

This Time, It's for Real...

PREPPING FOR A PRESENTATION CAN GET PRETTY HECTIC. ESPECIALLY WHEN THE SPEAKER IS PERFECTIONIST ROB GLASER. BY SCOTT LAJOIE

ROB GLASER HAS HARDLY had time to breathe.

The past month has been a whirlwind of events for Glaser and his company, RealNetworks. On April 12, the company announced a major strategic agreement with IBM. The next day, it announced plans to buy Xing Technology, the leading encoder of MP3 music files. Glaser delivered the keynote address at Spring Internet World in Los Angeles a couple of days after that. Then came an earnings report and stock split the following week, after which Glaser again found himself at the podium for another keynote speech, this one for the National Association of Broadcasters' annual conference. Twelve days later, Glaser unveiled RealJukebox, the audio player that may well put the company in the vanguard of the MP3 revolution.

Just off the plane from the RealJukebox announcement in New York, Glaser and his crew are setting up for their own annual show—RealNetworks Conference '99—at the Marriott in downtown San Francisco (a hotel that bears an appropriate resemblance to a jukebox). For Glaser, this is the capstone event, a prime opportunity to rally the myriad of developers who have come to hear about not only the future of music and video on the Internet but the future of music and video altogether. RealNetworks' partners, designers of crucial supporting technologies, are Glaser's most important audience yet.

But at 8 p.m., the Yerba Buena ballroom, where Glaser's keynote address is to take place in just 12 hours, is nowhere near ready. The chairs aren't set up, the backdrop is still being nailed into place, and people from the production company are frantically whispering commands into their headsets. Glaser is running late, too. He had hoped to rehearse at 7 p.m., but at the moment, he is still holed up in a room upstairs working on the

particulars of his PowerPoint presentation. Instead of a full-blown run-through, he may have to settle for only a "click-through," and even that won't happen until 11 p.m.

Glaser sits at the center of a long table, flanked by executives Len Jordan, Ben Rotholtz, David Johnson, and Chris Carden, each staring intently at his own notebook computer. Given their standard style-of-no-style look, you might not guess that this group represents the management of a company that the market values at \$4.4 billion. All are young and casually dressed—particularly Glaser, whose white polo shirt hangs out of his trousers. All of them look a bit spent. Coming down to the wire, each of the executives is adding new material to the presentation.

Meanwhile, downstairs, one of Glaser's division vice presidents, Maria Cantwell, is patiently waiting for her CEO. She has finished drafting her parts of the speech and is wandering around the ballroom floor. A former

Washington State politician and U.S. congresswoman, she knows a thing or two about public speaking. Most of the night, she will stand silently near Glaser, listening intently. When Cantwell does speak up, however, Glaser will pay close attention.

Finally, around 9:30 p.m., Glaser appears. Arms crossed, expressionless, he watches the opening videos play above him on the big screen. The video consists of clips of the New York event, where Chuck D of rap group Public Enemy and rock star Dexter Holland laud the RealJukebox product. Humorous bits include an introduction of Glaser as Rob G and segments from Comedy Central's *Win Ben Stein's Money*. But Glaser doesn't like the sequencing and tells the video editors to rework it.

Having laid the last lengths of duct tape over the wires on the floor, the event staff have finished their preparations. Annette



Booth, RealNetworks' senior manager of event planning, and Cindy Ayres of Caribiner Digital Media Group both sit down in two of the hundreds of chairs set up in the past hour and let out a sigh in unison. Little by little the room empties until there are only a few figures at the front of the hall.

After a full 20 minutes of discussing the logistics of the presentation, Glaser heads onto the stage. He runs through the PowerPoint slides at the podium, hacking pieces of the presentation apart. Glaser claims his approach is a matter of distillation, of tightening the language. If something is said in five words, he pares it down to three. His staff watches intently as Glaser works. Brows furrow and heads nod as he cuts and pastes new words and phrases into the slides. Glaser is now hyperfocused on his task, though it is past midnight (3 a.m. if you consider that hours earlier he was in a different time zone).

One of RealNetworks' vice presidents is simultaneously working on the RealJukebox demo, a real-time download of MP3 music files. This bit of theater is a big risk. If Northern Californians decide en masse to jump on the Net while he is doing his thing the following morning, there could be an embarrassing delay.

The trips to the back of the room for ice water and Diet Coke have become more frequent. Everyone but Glaser seems to be

quickly running out of energy. The time comes to view a clip of Kevin O'Connor, CEO of DoubleClick, singing the praises of RealNetworks. On the screen, O'Connor's image stares straight ahead, delivering a rather dull testimonial. "Believe me, it's a lot better than it was," says Len Jordan. After a moment of thought, Glaser announces, "It's totally fine."

