



# **The 12n's Ebook of Interviews**

**By**

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This Ebook consists of personal interviews that were conducted by Colin Ong TS, Managing Director of MR=MC Consulting Pte Ltd.

The desired outcome is that the reader is able to distill from the experience and expertise of all the expert interviewees who are the direct contact of MR=MC Consulting Pte Ltd.

What is 12n (Want To Network?)

It is a professional networking community that was founded by Colin Ong – to join please go to <http://www.mrmc.com.sg/12n>

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## **Guest Article:**

### **Global Implications for eLearning**

**By Marcia L. Conner**

Outside London in 1995, I delivered a series of TCP/IP and Internet basics workshops to IBM's senior level staff from around the world to help prepare them for the coming eRevolution. Managers came from as far as Russia and Egypt, each with a special set of concerns and opportunities from their countries and business practices.

By now we'd assume these classes would be delivered online. Why not? What better way to learn about the Internet than by using the Internet?

Ten years later, however, the reality is that elearning across national boundaries doesn't always work as smoothly as we'd like; good programs are hard to find. Issues range from expectations to privacy and our old friend, time. Remembering my days in that London classroom, I've taken a close look at the issues all companies face when they consider moving content online to reach a global audience.

Before digging into the issues and their implications, however, I want to touch on the compelling reasons to settle these issues:

**1.** According to an IDC study on globalization: the percentage of American users will drop from one-half to one-third in the next 3 years as global use increases; 92% of the world doesn't speak English; 43% of today's Web users are non-English speaking; and over the next few years, Internet use is expected to grow by 79% in Asia, 123% in Latin America, and over 2000% in Japan.

Specifically on the learning-front (when everything works) this means:

**2.** One e-savvy education department may be able to support people all over the world.

**3.** Educational programs can be offered just in time, no matter the time.

**4.** No need for those classrooms, right? Wrong, but at least, you may need fewer.

**5.** You are likely to save some travel costs (either from flying a trainer in or flying students to another location).

**6.** Students may have access to a far wider set of programs than your trainer(s) can deliver.

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Compelling reasons aside, elearning is still at an early stage of development. More is unknown than known. Working through all the details remains difficult and problems only escalate when spread across miles, languages, and cultures. Privacy, costs, language, localization, culture, learning, and technology are all daunting, but critical factors when going global. Many businesses forego worldwide reach because of these issues.

Providing education across the globe is no easier. I hope that the issues raised here will help you and your organization (be it an internal department of a multi-national, beginning to offer programs across the globe, or a training vendor thinking... “Let’s go to China next!”). These are just some of the critical factors you’ll need to consider before you make your move.

## **Privacy**

**Do you know when and where keeping records on learning blurs the legal line?** Eilif Trondson, Director of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) Learning on Demand program has spent much of the last 20 years working with organizations all over the world wrestling with learning and technology. Trondson points out that the Internet may give a boundary-less sense, but politics exist even in cyberspace. “Although there are efforts underway to deal with privacy and get some uniformity within the European Union, a quagmire can occur from many situations such as, differing legislation from country to country and even within countries with local authorities who disagree.”

Despite the overwhelming pressure around ecommerce, research indicates fewer than 30% of people using the Internet have ever knowingly put their credit card or personal information online. Some argue that the remaining 70% do not realize their information is available online if someone is looking for it today. People—many people—are still very concerned about their privacy online. This partly reflects an attitude that anarchy pervades the web. A Cheskin Research study reported that many people believe there are essentially no rules for the way information is managed and protected across cyberspace. In the absence of rules, people feel a heightened sense of risk when engaging in transactions. The same holds true for learners.

When a company misuses your credit cards, you might be out \$50\* and the time to clear up the matter. But, if your employer discovers you are short two credits to actually graduate or that you failed the quiz on your company’s core product; you might be out of a job. Many employers do not even alert employees that they track this information.

Trondson reminds us about the power of organizations built to protect the rights of their members. “In general, privacy is a considerable concern. One of the key reasons for this concern in Europe is the strong role of the unions. The unions are very apprehensive about accessible data such as when someone has taken an assessment or test. Now that it is possible [with Learning Management Systems] to examine these individual results, they are even more concerned.”

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After spending the last decade living, working, and consulting in countries outside the U.S., Kellee K. Sikes, head of Pioneer Technologies LLC, recalls some client' learning snafus. "Depending on the country you work in, the laws of the land can be demanding. A global elearning client found the German laws prohibitive to maintaining detailed records on employee's competency based on training exercises. In France, to receive desired government subsidies, another client found themselves under a mountain of required paper work detailing each employee's training plan."

Data stored in learning management systems can include everything from benign resume information and classes you've attended to test scores and comparisons with your coworkers on attitude, aptitude, and competencies. No one should treat this information lightly, but I have yet to see instructions to managers requesting they treat this information with the same sensitivity as salary or performance data. Have you added that to your management training yet?

**Implications?** Look at the differences between privacy legislation and regulations (and talk to any affected union representatives) before tracking employee's competency and performance data. The human resources department in the countries you are working in should be aware of the "legs and regs," as well as the overall climate for tracking this information. Just because learning management systems seem the efficient route in the U.S., they might be far from effective in other countries.

## **Who pays?**

**Do you know where the money for elearning can come from?** Historically, in most European, African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries, the state provided education indirectly through tax dollars. Companies in these regions find it hard to accept the increased responsibility and costs associated with the evolving elearning programs.

In many countries, there is a "different set of expectations around who pays, which will involve quite a shift. It will also probably take a bit of time before recognizing that, 'This is my responsibility to pay for and it is not something that will just be given to me,'" points out Trondson. "The idea of going out and buying elearning modules over the Internet could be a much more difficult proposition in Europe [and some other regions] than what we'll see in the United States."

Tomás Heguy, former Vice President for an executive-level content provider in Latin America, shared a contrasting view. "That's not the case in Latin America because the state has not been very efficient. There's corruption, lack of resources, and our public services are not very good. Education is far from ideal so people do not assume that you can receive good education for free." Businesses, he asserts, are very willing to pay for good, branded content, from recognized authors and gurus. Just do not expect them to pay for materials where they cannot see the immediate value to their employees.

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Are private companies prepared to run into government initiatives or private/public initiatives where there's a fair bit of public money involved? And whose money is funding this? The public monies of one country are potentially in competition with the private work of others. Are you ready?

