

How I lost out to a dead guy

Karen Roem encounters an amorous laptop, suffers a bout of self-consciousness and wonders if being Dutch means she's mean

Thursday 16 March

It's finally released! After six months without any sleep we finished our computer-based training. Last night, when the client and I were drinking premature celebratory champagne cocktails, we were still unsure about the exact date it would be online, but today we got the green light. OK, I have to admit we've been through hell and back (a few times). Fears of not being up to the task. Writer's block. Shitty pilot feedback. Web hosting issues. But the result is pretty cool. Mind you, we've kinda been knocked off cloud nine as – get this – it's one down, four to go.

By the way, if you love the satisfaction of popping bubble wrap when stress levels go sky-high, there is an insane virtual version of this entertaining packaging material on www.virtual-bubblewrap.com.

Tuesday 21 March

Picture this. I'm sitting with my client on a table. Both with our laptops. Suddenly my laptop makes what sounds like a good old fashioned wolf whistle to the client's laptop. The delighted device responds in an amorous manner by suggesting to connect. And before I know it, I have a version of the client's Word document on my desktop. Ah, the wonders of wireless link.

Tuesday 28 March

Got a message from somebody asking why I would sit on a table with a client. (Well, at least someone has read my posting of last Tuesday.) Visions of the customer and me dangling our feet over the edge of a rickety office table make me reconsider my choice of words. Lord knows what the correct preposition is, but I suggest 'around'. The smug commenter proposes 'at'. In the end we settle for 'under' and agree never to talk about it anymore. Ever.

Thursday 30 March

Wrap-up time. So here I am, giving closure to the two-day train-the-trainer programme, ensuring that participants are happy with what was covered and that they feel confident to return to their desks and start their new role. 'Any last-minute questions?' I ask. 'Yes,' one of my female course participants answers. 'Where did you buy your shoes?'

Friday 7 April

Back on air. On arrival the producer warns me it'll be three of us in the studio. Apparently, Ian is there, too. 'But he'll be really quiet,' she



'The producer says there'll be three of us on air, but Ian will be very quiet. Her dead friend's ashes are on a chair'

assures me. Turns out that, tying in with the BBC2 programme *How to Have a Good Death*, BBC Radio Cambridgeshire has been broadcasting a week of features on the often-taboo subject of death. Yesterday, Sue Dougan did her broadcast live from behind the scenes at Cambridge's crematorium. Today she brought her deceased friend's ashes, and as I enter he's sitting on a chair in the studio. But it's business as usual... callers are invited to phone, text or email their questions. And guess what. The dead guy scores better ratings than me!

Tuesday 11 April

One of my course participants informs me that he's been on this very same course with me before. Gee, thanks for telling me that. As if I'm not already self-conscious enough about making the same jokes every time I run the session. And that's without somebody in the audience who might realise

I'm not as funny as I'd like to think I am. But then, if it was applause I was after, I should have signed up for the Sylvia Young Theatre School.

Monday 8 May

National stereotypes. You know, the Germans don't have a sense of humour. The Russians are drunk most of the time. The French eat frogs. And the Dutch... well, suffice to say that they make the same jokes about us as you do about the Scottish. Supposedly we're mean, tight-fisted, Penny-pinching. So when I get home with my packs of laser printer paper to print off the manuals for various upcoming events and I notice I've been charged for one too many, I jump in my car and drive back. Expecting a verbal fight with the customer service lady as I could easily have made this story up, I am pleasantly surprised she refunds the money immediately. No questions asked. So when I express my gratitude she just looks at me and mumbles: 'Most people wouldn't have bothered.'

Friday 19 May

Testimonial for your website, the subject of the email reads. Feedback from a client I have been working nearly a year for. All psyched up I open the message. 'Karen is a real bitch. I can't stand her. And she always makes me pay for my own dinner which just isn't on.' One paragraph down it continues: 'Ok, here's the real one...'

Karen Roem is the founder of software training and support firm Roem Limited. Diary of a training consultant is an extract from Karen's Blog: www.roem.co.uk/blog.html