place you in front of an audience of millions. By keeping it sharp and using it effectively, it can attract buyers and boost your business. **WM**



## Novel Ideas

If you can't get published, don't give up, but do try something different, says **Lynne Hackles**

If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again. Apparently that worked out well for Robert the Bruce (or was that his spider?) but what about writers?

We have all heard about successful novelists who went through countless rejections before someone intelligent enough to see their genius signed them up. You might be one to go down this route, or you might be the writer who never gets a novel published. If you've tried and tried, in your chosen field, and still failed when do you stop banging your head on that door that never opens?

Let's say a day dawns when you realise that you are spending your life churning out words that no one wants to read. What then? You step off that road and take a side turning. Why? Because if you're not cut out to be a novelist then perhaps you can be a great short story writer or sell hundreds of articles or write a shelf-full of non-fiction books.

I'd like to tell you about my lovely friend, John Newton, who died in July. He wrote several novels but, and he admitted this to me, they were flat. Something was missing. Eventually John tried something else. Humour. He used a lot of personal experience in his articles, writing laugh-out-loud pieces about life as a father and being a grumpy old man. He sold the first few to a country magazine and they were so popular he was asked to write a regular column for them. His work delighted readers and the members of his writing group.

Maybe it's time for you to change tack and step out of your comfort zone.

There are lots of doorways into the world of writing. If your first choice appears locked then try another. **WM**