**Implications?** If you envision selling elearning programs into some countries, you may be surprised to find shrewd business men and women wondering why they would want to spend money on your program when education is something they expect to be provided by the government for free. In other countries, you might be talking with the wrong group; it is the employee with the purchasing power. And in other countries, without solid business results, or brand name recognition, there's no point in trying to sell anything at all.

## **Language**

**Can you speak the languages of global elearning?** Language is often the first issue people think of when looking at offering their programs to another country. Ironically, though, language is often the last issue actually addressed. That's too bad because it is the overriding issue affecting impression and receptivity.

“People may speak English [in Latin America], but when you need to do everything in English, the challenge is much more daunting. And if you are going to introduce something that is somewhat of a stretch—like elearning—which is a different way of learning for people who are used to more human interaction, you better make it easy or as easy as possible,” notes Heguy. “We are developing everything in both Portuguese and Spanish because people are much more comfortable in the local language. Over the Internet, language is a clear differentiator.”

Translation has certain cost implications and when you do not know how many people who speak a certain language will be using your product, it is hard to justify the cost. How can you meet the learner's needs and still keep the programs from being incredibly expensive? Companies need to decide whether they can afford the upfront cost and who will pay it.

Companies who translate are often shocked by the estimated cost—let alone the reminder of ongoing translation to coincide with updates and improvements along the way. The shock dissipates though, when they consider the cost of first training in English and then retraining in the local language because the English training didn't take.

Talk with someone who has translated a software product (or even an instruction manual) into another language to get a realistic picture of the challenges. Not only are there vocabularies the translator might not know, but they also must adapt sentence structure, significance, and colloquialisms to convey equivalent meaning. One translator compared translating a training program to translating poetry. You must capture both the direct message and word-transcending nuances one-for-one.

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**Implications?** The single strongest held belief around elearning is that it will save companies money—not force companies to spend more! As a result, many companies try to hold off on translation investments for as long as possible, until they see how they will provide a return. Be cautious, however, with that plan. For people to use elearning programs and share their wonderful experiences with others, you need to meet learners’ needs so they are comfortable with and willing—even interested—in trying and working through the programs again and again. That often means creating programs in the local language whenever possible.

## **Localization**

**Once you’ve covered language, what about the rest of translation?** To further complicate the translation process, some languages have a number of distinct dialects. Spend time in Australia and you’ll discover English words can take on very different meanings than those in my hometown in the American Midwest. Localization refers to the process of preparing written words in software or documents for a very specific target language, or dialect, and its culture.

Trondson, a Norwegian, says he sees language issues come up between two countries most people think are very similar: Norway and Sweden. “A Norwegian friend of mine looked at some learning materials from Sweden and felt so uncomfortable with them he couldn’t use them.” If that’s the case between two counties with similar cultures and language, how must it be between other countries that have even less in common? How far do you go to address local, regional, or national differences within a language?

And it is not just the language, but knowing the culture and mores, the usage and tone. This is not just a rehashing of common personalization and customization themes you see on the web or even those of learning styles and language. Localization addresses how people look at the world.

Several companies have begun to specialize in localization alone. They localize both regular software or elearning programs to be better accepted in different countries and within parts of countries by different types of learners and within different cultures.

Pam Booker, former Director of Strategic Alliances at localization company Lionbridge Technologies, warns, however, “The Internet makes [companies] instantly global, but not multilingual. Language is the most significant barrier in the online international marketplace.” Lionbridge localizes customer products in two ways: in readying code for double-byte language translation (for languages such as Japanese), and in translating content so that it makes linguistic sense. Not surprisingly, they find that most companies just look for localization at the tail end of a project instead of considering it in their design.

**Implications?** There’s more to going local than the translation of language. Localization helps people feel the material is written for them. If you do not have expertise in local

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cultural and language differences, consider partnering with a firm that specializes in localization... but do that early on, not when you are ready to roll out your program.

You'll need to localize some content, adapt other content to the audience, and create unique local content along the way.

## **Culture**

**Do you know how to culture your elearning?** Culture is defined as the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. These can be from a particular period, class, community, region, or population and particular to a category, such as a field, subject, or mode of expression.

Much of our perception of education (category) comes from our elementary education years (particular period), which likely varied widely through the world (as a result of class, community, population, and region).

For instance, those who grew up without any exposure to technology rely more on personal interaction. For some, it can be quite stressful to get used to doing everything online when they are accustomed to learning from people they can see and hear.

Heguy reports, "Interaction will be an ongoing issue in Latin American. We have to overcome [our customer's] fear over responsiveness and having a teacher available.

There will need to be education on those issues for elearning to be successful." In Asia, school often entails sitting quietly in a classroom while the teacher offers gems of wisdom. "You won't find any interactive, energized classrooms in Japan," points out, Beth Scofield, who taught English as a second language in Japan for several years. To make the differences painfully clear, she tells the story of delivering a lecture to several hundred businesspeople in Japanese, accidentally substituting the word carrot for people throughout the speech. "No one snickered or gave me any indication I'd made such a horrible faux pas. That wouldn't be the case here. At the end of the talk, when I realized I'd made the mistake, I apologized (and the crowd laughed with me) but until they saw I had realized my error their etiquette kept them quiet and still."

In other parts of Asia, the idea of an entirely online classroom hasn't caught on either, but in a culture of quiet, students may feel completely unequipped to answer questions in front of their peers. In contrast, online learners can contribute to forums, chats, and virtual whiteboards in an anonymous way. eLearning can provide a more collaborative, interactive environment than a classroom.

Culture plays a role in topic choice and appropriateness, too. For instance, Alex Goldhagen, Director of JAG Management in Melbourne Australian, points out that, "While the business landscape differs only somewhat in Australia, the mental and

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emotional drivers of the people who work here are strikingly different from those in the US. Our clients and employees would not immediately understand the need for courses on racial integration or acceptance, drug abuse, equal opportunity or office politics.” Instead, Goldhagen he says, “There is a recognised need for education programs that help our people and organisations compete in the global market. Many Australian businesspeople feel a certain degree of inferiority to other western nations, particularly the U.S. And, since much of the market-leading technology is developed in the States, this need to keep up is exacerbated still further.”

