

CBT Speaking Coach

By Garry Cosnett
Training consultant



Effective Presentations CD-ROM (three discs), 1999, Xebec Interactive; 800.598.4077; mhlifetimelearning.com. Purchase US\$1,995 (single workstation, multi-user license). Other material: none.

Xebec Interactive's new CD training program, *Effective Presentations*, is designed to give users a comprehensive course in business-presentation skills. As a presentation coach and consultant with more than 10 years of experience, my interest in this program is more than academic. I want to know whether three discs can put me out of a job.

The first unit of the course, "Creating Your Presentation," covers the basics: setting objectives, analyzing the audience, structuring the message, and writing openings and closings. Most of the lessons, delivered through onscreen text, voiceovers, and video segments, are reasonable and helpful. Yet, each claim that the narrator makes—no matter how subjective the topic—is delivered as a definitive truth.

The second unit, "Delivering Your Presentation," focuses on delivery issues, including appropriate dress, gestures, body language, eye contact, and stress management. For the most part, the lessons are standard Speech 101 fare. Nothing is terribly new or insightful, but the tips and suggestions are sound.

One area of weakness is the section on managing presentation anxiety. It may follow Hippocrates's admonition to "First, do no harm." Unfortunately, it doesn't do a lot of good, either. "Think positively" and "envision success" are key suggestions, but the program gives little concrete instruction on how to do those things.

The final unit, "Put Your Skills to the Test," offers learners the opportunity to prepare and, in a limited way, deliver a persuasive presentation. The challenge is to deliver a marketing presentation to a skeptical audience. To prepare, the learner reviews relevant market data, media reports, and the like. He or she then analyzes the audience, structures the presentation, and chooses visual aids. Those

RATINGS KEY

★★★★	Outstanding
★★★1/2	Very good
★★★	Good
★★★1/2	Above average
★★★	Average
★★1/2	Below average
★	Poor



choices then help shape a simulation in which a video presenter delivers the presentation. The simulation is complex and sophisticated, showing the audience's reactions to each component of the presentation from the opening to the interactive question-and-answer session.

Because it does a reasonable job of simulating the multidimensional challenges a presenter faces, "Put Your Skills to the Test" is the most valuable section of the program. Obviously, the weak link is the fact that a digital actor, not the learner, is the presenter. Yet, to score well, the user needs to direct the simulated presentation with skill and flexibility.

Can the art of oral presentation be taught via CD-ROM? In the case of *Effective Presentations*, my answer is "sort of." Clearly, the user can gain a basic understanding of how presentations work and practice the planning and structuring part of business presentations. But developing presentation skills—like developing scuba- or sky-diving skills—requires real practice. And that's not likely to come from a CD-ROM anytime soon.

Effective Presentations

★★★★	Ease of installation
★★★	Holds viewer interest
★★★	Production quality
★★★1/2	Degree of interactivity
★★1/2	Quality of interactivity
★★★	Value of content
★★★	Instructional value
★★1/2	Value for the money
★★★1/2	Documentation
★★★	Overall rating

Learn the Cs (or, Tell It to the Judge)

By Paul Pierroz
Human resources manager



Jack Cade's Nightmare III: Caught in the Crossfire video, 1999, 44 minutes (two tapes), BNA Communications; 800.233.6067; www.bna.com/bnac. Purchase US\$1,595 plus \$7 to \$10 per learner. Other material: facilitator manual and guide, participant manual.

There's a bit of Jack Cade in all of us.

The star of this video-print program, Manager Jack, has a habit of taking a head-down, bull-in-the-china-shop approach to performance management. That habit lands him in a heap of trouble, costing him his job and, potentially, a lot of cash.

Jack's plight begins when he fails to communicate an attendance policy and doesn't complete his team's performance reviews. His inability to support and follow through with those responsibilities triggers a cascade of events involving his team members, management colleagues, senior management, even his neighbor. He eventually finds himself dealing with larger problems, starting with routine complaints and team turnover and ending with discussions about his job performance and legal liability. In fact, tape 1 ends with Jack, head in his hands, on the witness stand being grilled by an aggressive attorney representing one of his former team members who's claiming wrongful dismissal.

In tape 2, we learn how Jack could have avoided this trouble and stayed out of the crossfire by following 10 rules of performance management. The rules are narrated by a legal expert and reinforced with tape-1 footage.

Considering the topic's potential to kill interest, I expected much less from this program—a list of legal principles delivered by a portentous presenter, followed by a model for "correct behavior," for example. You get the inverse: Jack's discussions and decisions, the courtroom challenge to his actions, and the rules for preventing his nightmare.

The dozen or so actors are believable as factory workers, a senior executive, and a courtroom lawyer. The director has managed a quick pace, and Jack provides comic relief with his renegade approach, wall punching, and impulsive behavior.

If your goal is to introduce managers to basic leadership principles and review the business consequences of a shoot-from-the-hip philosophy, this program is right on the money. It's a refreshing twist on training a manager in these key skills: coaching, counseling, and communication. I strongly recommended it for organizations and teams committed to improving their performance and reducing a cycle of subpar performance, low morale, turnover, and legal challenges. It should work well for group or self-study.

This CD course offers a lot, including cogent content and a fast pace, but that's not to say it doesn't have rough edges.

The format of *Sexual Harassment* is consistent throughout—a talking head describes the upcoming scenario, and a video clip follows. Then, a lawyer explains, in clear terms, why the scenario is sexual harassment. The harassment victims also put in appearances to describe how the behavior made them feel. Unfortunately, the course was difficult to install. I couldn't find directions and, after much ado, I discovered that the program had been installed on my C: drive. But once I started the course, I was enthralled.

For starters, the production quality is excellent. It's as good as more expensive videos that I've reviewed. The program has a comfortable user interface with pleasant colors and unique icons with clear meanings. At every step, the user knows how to go forward or backward, and how to exit.

Nevertheless, interactivity isn't a strength of this courseware. There's little, other than clicking on video icons, talking-head graphics, or answers to questions—not an effective or imaginative use of the medium.

The 14 scenarios have a good mix of gender, race, physical setting, worker level, and management-subordinate and peer relationships. However, only two of the video segments feature different outcomes that depend upon behavior, and I'd like to see more of that. It would be more effective if all 14 scenarios were replayed to determine how the situations could have been handled differently.

This program could easily lend itself to discussion groups, but that's not an option with this courseware. It's also reasonable to expect (especially given the price) a leader's guide that provides post-training discussion opportunities.

At \$4,000, this CD is expensive, unless many people are going to use it. There are also some learning-design problems. Still, the course is enjoyable, quick (30 minutes or so), and engaging. That's an asset considering that mandatory sexual harassment training is often greeted with indifference—or worse—by employees.

Jack Cade's Nightmare III

★★★★★	Holds viewer interest
★★★★★	Acting/presenting
★★★★1/2	Diversity
★★★★1/2	Production quality
★★★★★	Value of content
★★★★1/2	Instructional value
★★★	Value for the money

Sexual Harassment

★1/2	Ease of installation
★★★★1/2	Holds user interest
★★★★1/2	Production quality
★★	Degree of interactivity
★1/2	Quality of interactivity
★★★	Value of content
★★★	Instructional value
★★	Value for the money
N/A	Documentation
★★★	Overall rating

Harassment CD

By Lynn Monaco
Training director



Sexual Harassment CD-ROM, 1999, Corvus Digital Solutions; 502.261.9874; www.corvusdigital.com. Purchase US\$4,000. Other material: information booklet.

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