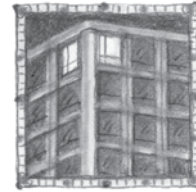


# THREE WORDS: COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION, COMMUNICATION.

KAREN ROTHWELL, *Outward Insights*



The best analysis in the world can be ineffective if it's not properly communicated and heard by management. Intelligence consumers today are bombarded daily with communications of information from various sources, ranging from news shared in company meetings to messages pervading their email, pda's and mobile devices. To capture the attention of senior management, competitive intelligence (CI) practitioners must effectively distribute intelligence deliverables, that contain compelling analysis and unique judgments.

Effective communication is a critical step in the analytical framework. My previous columns have addressed the first two steps of this framework: 1) identifying the right questions and 2) utilizing the appropriate analytical tools to answer these questions. This month's column focuses on the last step: required communication skills to deliver the answers effectively (see Figure 1).

## COMMUNICATION SURVIVAL SKILLS

First, identify the most importance sections of your analysis to communicate. Practitioners who currently provide CI to senior management are well aware of how difficult it is to meet with these busy executives.

Given existing time constraints, practitioners' must determine exactly which core messages they need to convey to their internal customers. Compelling intelligence deliverables that capture the attention of your management team follow four critical guidelines.

### 1. Identify the one key message your analysis must convey.

Your internal customer should gain from your report or presentation a clear understanding of the core message you intended to communicate. Intelligence consumers can lose track of your analytical conclusions if it contains too many messages to easily absorb.

Honing the analysis that you have developed over weeks or months to just one key message is by no means an easy task. If necessary, break your analysis down into separate, digestible, intelligence reports. Try the exercise described in Tip #1 to help you focus your message.

### 2. Position big picture, bottom-line conclusions up front.

Do not wait until the end of the report or presentation to deliver the most important messages from your analysis. Internal consumers usually do not have the time or patience to wait for your conclusions. The detailed evidence that supports your conclusions can always be inserted at the end of the report or in an appendix.

#### TIP #1

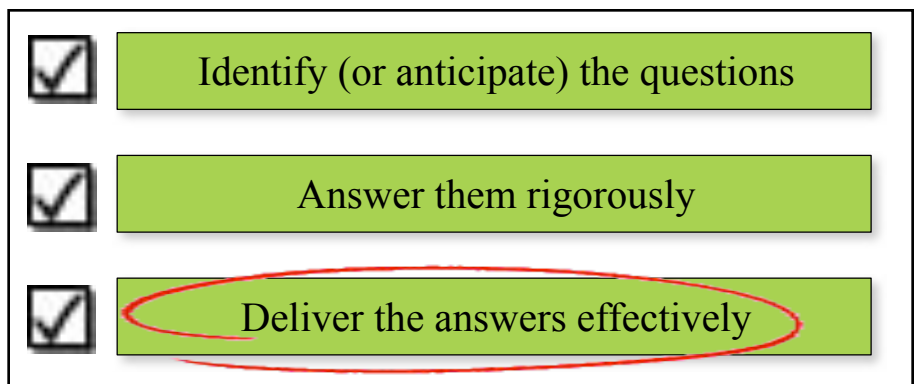
**Assume that you have just been told you have only 30 seconds to present your analysis to the CEO, what would you condense your message to say?**

Do not lead with evidence or data. Refer to the inverted triangle in Figure 2 for developing your structure. Intelligence writing requires that you state your main point as a topic sentence at the top of a report paragraph or as the title of a slide in a presentation. Then, marshal analytic judgments and evidence to support it.

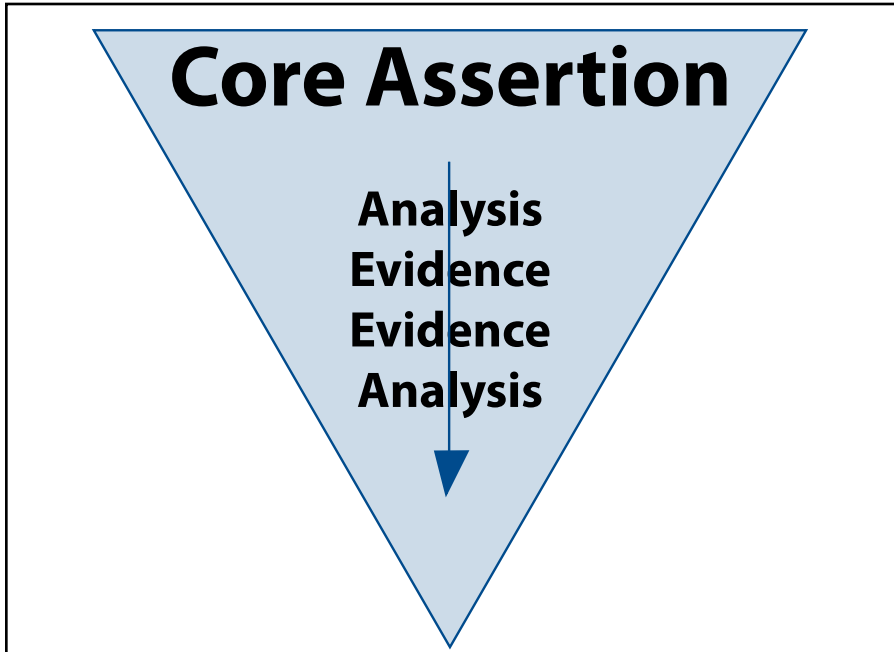
Consider the contrasts in these two examples:

#### 1. Inverted Triangle Approach.

XYZ Tool's new automation process enables it to more readily compete on price making it well positioned to step up a price war in our market space. A significant drop in employment numbers from 2,500 to 1,600 within its first year suggest the firm is realizing



**Figure 1: steps in the analytical framework**



(source: Outward Insights Coaching Center How to Guide) [June 2004]

**Figure 2: The inverted triangle**

immediate labor savings, which is being passed on to product pricing.