And style? “If something has too American of a style, very ‘touchy feely,’ too personal, or even sentimental, people may mock it [in Latin America],” cautions Heguy. “There is a latent bias against the U.S. culture where the economy is efficient and you do not have to worry about making the telephones work or about public services that cost a fortune.” While living in Eastern Africa, I learned first hand that a society with very few resources and little ability to change their situation focuses on areas that other countries might not even notice. When needs are basic, you worry about small things.

Dave Grebow, Chief Learning Officer for Comcourse and an experienced worldwide training manager points out every culture does not consider elearning a desirable way to learn. “Learning on your own is not an acceptable practice all over the world nor is it viewed as the best way to learn. Sending an employee to class is a perk, a way that your manager said you were doing a good job and were ready to move on and learn at the company’s expense with an instructor in a class of your peers. eLearning can be viewed as a way of losing face or not being in the same league as those who went to instructor-led programs. In other cultures, though, it might be the key to success for both an employer and the culture itself. For example, with the use of elearning and telecommuting, companies can begin to employ Native Americans who are preserving their culture by living on isolated reservations with other members of their tribe.”

Also, humor is often local. Despite the fact that television shows like “The Nannie” can survive in foreign markets longer than they do in the U.S. what’s funny to one culture won’t likely elicit the same result in another. You need to pay attention.

**Implications?** Language and localization may reach your bottom line fast, but ignore culture and you’ll sink from the weight of the world. Since you face a large enough challenge asking people to attempt something new, try your hardest not to offend them along the way. Unless you are creating different material in each culture, keep your stories, analogies, metaphors, humor, and even design as neutral as possible.

## **Time for Learning**

**Do you know what it means to make time for elearning?** People around the world are sensitive to learning business-related matters on their own time and being asked to learn more on top of already-packed workloads. The issues may be different in various parts of

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the globe, but they all lead to the same concern. The line between working and personal time has blurred forever.

Gunnar Brückner, former Chief Learning Officer for the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) and currently Managing Director of CoachingPlatform LLC, created an Electronic Platform for Learning at UNDP with in-house tools that rivaled any platform I've seen in flexibility and reach. But even given his platform's power, Brückner lists time as the number one concern of his internal customers, UNDP employees around the world. He points out that, "People are overwhelmed with their day-to-day work tasks and believe they do not have time to start something new even if it is at their fingertips. It is not automatically clear to everyone that accessing and using the electronic platform actually saves time."

"This is where our learning managers and the people that we train in each country office come in. These are real people in each country being trained as learning coaches. They take on the message. If push comes to shove, they can talk to people and say, 'Sit back and relax. Nobody is going to squeeze you any more. This is good for you, so let's try to check it out.' That wouldn't be possible if we only had an electronic platform." From Argentina, Heguy offered a similar experience with his company's new elearning programs. "People use it a lot at work: they stay for one more hour or they arrive one hour sooner than they did. They can work at home, but when they get home, they have the family. They also pay for the line or if your company provides a line, they tie up a line. If they pay, it is not a flat fee. Family is very important here so this is not just about technology."

Likewise, Europeans are also quite apprehensive about when they will find the time to learn in the workplace and whether their companies are going to assume they'll go through most of the training at home. Remember the unions mentioned earlier? Think they aren't concerned about people taking work home?

Remembering some European experiences, Sikes shares a common struggle for workforce training. "Asking people to work on their own time can be against the law. If the law says the workweek is 35 hours then it is 35 hours, period. In many parts of Europe, if you want the training done, you must fit it in during the workweek or be willing to deal with consequences that can include paying over time or fines."

**Implications?** We are all short of time and the blurring of the boundary between work and leisure is a fact. People are taking work home, including what they need to learn, whether they want to or not. This is something employees everywhere progressively face.

To overcome the objections of harried employees, address time head on. Answer how long your program will take, how it can be completed within the workday, and break programs down into modules that can be completed one at a time between other activities. Recognize that different cultures have different expectations and beliefs—make an effort to learn the time values they live by.

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## **Technology (Hardware and Bandwidth)**

**Do you have the technology for elearning?** Earlier this summer, the elearning department at a worldwide accounting firm learned that the accountants in some other countries weren't using spreadsheets to tabulate accounts. In Malaysia and Thailand, for instance, computers would have cost three or four times a worker's annual salary. It was more cost-effective to hire people to manually balance the books. While this department assumed their global coworkers had access to computers, which was far from the case.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, several multinational companies have given all of their employee's computers for home and personal use just to get them familiar with the technology. Nothing is consistent when it comes to technology around the globe.

Brückner may have one of the most daunting challenges. "The world is very complex and has many hot spots. UNDP is in all of these hot spots. Picture a person in Eritrea, Somalia, or Myanmar trying to learn online? They simply do not have the access they need to use the system in its best way. But if it is not provided for them, they are ticked off. If I promised you can take an online course and your connection is 9,600 baud, you'd be very frustrated, too. Technically, we're between extremely good and extremely bad connectivity, so we try to replicate at least parts of our environment and send it out on CD-ROM to the country office so it can be installed locally. That's obviously not possible with the offerings that require active online participation, but at least it works for our database driven content."

While 56 kbps and browser equivalent to Internet Explorer 6 has become the lower-common denominator in the U.S. 26 kbps is considered speedy in many countries: IE or Netscape 3.0 on a 486 machine is the norm.

Brückner adds, "Our hypothesis is that bandwidth and hardware problems will go away so we cannot hold ourselves back just because a few countries still have them. Too many of the countries have infrastructure problems because management has not made it the number one priority. First they often have to overcome technophobia to be willing to try [the electronic platform] and find one offering that really helps no matter its performance."

Other technologies have wider adoption in other countries that would prove well suited for trials. When I ask companies for their mobile learning (mLearning) strategies, I'm greeted by blank stares or excuses that mobile devices are not popular enough yet to develop a strategy. While handheld or mobile devices may not yet be ubiquitous in the U.S., they are in Japan and many Nordic countries. The Japanese have long been interested in experimenting and testing out hardware devices. Why not try out new programs there in anticipation of the coming boom in other regions?

**Implications?** Technical infrastructure and hardware pose conflicting challenges. Based on the part of the world you are targeting, you'll need to make different considerations.

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Just do not assume that the U.S. is ahead of everyone else. Take the opportunity to identify if the countries you are targeting offer you opportunities for testing and trying new delivery platforms or ways to work with very low bandwidth. Be at least as resourceful as you learners need to be.