Glaser looks at his watch: 12:30 a.m. Returning to the slides, Glaser suggests that they might have too much information. He has never done a presentation quite so long. But instead of more cutting, Glaser and his staff agree that an additional slide is needed to show RealNetworks' partners. A consultant who was hired to create the PowerPoint slides jumps up. "Should we have descriptions of the companies?" asks Jordan. "Pithy," Glaser says. "Make 'em pithy."

One o'clock rolls around and Glaser finally decides to call it a night. Everyone is sagging. Unfortunately, Glaser still has not done a full run-through, and most of the staff appears a little nervous because of it. But Glaser isn't worried. In less than six hours, he will take the stage—dressed in his signature suit, royal blue shirt, no tie, full of energy and optimism—and give the RealNetworks developers what they're looking for: a whole lot of rah-rah. ■

15 tips from those who have been there...

1 Write your own speech so it is in your voice. Take ownership of it, so you know the story you want to tell clearly and concisely. Pepper it with your own anecdotes. Don't let your PR people make up stories for you.
— Jerry Weissman, speech coach, Power Presentations

2 Don't use PowerPoint and other multimedia crutches. This stuff seldom works right, which means you'll be trying to recover from the beginning. Even if you get the thing running, you'll

have too much text in too small a font size. The more media a speaker uses, the less he or she has to say.
— Guy Kawasaki, CEO, garage.com

3 Make sure your speech is fresh, germane, and up-to-date. If you're talking in the past tense, you destroy your line of credibility. Whenever you repeat historical references, people view you as a history teacher. Essentially, the audience's minds shut down. It would take a marching band to get their attention back.
— Ed Griffin, president, Meeting Professionals International

4 Survey the venue well before you're on. Find out about backdrop. If it clashes with your clothes, you will not be a pleasant sight. Also, look to

see if there are any cords that may be in your path. Tripping over a cord can be extremely embarrassing.
— Patrice Carroll, VP, MCI WorldCom

5 Use an attention-getting device. Whether it is a startling statistic, a funny anecdote, or even a prop, it will loosen up both you and the crowd. It only takes between three and seven seconds for audience members to decide whether they like you or not.
— Joyce Newman, voice coach, The Newman Group

6 Don't use a TelePrompTer. Only wings use TelePrompTers. If you need a word-for-word transcript, you don't know enough about the subject to be speaking on it. If this is so, do the audience a favor and decline the speech.
— Guy Kawasaki

7 Make eye contact and smile. Try not to look like a duck in a shooting gallery. Too many people speak right over the audience's heads. You want each member of the audience to feel a connection with you.
— Joyce Newman

8 Pause to breathe and take a drink of water. Use this break to think about what you are going to say next. Don't ever say "um" during these respites.
— Jennifer Jones, marketing guru

9 Use short sentences, but take it slow. You need to write your speech for the ear, not the eye. Remember that the listener cannot go back to the previous paragraph to figure out what you're talking about.
— Joyce Newman

10 Don't focus on your company. Don't tell people you have a great company. Give them a high-content, relevant speech, and they will conclude by themselves that you have a great company. At most, weave in your company as an example, but it should not be the central focus.
— Guy Kawasaki

11 Don't speak too far above the audience's heads. Never speak in bits and bytes to an audience who might not be as

tech savvy as you. I pretend I am speaking to my 72-year-old mother-in-law.
— Sheldon Laube, CTO, USWeb/CKS

12 Don't move on your punchlines. Let them sink in. But don't let rigor mortis set in afterward. Start moving again and make hand gestures.
— Joyce Newman

13 Make sure to wrap it up. People think, "If I just give you the facts, you'll understand, you'll get it." People have to be told the relevance of what you're talking about.
— Anne Miller, speech coach, Chiron Associates

14 Don't get a swelled head from a round of applause. Some speakers, once concluding that they've nailed a speech, will use that presentation over and over again. They get positive responses until it reaches a point of diminishing returns.
— Danny Stern, president, The Leigh Bureau

15 Don't believe your PR handlers. Silicon Valley's worst job is escorting big-name execs to their speeches for the purpose of assuring them that they didn't bomb. If you have to ask your PR handler how you did, you bombed. The only opinion that matters is the audience's, not your \$100-an-hour babysitter's.
— Guy Kawasaki

16 Use an attention-getting device.



17 Compiled by Michelle Jeffers and Scott Lajovic