## 2. Traditional Approach.

Evidence has been marshaled that XYZ Tool has introduced a more efficient automation tool to manufacture its product. Facts suggest that employment count has dropped from 2,500 workers to 1,600 within the first year of its implementation. There is no doubt employees will continue to drop enabling the firm to reduce labor costs substantially. There is a good probability that a price war in our market space is going to be inevitable.

These examples show two major differences. First, the key message that a price war is imminent appears in the first sentence in example 1. Example 2 does not explicitly state this message until the fourth sentence. The writer builds up evidence to support the key message instead of the other way around. Most of us were not taught to write using the inverted triangle approach so it may take some practice

to become comfortable with this approach.

Second, example 1 economizes on words and does not include phrases adding little value such as 'there is no doubt', 'going to be' and 'there is a good probability.' Remember your goal is to be clear and concise in your writing.

## 3. Provide analytical judgment.

Analysis is not a regurgitation of data and facts. True analysis requires core assertions and judgments based on your interpretation of your research results. Answer the 'so what' – what your analysis means for your organization from an implications standpoint. The goal is for your analysis to inspire healthy dialogue and thought-provoking questions, challenge current thinking and assumptions, and ultimately compel your internal customer to take action.

## 4. Keep it simple.

Economize in your use of words and avoid the temptation to write flowery and fancy prose. Especially in

today's increasingly global world, write with clarity and avoid complicated language and jargon that might confuse any person in your audience. Choose each word carefully. Less is definitely more.

The end goal is for everyone to understand what you have written and receive the same message. Look for and eliminate any language that might obscure your conclusions or distract your audience from the analysis' key point. As you proofread your analysis, use the checklist outlined in Tip 2.

### TIP #2: What to Avoid

- Lengthy and hard-to-digest reports
- Redundancy
- Rhetoric
- Colloquialisms
- Technical jargon
- Vague abstractions

## COMMUNICATION FORMATS

Everyone has a different 'best vehicle' for communicating their analysis. Factors affecting your choice include the topic, audience, expectations, timeframe, and your own skill sets. Ask yourself the following: What is my strong suit? Is it your voice? If so, use it. Always leverage your strengths.

Consider the expectations of your internal customers as well. What is their communication style? What format would they best respond to? Your analytical deliver format should be customized to the user whenever possible. Options for communicating can include an oral briefing, written report, or presentation. Figure 3 provides you assistance in selecting the appropriate communication tool.

Deliverables with medium to high analytical complexity should be delivered in person whenever possible.

Deliverable	Timeline	Preference	Complexity	Audience	Format
Intelligence Report	Immediate	Facts	Low	Wide distribution	Email or self-service
Analytic Alert	Interim	Analysis	Medium	Decision makers & need-to-know	Email or in-person briefing
Intelligence Assessment	Longer term	Forward looking analysis	High	Only need-to-know	In-person presentation

**Figure 3: Selecting the appropriate communication tool**

There is no better way to gage your clients' reactions to your analysis than to see their response visually and listen to how they deliver their comments. In person, you also have the opportunity to respond to any objections and defend your analysis. If your analysis came to the wrong conclusions or you used the wrong approach, you have an opportunity to identify what needs to be done to deliver the right analysis.

An observation about frequency. Most intelligence projects that support your managers' Key Intelligence Topics are ongoing -- delivering your analysis is not a one-time event but is a series of communications. These results most likely will have to be communicated several times and possibly in different format to make an impact within your organization.

**COMMUNICATION IS AN ART NOT A SCIENCE (HOW TO MAKE IT STICK)**

Analysts must communicate their findings in such a way that they capture the attention of the organization's decision makers. This is your opportunity to be creative. While you do want to keep your message simple, at times it may make sense to incorporate

new terminology to grab management's attention or make a message stick. Some options for capturing the attention of your audience can include inventing new:

- Language
- Terminologies
- Images
- Icons
- Acronyms

Your goal is to make your message influential and memorable. There is no

**SIDEBAR: RULES OF THUMB**

- Actively listen to what your internal customer asks for.
- Always keep your communications simple and focused on one message.
- Prepare to defend your analysis, but don't be obstinate.
- Be patient, it may take time for decision-makers to understand or accept what you're saying.
- You may need to communicate your analysis multiple times for its conclusions to be heard.
- Personal delivery is ideal delivery to receive feedback and facilitation action.

better example of a term that has staying power like Burson-Marsteller CEO Mark Penn's identification and description of "Soccer Moms" as a critical constituent in Bill Clinton's re-election campaign. He coined this term to describe busy suburban mothers devoted to work and their families. It was not overly complicated and it resonated with the 1996 campaign and today still continues to define a segment of our society.

If the thought of being inventive makes you uneasy, visuals such as graphs and charts can create memorable take-aways. They can be very

effective vehicles for communicating complex ideas or data.

Finally, do not feel that you have to work alone. Collaborate on your analysis and communication strategy and connect with individuals outside of your team. Yes, this includes people in functional departments across your firm. Especially seek out those who know your products and services inside and out, and most likely a great deal about your key competitor's. There is strength in numbers.

*Karen Rothwell is a director at Outward Insights where she works with companies to design world-class competitive intelligence programs. She previously was vice president of consulting at Fuld and Company, and project manager at Accenture. Karen holds an MBA from Suffolk University and received her BA in Marketing from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She can be reached at krothwell@outwardinsights.com.*