## Summary

Trondson concluded my interview with him by saying, “There are many culturally different ways of learning, where you combine some of these different elements to make the whole thing more interesting, particularly for a given audience, a given age bracket, a given cultural or ethnic background. I think we have a long way to go but I’m optimistic.

Enough innovative people out there can see they can make a buck on this if they do it right. I hope they will. We’re just in the beginning. Two, three, four years from now we’ll see some very interesting things that will be much more effective in terms of providing learning that is meaningful and can, in fact, have an impact on performance.”

No doubt elearning across the globe introduces more variables and more potential problems than targeting your content and message to a local audience you know well. You will need to pay even more attention to testing, quality control, and creating a user-centered design. But if you are willing (or required) to make the adjustment, your return can be of proportions never seen before in the education field.

\* Many credit card companies only hold the customer responsible for the first \$50 of unauthorized use.

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## THE TOM LAMBERT INTERVIEW

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“E-Market Dominance”,  
“Making Change Pay”,  
“High Value Consulting”,  
“Key Management Questions” (September 2002),  
and “21st Century Consulting” (An "e" professional development guide)

**This interview was conducted by Nikki Chan** who has recently graduated from Victoria Junior College (Singapore) and is awaiting for her "A" Level results. She is currently teaching English and Literature at Pei Cai Secondary School, and also interviews consultants - especially on their outlook in the consultancy business at present.

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**1) Tom, you touch on a wide range of consultancy services. Which branch do you think deserves the most attention?**

I may appear to be in two minds about this. I believe in the vital importance of Strategic Planning above all else. In a world in which the business cycle is spinning ever faster and in which the penalties for failure are increasingly dire it is essential for any organisation to have identified, as far as is possible, the threats that it might face and have clear and workable contingency plans. Equally important if not more so, I agree with Peter Drucker that in a volatile environment you cannot hope to be effective if you attempt only to react to change. Only through effective strategic planning can you initiate the changes that will enable you to create the rules by which others will be forced to play and so manage change. What is more any organisation that aspires to leave the world a little better than they found it will fail unless they have a robust and flexible strategy.

I said, however, that I might appear to be in two minds. This is because although I believe that effective strategic planning is where it all starts the key growth area at the moment is that of Business Process Outsourcing and that is where the focus of activity for most of the major consultancies and their clients lies. (Some 30% of international consulting business last year was in the field of BPO.) The problem that consultancy must address if BPO is not to become a fad that dies as so many have in the past is that too many client organisations choose to outsource activities for the wrong reasons - encouraged by consultancies eager to make an easy profit - and in the wrong way simply because they do not have a clear strategic plan in place.

**2) How would you define the role of consultancy business in the globalising economy today?**

The International Centre for Consulting Excellence has been designed from the ground up with the clear vision of enabling the best use to be made of the best people through international partnerships. In most parts of the world we work in partnership with local firms to enable them to compete with the big "foreign" firms in terms of state of the art knowledge and proven tools and techniques sensitively adapted to local needs. So if I were to answer your question in a word, that word would be "partnership".

**3) If you could take your consultancy business up another level, how would you go about it?**

I have just returned from delivering the keynote address at the "Summit for the Future" so the answer seems obvious to me at the moment. There is a moral imperative for consultancy to play a role in supporting the development of the whole world to everybody's benefit and to end exploitation. Consultancy has a role to play - with carefully chosen partners - in protecting the environment, improving the access to medicine, science and technology and above all things in "making poverty history".

Your neighbour Malaysia through the government of Dr. Badawi along with people like Sir Paul Judge and the Royal Society of Arts in England have to a major degree inspired my thinking that consultancy will reach the next level when it is directed by a genuine passion to do what is right as much as what is profitable.



**4) As a consultant, what do you think is failure?**

Failure for a consultant is most clearly shown when so many consultants take a ready made solution from the shelf, attempt to force-fit the client's problem to that solution and then walk away with their fee leaving the client with an unworkable outcome or a massive and meaningless report that has only depleted the client's resources.

**5) Who is your role model and why?**

I have many heroes. Like Isaac Newton I can truly say that anything that I may have achieved has come from "standing on the shoulders of giants". My role model in the field of consulting is the late Howard Shenson, the only man in my opinion to treat consultancy as much as a science as a business.

Since Howard's death I consistently seek out "masterminds" from whom I can learn - and I find some of them among my students. I am never reluctant to use the great thinkers of the past as role models for the future. Great minds and great hearts like Schweitzer and Einstein still have the ability to create passion in me.

A friend recently sent me a note that read, "If you are not a little scared your dreams are not big enough". Whoever originally wrote that thought will never know how much they have become an unknown role model.

Thank you for taking the trouble to think through and write the questions I enjoyed answering them. And every good wish for your success in your "A" Level results.

Tom



## **THE PETER GRIFFITHS INTERVIEW**

Peter Griffiths is an outstanding speaker and writer, with an international reputation. He speaks with passion, with humour, but always with honesty.

Enquiries please email him at [peter@griffithsspeaker.com](mailto:peter@griffithsspeaker.com)

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## **1) How has the consulting industry changed, through the years?**

When I started, it was rare to meet a consultant. Most of them started, like me, at the age of 40 or even 50, when they had already established a reputation as an expert in their subject. A few went straight from university to a consultancy firm and became 'consultants'. But nearly everybody had a steady job, and provided a service within the firm.

Now firms have downsized. They tend to work with a very small management staff and to buy in services. These may include interim managers, carpenters, image consultants, marketing experts, archaeologists (no I am not joking - construction firms have to employ them before destroying historical sites) etc. Up to half the people in our Chamber of Commerce are consultants of some sort or another.

Many of them go into consultancy when they are still in their 20s. Some have no discernable skill, but lots of enthusiasm, and manage to do well.

In Britain about half the people over 50 are unemployed or semi-unemployed. They call themselves consultants. Some become interim managers. Some do very well indeed as consultants. Some do not. Generally they have a lot of experience in one particular firm, but no knowledge outside that firm or industry, and certainly no consultancy skills. The failure rate is very high.

In international consultancy there seem to be fewer and fewer experts. A lot of people are recruited straight from university. I have problems with using someone straight from university in England with no special knowledge or experience to advise senior people in the Third World.

