

## Meeting Machina

*Deus ex machina* is a term invented by Hellenic dramatists about 400 B.C. to save the day. A creaking crane would lower a god to the stage to help the hapless hero of the play. Hence, the “god out of the machine.”

Meeting producers, according to *Meeting Masters Memo* editor John K. Mackenzie, have long used similar devices to rescue speakers by injecting humor, smoothing over technical glitches, and beefing up presentations.

Here are 10 contraptions you might find useful:

1. The robot. Mobile robots controlled by offstage operators can be used for improvisation.
2. The puppet. Onscreen or on stage, puppets can help speakers deal with touchy subjects (just think of the *Muppet* training videos).
3. The audience plant. An actor sits in the audience and pops up on cue to ask a question or to heckle the speaker to add some humor.
4. The organizer. Introduced as a “world-renowned meeting coordinator,” a bewildered actor wanders onstage lugging a sticker-covered suitcase and tries to figure out which meeting he’s at. He proceeds to make mistakes about the products, company, and so forth. Each mistake requires clarification, which leads to the audience’s edification.
5. The spirit ball. A large, translucent plastic globe is placed on a pedestal or lowered up and down by a thin wire. Colored bulbs inside the globe pulse in sync with the voice of an offstage announcer or sound track.
6. The shadow silhouette. A head and shoulders is projected on the screen as someone offstage provides the voice.
7. Mad meeting machine. This noisy Rube Goldberg type of device spits out blobs of paper and bizarre audio accessories when activated by the speaker to highlight absurd ideas.
8. Giant props. A big bottle,

pencil, or inflatable toy can be great fun as background pieces or used for audience photo ops.

9. Masks. In the tradition of Greek actors, these can be fun if used judiciously.

10. Showdown. Derived from reality TV shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, meeting planners sit onstage around a table planning a meeting. As they discuss presentations, products, and policies, the audience uses electronic keypads to vote losers out. Last one left gets to leave and play golf.

See [www.thewritingworks.com/memos.html](http://www.thewritingworks.com/memos.html)

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## News Flash

- ❑ **Trading at work** can cost you less in brokerage fees.

Ameritrade Holding Corporation (Nasdaq: AMTD)—a provider of online brokerage services—recently introduced Ameritrade@Work, a program aimed at helping businesses make low-cost investing services available to their employees.

The service represents a unique corporate benefit at little cost. No minimum deposit is required to open a new cash account with Ameritrade, there are special discount opening offers, and direct deposit from an employee’s paycheck to the account is available.

Ameritrade@Work is free to participating employees, and there’s little necessary administration by HR managers. Every participating company gets a dedicated program manager from Ameritrade Corporate Services, which runs the service.

For more information, visit [ameritradeatwork.com](http://ameritradeatwork.com). If your company is interested in becoming a member, call 888.265.2788.

- ❑ **The Internal Revenue Service** awarded Arthur D. Little its \$88 million e-learning contract to provide a broad range of distance learning services designed to help the agency retool its workforce and improve performance.

- ❑ **eBusiness: Models and Applications for eCommerce** is the first online course offered through the partnership of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania and FT Knowledge, a global provider of open learning and a division of the international media company Pearson plc.

For more information, visit [www.ftknowledge-wharton.com](http://www.ftknowledge-wharton.com).

## How To

Here’s how to derail a discussion on training budgets, according to real-life sarcastic remarks overheard by Douglas J. Constant of Centennial Communications:

- ❑ **“Sounds like you guys want a road trip.”** (in response to brainstorming on ideas to increase the competency levels of the company’s trainers through seminars, conferences, and certification programs)

- ❑ **“Do you understand you already have the training job?”** (in a discussion on the how-to of using new training techniques)

- ❑ **“We don’t need leadership training or fancy methods. We must conduct triage; our people are dying. And, yes, we’ve been in triage for five years since I’ve been here.”** (in a debate on proactive training versus reactive training)

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# Survey Says



- Where employees train
- ❑ in their cubicle or office, 39%
  - ❑ at home on own time, 35%
  - ❑ don't have time, 13%
  - ❑ at offsite workshops, 9%
  - ❑ at their company's learning center, 4%

Source *Frontline Website*

## Employee growth

- ❑ Major U.S. companies have grown their workforces by 5.9 percent in the past 12 months, ending June 2000.
- ❑ Job turnover rates rose to 19 percent.
- ❑ And 76 percent of HR managers report that skilled workers are scarce, according to the American Management Association.

## HR's struggle

- ❑ More than half—55.6 percent—of HR professionals say that the biggest technology issue they face is choosing the right technology to meet the ever-increasing scope of their responsibilities.
- ❑ Only 24 percent say the cost of such technology is their biggest concern.

Source *RewardsPlus*, [www.rewardsplus.com](http://www.rewardsplus.com)

## Who's online?

- ❑ Roughly half of all large U.S. companies use instant messaging.
- ❑ About 90 percent will be using instant messaging by 2003, according to Gartner.

Source *USA Today*

## Who's interacting?

- ❑ Only 11 percent of corporate training programs are conducted through computer interaction, video streaming, or other online means.
- ❑ However, online training

will soon steal market share from business training courses using teachers and classrooms.

- ❑ Wireless technology subscribers sending and receiving information via the Internet will grow from 7.5 million in 1999 to 61.5 million in 2003, a whopping 730 percent rise.

Source *The Castle Group*, [www.thecastlegrp.com](http://www.thecastlegrp.com)

## Who's working snapshot

According to an online survey conducted by the Lancaster, Pennsylvania County Chamber of Commerce in September 2000,

- ❑ 57.5% of respondents were working
- ❑ 45.9% of respondents held more than one job in the past three years
- ❑ 39.6% of working respondents were 40 years old or older
- ❑ 48.8% of unemployed respondents were 40 years old or older.

Other findings:

- ❑ 66.1% of all working respondents rated their supervisor as "pretty good" or the "best"
- ❑ 51.3% rated their employer as "pretty good" or the "best"
- ❑ 10.6% couldn't wait to find another job
- ❑ 4.9% rated their supervisor as a "jerk."

For more info [www.evolveordie.net](http://www.evolveordie.net)

## E-business hype?

A sampling of 26 U.S. corporations by Paradigm Learning of Tampa, Florida, indicates that more than half are still in the process of building dedicated e-business departments, relying instead on steering committees to define their strategies; 15 of the companies are on the *Fortune* 500 list.