The other source of international consultants, for Russia particularly, has been unemployed businesspeople. Again, very limited experience, not the most experienced businesspeople, no consultancy skills, and no experience of working abroad. But they are cheap. And the Russians wanted "real capitalists". The effect has been disastrous.

## **2) What are your strengths?**

I listen to people. Depth interviewing is one of my main skills.

I am a competent economist, but I have the rare skill of being able to apply a high level of theory to the real world. Something they do not teach you at university.

I write well. Clear English that can be understood at the same time by farmers, economists, scientists, managers and politicians. I can also convince people that I am right, and, sometimes, get them to act. Many years of work have gone into this.

I have some consultancy skills.

Which all means, I suppose, that everyone else in the group has some skills that I do not have. We all have our own unique toolbox, and have to do the best we can with what we have.

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### 3) Do you view yourself as a consulting authority?

"Do as I say, not as I do," is what the consultant always says. I may not be a perfect consultant, but I have

- a) read thousands of consultancy reports
- b) read consultancy reports on different industries, different countries
- c) read consultancy reports in different disciplines - economics, marketing, agriculture, science, engineering
- d) talked to hundreds of consultants
- e) worked closely in teams with hundreds of consultants
- f) talked to their clients
- g) visited their projects and watched what they do
- h) seen the results, if any.

I now have a good idea of what the effective consultants do, what makes them different from the average consultant. They think differently. They act differently.

I have written one book *The Economist's Tale: a consultant encounters hunger and the World Bank* [for reviews see:

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/redirect-home?tag=griffithsspea-21&placement\=home\\_multi.gif&site=amazon](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/redirect-home?tag=griffithsspea-21&placement\=home_multi.gif&site=amazon)

This analyses one successful consultancy project, from start to finish. It shows all stages from the courtesy visits to the presentation of the report. And it shows the difficulties encountered.

This is completely unlike any other book on consultancy or economics. It is not like the 'how to do consultancy' books which are largely on marketing. It raises the important issues, like ethics, like the pressures on a consultant to do a bad job. It shows the problems of doing multi-client consultancy - when you do not have to satisfy just one person or one organization, but ten or twelve organizations.

Does it apply to all consultancy? No. Of course not. Some aspects may not apply to yours. I ask only that you think carefully before you say that you cannot use these ideas. You may be right, but you will learn a lot from making the decision.

Plato and Confucius are important not because they came up with the right answers - they did not - but because they asked the right questions. I have asked new questions, and I hope that they are the right ones.

### 4) What motivated you to write 'The Economist's Tale'?

Many things.

I see Third World countries in a state of collapse. Many of them are countries I have enjoyed working in, countries where I have friends. My friends, highly qualified professionals, are desperately poor. People are hungry. People are dying. Some of

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these are countries that were among the richest in the Commonwealth in the 1950s.

This is in spite of enormous sums of money being spent on aid. It is in spite of the aid organizations employing people like me.

The system is not working.

I wanted to show that the system was actually discouraging progress.

Enormous pressures were being put on people in the aid organizations and on people in the front line like myself to meet objectives. But the objectives had nothing to do with development. They were to do with promotion within organizations. They were to do with personal aggrandizement. They were to do with politics and micropolitics. They were to do with money and corruption.

I showed that there was nothing that people would not do to achieve these objectives, even create a famine (yes, I have seen it in several countries.)

As Joseph Stalin said, "One death is a tragedy: one million deaths is a statistic."

And I showed how it felt to be a consultant working in the system, with all the pressures on me to let a famine happen.

And of course I wanted to show the effect of the dogmas of the World Bank, the IMF and the aid agencies.

#### **5) Any decision to translate it into different languages?**

It is doing well particularly in the USA and UK and a reprint is due. It is being translated into Spanish this year.

Anybody interested in translating it into another language?

#### **6) Are you going to write a new book?/Any advice for people going into the consulting business?**

I have roughed out a book on how to be a consultant. I will be putting chapters on my web site for you to look at and comment on. It is a matter of a couple of complete rewrites before I publish it.

Meanwhile I have developed a series of training courses on various aspects of doing consultancy, and of being an international consultant.

I have also prepared training courses on

- Become an effective economist
- Write reports that make people change
- Depth interviewing
- Quality as a marketing tool

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I am switching career from international consultancy to training and public speaking. I think I have done too much travelling - I have worked in 30 countries - and the world is no longer a safe place.

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## THE BILLI LIM INTERVIEW

Mr. Billi Lim, the author of the No.1 best seller "Dare to Fail", was born in 1950 into a large family of 14. His father was a butcher and his mother was a homemaker. His childhood was very tough and there wasn't a day that went by without one of his brothers, sisters or mother being scolded or beaten by his father. They were usually fed on the leftover bones and slivers of meat from his father's counter when each day was over.

His days as a teenager, student and later in business have been checkered with lots of failures. He failed to get into the local university in his first attempt. He would have been rejected again in his second attempt had he not held a state bursary.

He has failed a few times in his love life and has gone through an emotional 'hell'.

He has built businesses to great heights and seen them crashing down. Today he is a very much sought after speaker, trainer and consultant in this region and has spent over 18 years in Entrepreneurial training and manpower development. He holds a B.Sc.Degree and a Diploma in Education from University of Malaya. He also finished a marketing course from the University of Singapore and a managerial course from the Asian Institute of Management, Manila.



Billi autographing more than a thousand books during the seminar.

The founder of IHK (Institute of Hardknocks) and the Originator of the renown "Born To Be Free" seminar. His book, "Dare to Fail", has been translated into English, Bahasa Malaysia, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, Taiwanese, Mandarin and Japanese.

The book has taken the public by surprise by capturing the first and second spot in the best seller list in the New Straits Times.



**1) In a paragraph (or two), can you describe some of your more memorable achievements.**

One of the more memorable achievements in my life was the development of a life changing seminar known as "Born To Be Free". To date the seminar has impacted thousands of people in S.E.Asia. It has helped to awaken the power in a lot of people and led people to more rewarding lives. The seminar is time-tested and has been conducted in one form or another for more than 20 years!

Another memorable achievement was the founding of a Networking Marketing Company in the 70's. From there it has sprouted a lot of offsprings which has given rise to the phenomenon growth of Network Marketing businesses in the region.

The 3rd is the writing of my book "Dare To Fail" which has set a movement in the region and inspire people to look at "failure" differently. But the really memorable achievement I believe is yet to come !

**2) Can you tell the 12n Community more about your country Malaysia especially in the area of business opportunities? Most of the 12n members are not from the ASEAN region :)**

I'm not the Tourism Minister but Malaysia has a vibrant business community with the "can do" attitude. We have broken many world records, like the Tallest Building in the world. It is a wonderful land with multi-races living and building together. To know more you have to visit the place yourself.

**3) Do you have any mentors and role-models?**

I learn from everybody, like Larry Allison, Richard Branson, Mark Victor Hanson.

**4) What is your favourite motivational phrase?**

Be what you dare to dream!

**5) Do you see yourself as a state-person (role model) as your contacts are very impressive?**

I see myself as putting into action the things I learned. If people want to learn from me, by all means, do so.

**6) With better education, are the young generation more ready to accept failure?**

Better education is not enough, they need to have a thorough understanding of what failure is. That's what my movement is about. In this new era, taking a risk is important, so we should not be afraid to fail.

**7) What book are you currently reading?**

"When life gives you lemons" by Alex Tresniowski. It's a book about people who went through huge failures and yet bounced back. We did a lot of research on "failures".

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**8) Are you looking for new business alliances or new talent for your organisation?**

I've always been looking for new alliances. I want to have alliances in 218 countries in the world.



## **THE THOMAS WONG INTERVIEW**

CEO Thomas Wong, M.S., joined Koyale in 2004 with 14 years of management experiences in software applications development, technology training, and marketing. He has provided excellent services to Yahoo!, Solectron, Cisco, Sun Micro, e-ASEAN, and Malaysia National IT Council. Thomas is the best-selling author of "101 Ways to Boost Your Web Traffic" (now published in the US, India, and Russia) and a contributor to Mitchell Levy's "Outsourcing" book. He's also serving as Americas President, Expert Committee of China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA) E-Commerce Forum from 2004-2008.

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### **1) What are your expertise?**

My expertise can be summarized as follows:

Thomas Wong, M.S., is a leading technology analyst and consultant based in Silicon Valley of California. He assists multinational companies with acquisition of new technologies and human resources. He is also talented at marketing Internet startups to a worldwide audience.

### **2) What motivated you to write your first book about internet marketing?**

If you recall, I shared that with you a few years ago. I was interested in building a human resource and training network and wanted to learn everything about Web marketing. As I worked on the process, I realized that I could package my findings and experience and package them into a book. I did, and the marketplace liked it. The book, which is entitled "101 Ways to Boost Your Web Traffic," is in its Second Edition. I'm working on the Third Edition, which will be released in a few months. For more info, please visit Amazon.com:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0963834967/intesync>

### **3) How was your book received?**

It has been the best-selling Web development and marketing book at Amazon.com since 2000. In addition, it will be published in Russia and India later this year. More countries will follow soon.

### **4) Any plans to write a new book?**

Not at this point.

### **5) Any role-models?**

My role models are of two types:

1. Best in the industry
2. Best in practice

For examples, when I wanted to improve my voice, I went to the best voice coach: Dr. Morton Cooper. He is the best in the industry. When I wanted to learn internal consulting, I studied the approaches used by my former manager at Solectron, Michael Sato. He is now heading the new Yahoo! Global University (for their employees). He is the best in practice I have worked with.

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**6) As the first President of HRD Gateway, what do you want to share about your experiences?**

Please see the Organization section of HRD Gateway December Newsletter:

<http://www.hrdgateway.org/hub5/hrdgateway/12-2003>

**7) Are there any short-cuts about building large, vibrant online communities?**

Building an online community is similar to building a business. First, there must be demand in the marketplace. Then you need to invest in time, money, and resources to develop and market it. It's becoming easier in that more people are savvy about the Internet. But at the same time, there are more competition. As for short-cuts, it will depend on the strategic interests of a community. There are many new and amazing technologies on the Internet that can help in the development and marketing process. My book talks about some of these technologies.

**8) What is the future directions of HRD Gateway?**

Please see the Organization section of HRD Gateway December Newsletter:

<http://www.hrdgateway.org/hub5/hrdgateway/12-2003>

**9) What are your own plans in your career?**

I'm working on gaining more experience in organization development. I'm very experienced with business process reengineering. OD is on the top level of any change work in an organization.

**10) Will the Internet be obsolete with better telecommunications (Mobile and Wireless)?**

To the contrary, none of these three will ever become obsolete. They will become more integrated though. (Just visit any electronic stores to see the latest and greatest features.) This means that you can use any device to access information and communicate at any time and any where. For some corporations or countries, there may be a tendency to promote one over another. For example, US was slow to adapt mobile phones even though it led the use of Internet. In addition, the Internet is more than Web browsing and emails, it also includes the use of Windows Media Player, AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, MSN Messenger Service, and Real Player.

**11) Finally, what are the qualities of a good consultant?**

To me, the basic quality is having the ability to do process consulting. By that I mean helping a client find her own solutions. Similar to career counseling, the consultant's role is more like a coach. Instead of telling the client what to do, you facilitate the problem solving process. Of course, it doesn't mean that you only facilitate, you can also be the person to deliver some or all of the solutions. Having this quality will allow a consultant to diagnose the problem from an organization or holistic point of view instead

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of a limited area. This quality is especially important for organization development.

Thanks for your time, Thomas

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## **THE STEVE JONES INTERVIEW**

Steve Jones is the owner of The 3G Portal Information Site.  
(<http://www.the3gportal.com>)

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### **1) Do you niche yourself as a 3G guru? Is so, why?**

I enjoy launching new companies and innovative services. That's my speciality. I like to work with products I want to own and enjoy. I have lead the launch of cash cards, voice-activated telephone banking services, digital radio services, 2G wireless services. I launched cable TV in my region and ensured we built the network passed my house in the first few months! I wanted a 3G phone and got involved in helping promote 3G understanding and launch via my business - The 3G Portal ([www.the3gportal.com](http://www.the3gportal.com)). Once 3G is established I hope to be lucky enough to work with next gadget or service I really want to own!

### **2) What are the new interesting applications brought about by 3G?**

None so far. Video telephony has been tried many times since the 1950's and its never been a killer app. Watching TV/video on a tiny screen has been around since the 1960's on handheld TV's (since my views on this here <http://www.the3gportal.com/3gretro/adsaersmaller.html>) So the two services that are being promoted as THE appealing apps of 3G - video telephony and streaming moving-images, will not be the kind of success the wireless industry expects.

The new kinds of apps that 3G will support involve bringing people together in a more intimate way, and also help enable group communications. You can get a flavour of what I mean by reading my White paper - The Next Generation Business Strategy for Wireless Carriers (download it here <http://www.the3gportal.com/3GUI/enquiry.page.shtml>)

### **3) Will 3G replace wireless broadband?**

Already wireless telephony has become the favoured way for certain groups of people to communicate - my teenage children rarely use the phone in our house. It hasn't replaced fixed telecoms but become just another option.

The car became most people's favoured mode of transport and horses are rarely used for getting from A to B. In time I think wireless will be available in as many flavours as their are types of motorised vehicles - and it will become the standard way for people to communicate. Fixed telephony will go the way of the horse when it comes to fixed telephony based communications.

### **4) Tell us more about the The 3G Consultancy**

It (<http://www.the3gportal.com/3gc/>) is a consultancy business of The 3G Portal. We offer assistance - on site or off site to companies that are trying to make sense of what they can do next to create profitable commercial ventures on the back of this technology. Our focus is on the commercial opportunities 3G offers handset makers, wireless operators, brand owners and application developers. For example we are working with a client in Korea from our base in the UK advising on 3G usability issues - with respect to user interface design.



**5) What motivated you to set up The 3G Portal?**

I worked for a wireless telecoms consultancy - as their market specialist - and travelled regularly in Europe and the Asia Pacific region and needed to keep all my browser bookmarks in one place. So I created a web site - The 3G Portal to store them. I kept this information in the public domain. These links to 3G and wireless internet articles and news grew in hundreds and then thousands of links to useful information on the web about 3G. Other people discovered my web site and began using it more than me!

So I invested time and effort to make the 3G Portal more organised, more up to date and to cover more topics. If you have some one visit your home you like to create a nice experience for your visitors. That's what motivated me to develop the site. I can still recall getting 50 visitors in one day and being amazed. Now we serve up nearly half a million page views a month!

**6) Is there any revenue-stream in creating white papers for 3G related topics?**

We offer our own white papers for free - these two have been the most popular with over 1,000 downloads in the last few months.

a) Designing Phones to the four UNIT principles  
<http://www.the3gportal.com/3GU/enquirypage.shtml>

b) 3G: Building the Worlds Biggest Machine  
<http://www.the3gportal.com/cgi-bin/downloadcount/down.pl>

People have read them, liked our thinking and as a result have employed us to work with their company on a consultancy basis.

**7) Do you intend to provide workshops about 3G strategy? Which part of the world?**

In partnership with my friend, Tomi Ahonen one of the world's most famous 3G guru's we have run 3G strategy workshops for Oxford University over the last 2 years. We are now developing a new course for 2004. Tomi has been in Japan at the recent 3G Forum fixing up dates to run similar 3G strategy workshops in the region - as well as the USA over 2004.

**8) Are there any new alliance that you are looking for - I have set up 12n Community and there are a number of consultants who may be interested to team-up with you :)**

The 3G Consultancy is always looking for potential consultancy partners around the world. Contact me at [steve@the3gportal.com](mailto:steve@the3gportal.com) with your suggestions on how we might work with your company. We already have affiliates in Austria, USA, Italy and other countries where 3G has arrived or is coming soon.

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## THE SHIRLEY TAYLOR INTERVIEW

### (BIO FROM HER WEBSITE)

Thanks to some great teachers on my full time and part-time college courses (I have to say that - one of them was my Mum!) I obtained many advanced secretarial qualifications including the LCCI Examinations Board Private Secretary's Diploma (Fourth Level) and a shorthand speed of 170 wpm (it was a long time ago!) For nine years I worked as Private Secretary at director level in a large multi-national company in Sheffield, England.

After obtaining teaching diplomas and the Certificate in Education, I was lucky enough to obtain a post as Training Consultant in Singapore where I taught many conscientious and ambitious students. This was the start of my love for all things Eastern. Ever since then I've been like the proverbial bad penny - I can't keep away!

I lived in the Middle East for a couple of years when I was Head of Secretarial Department at a college in Bahrain, Arabian Gulf. As well as the East, I've also been West, to Toronto, Canada, where I was PA to the President of an animation company.

Since 1991 I have been lucky enough to move into writing - something which came looking for me, not the other way around! Despite that, I am happy to say that I keep being asked to write more, so I must be doing something right - and I actually rather enjoy it!

For several years now, I have thoroughly enjoyed conducting seminars around Southeast Asia, so it seemed a natural progression to make Singapore my base - it feels like coming home!

With Shirley Taylor Training and Consultancy I am enjoying living in Singapore, visiting different countries and providing training workshops all over Asia. I am also very much enjoying making many more new friends.



### **1) You are a well-travelled person - any favourite city?**

I loved living in Toronto, a beautiful place with fabulous people. I also enjoyed living in Bahrain, ditto. I now live in Singapore and I love it here too. How to choose a favourite city? I'm very lucky to have travelled far and wide and I like to appreciate different places for their uniqueness.

However, one of my favourite places to relax and unwind is an island off the east coast of Malaysia called Rawa - [www.rawasfr.com](http://www.rawasfr.com). It's paradise!

### **2) What are your strengths?**

I hope people would describe me as friendly. I like to treat people as equals and not be snooty or superior in any way. This helps me in my workshops because I can get on well with most people and relate to them well. I like to think I have a good sense of humour, and I am told that this is a very successful feature of my workshops and my conference speeches. I also aim to make all my speeches and workshops as participative and interactive as possible, and so far I feel I've been quite successful at doing this. I was once told during my teacher training course "Never tell the audience anything that they could tell you", and I've always remembered that advice. There's nothing more boring than someone waffling on and on, loving the sound of their own voice, doing a lot of telling, when it would be so much more fun if the audience was included.

### **3) What motivates you to write so many books?**

I guess one led to another and another. The reason I decided to write in the first place is because when I was teaching in Singapore in the eighties, there weren't any good books on business communication to use as a class textbook - hence my first book *Communication for Business*, which I'm happy to say is now in its third edition and is used by students at schools and colleges all over the world. I am presently in the process of revising this book so if anyone has any comments, please write to me. *Model Business Letters, E-mails & Other Business Documents* is now in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition - this was just published in November 2003 and it's already sold over 10,000 copies. This book is an evergreen – written originally by Leonard Gartside in 1971, I was asked to revise it after he died.

### **4) Has email created less importance in the structure of business correspondence?**

This is me on my soapbox .... One of the main advantages of e-mail is speed, but the pressure of coping with an ever-increasing mailbox is adding to the pressures people already face. This is resulting in messages being sent without much thought or planning, with important details missing, with spelling and punctuation errors, and with abbreviations that some people don't like and others simply don't understand. Some messages look like they are written in code! Some people are even neglecting the common courtesies of a greeting and sign-off just for the sake of speed! Also, emotions are hard to convey in e-mails, and some people type out exactly what they would say without thinking of the tone of voice that would be used to signal their emotions. With e-mail all we have are words. Without the right tone, misunderstandings could easily happen, or you could offend and perhaps lose an important business contact - or even

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friend! Good writers learn to choose their words very carefully and get the tone just right.

As more people use e-mail, sloppy work is becoming a major annoyance. People are receiving poorly formatted messages in one continuous paragraph, poorly structured messages that are not specific in the response required, messages written all in capitals (equivalent to SHOUTING) or all in lower case, and of course messages with poor grammar, spelling and punctuation. When I was doing some research recently, a friend of mine said: When I receive a message that has lots of mistakes - spelling errors, punctuation, grammar - I think the reader has no respect for me because he/she couldn't take just one minute to check it through before hitting 'send'. I completely agree!

The Internet has made it possible for us to communicate with people from all over the world. The only way those people can form an opinion of us is by looking at the way we write! Your credibility could be ruined with one swift click of the 'send' button!

Today's way of conducting business is very informal so that's what we should aim for in our business writing too - natural, relaxed, friendly, conversational. The only place for standard boring overused clichés like Please find attached herewith, I am writing to inform you, Please be advised, I should be grateful if you would kindly, is the waste bin! Busy businessmen and women haven't got time to plough through loads of old-fashioned, long-winded jargon. Nor should they be subjected to abbreviated, coded, sloppy messages that are full of errors! We should take just as much care in composing e-mail messages as we should with formal letters, memos or faxes. We should use short words and simple expressions, short sentences and short paragraphs that are clear and concise but still courteous. We should take pride in composing effective messages that are structured logically. Most of all we should identify with our readers, appreciate their feelings, and use words they will understand, written in an appropriate tone.

If you want to improve your electronic rapport with customers and colleagues, if you want to enhance your credibility and your reputation as well as your productivity, remember - it's not a computer you are talking to - it's a real live human being!

#### **5) Will you write a book about the proper way of sms? :)**

Er .... no! :-/

#### **6) What design elements did you put into the building of you website?**

When I set up my business, Shirley Taylor Training and Consultancy, in Singapore in April 2002, the first and most important thing I did was enlist the help of the most fabulous person - Hanin Bte Zainomum. I simply told Hanin what I wanted, gave her lots of information, and she came up with the logo, the icons, the colours and the general design. She makes sure my website is easy to navigate, interesting and colourful, and I try to make sure it's up-to-date and always contains new articles and information, so there is always something for people to keep going back for. I liaise with Hanin frequently and give her updates - every month I add new articles to Learning Links, and just recently I've added a new page on Frequently Asked Questions. Each month after I send out my e- newsletter, Shirley Says, Hanin adds the new issue to my website without even being asked. I also add new photos to the Photo Gallery after each workshop, and this is proving to be the most clickable link when I send out my monthly

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e-newsletters - it seems people love looking at pictures!!! Another popular feature is the Guest Book, and I'm always surprised and pleased to see so many people leaving me messages - thanks to everyone who has taken the time to do that.

### **7) Are you looking for new alliances?**

I'm always interested to hear from people who want to work with me. I'm very happy at the moment to be working with 3 companies in Singapore who organise public workshops for me - JobsDB, Learners Choice International and Partners Conference & Event Management. If anyone wants to talk to me about the possibility of us working together, I'd love to hear from you. Any companies who wish to organise an in-house workshop for their staff may contact me directly at [shirley@shirleytaylor.com](mailto:shirley@shirleytaylor.com). More details about my training workshops are shown on my website.

Thanks Shirley



**THE AMANDA BARRY INTERVIEW**

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Author of PR Power - Inside Secrets from the World of Spin  
Foreword by Sir Richard Branson.  
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**1) If you are the PR advisor for a Tsunami-hit government, what will you propose to do?**

Keeping communication channels - both internally and internationally - open will be vitally important for all governments whose countries have been affected by the Tsunami. Clear communication with aid organisations, overseas governments offering aid and assistance and coordination between officials representing all of these parties will play a large part in getting aid to where it needs to be most effectively and efficiently.

I would nominate a principle person to be responsible for coordinating these communication channels, and for briefing back to the government what is happening.

Also - keeping the ordinary people informed of progress with aid and assistance is also key. Daily information updates, in the form of briefings to the country's local media (radio, newswires, tv), will go some way to achieving this where people have access to radios etc. For those that don't - working with the aid agencies and those helping on the front line - to deliver information verbally, will help maintain communication at its most basic level.

**2) Is there a difference between a PR and Crisis-Management?**

Crisis management is a function of public relations. If public relations is essentially about managing how, when and in what way we communicate, then crisis management is simply this exercise carried out in extreme or 'crisis' situations.

**3) Do you have mentors yourself?**

For many years while I was managing a team of people at my consultancy, my mentor was Kiki Maurey - a superb adviser whom I found through attending a Business Link SME series of workshops. Many times she kept me sane and focussed. More recently, I use a 'counsel' of special contacts and associates with whom I share ideas and particular challenges with.

**4) What motivated you to write a book? Do you have new titles in the future?**

I was approached by Virgin Books series author Robert Craven and invited to submit a proposal to write the book on PR (there are twelve other titles in the Business Guides series). My ideas were accepted and suddenly, I had a deadline to meet! I have two other writing projects currently on the go - another business book, and a historical account of my father's time in Antarctica in the late 1940s.

**5) Can copywriting be trained?**

Copywriting is a skill that can be learned, but like everything - some will have more of a natural flair for it than others.