

Dear Client,

Welcome to our monthly newswire. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it useful.

Best wishes

John Harrison

DELL XPS 13 LAPTOP

The new Dell XPS 13 follows a long line of similarly named laptops. The design of this latest version is slick and looks very professional, but as with most compact laptops, ports and physical connectivity options are minimal. There's a USB 3.0 port on each side, a power socket, Mini DisplayPort and headset jack on the left. An SDXC card slot, and a security lock slot are located on the right.

The screen has a beautiful, slim bezel and with the screen switched on, only a very small edge remains black. Dell calls this new display "infinityEdge" and it is easy to see why; with so little frame, you wonder why all laptops aren't made this way. Interestingly the XPS 13 has a touchscreen which makes it a little bit different from the equivalent Apple Macbook Air.

Unusually, the bottom of the screen is where the webcam is located, as the designers couldn't find a way to slip a camera into the usual top-central bezel position. Rather unsurprisingly, this low-slung camera will mean that Skype chats will usually involve people looking up at your chin.

Dell UK offers four models with either Intel Core i5 or i7 processors. Each of these chips has integrated Intel HD Graphics 5500 which should be enough for most business users. Memory is fixed at 4 or 8 GB, with no option to add more as it is soldered to the motherboard. 8GB should be more than enough for typical users of an ultraportable laptop, unless you run more memory-intensive programs. The keyboard and trackpad are nicely constructed and easy to use. The trackpad is better than those found on many Windows laptops, if still short of the precise steering and control you'll find on an Apple MacBook.

The Dell XPS 13 is available directly from Dell from £769 (excluding VAT and shipping) with an Intel Core-i5 processor running at 2.7 Ghz. This model ships with 4GB of memory and 128GB of storage. However, it is probably worth going for the next model up, as it comes with 8GB of memory and 256GB of storage for £859 (excluding VAT and shipping).

PUBLIC SPEAKING – ENGAGE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

One of the main differences between an average speaker and a good speaker is that a good speaker possesses the ability to engage with people and really capture their attention. Good speakers are aware of how to make a connection with their audience. Here are a few tips to help you really engage with your audience:

Gratitude is always the best place to begin

Any and every speaking opportunity is an honour. Whether it is a seminar or an awards presentation, thank the audience for taking the time to show up and listen to you.

Be prepared

Even if you can improvise or "wing it" with the best of them, do a complete run through in advance, and prepare a written list of key points.

Lead with your best stuff

Make an entrance and put your best point forward straight away. Start with your best story, your funniest joke, your guiding theory etc. Don't make them wait to see you shine. Get the audience behind you from the very beginning.

Keep it interesting

When you prepare your talk, think about how important a book's first paragraph is; if it doesn't grab you, you're likely to put it down. The same principle goes for your speech: from the beginning, you need to intrigue your audience.

Know who you're talking to

Research your audience. You won't always be presenting or pitching to your target audience or even to people you "like" so find the common ground and focus on the relevant points.

Even if you are tired, don't show it

Never open with a comment about being tired or fatigued. Get up there and smile, no matter what. You can collapse when you get off stage.

Plan your finish

Wrapping up can be the hardest part of a talk because you've either used up all of your good stuff, have gone over time, or have space to fill. Prepare a little golden nugget for the end so that you can leave on a high note.

Believe that people are rooting for you

Every single person watching and listening to you wants you to be amazing. They want a great experience. No one likes to see someone fail. They really do want you to win – believe in that and your presentation will go well.

COMMUNICATION KEEPS YOUR BUSINESS ON TARGET

As a manager there will be situations in which you will have to communicate a new policy or process, understand issues that are impacting on the delivery of results or poor performance, present a report or business case to secure additional resources and so on. Good communication skills can help you to keep your business on track.

Avoid misunderstandings

When communicating something new, it is easy for things to be misinterpreted or taken out of context. Avoid misunderstanding by making sure that when you are briefing, you state what is required, check the audience understands what you are trying to convey and listen to questions that are raised.

Keep it simple

When you can use a simple and easy-to-understand word, use it. Using jargon, slang or complex language will just confuse your audience. Say only what you mean and mean only what you say. If you are not sure that your intended message was received by the listener, reconfirm.

Asking questions

When faced with problems, many people give so much focus to solutions that they fail to listen and fully understand what the issue is. Asking lots of questions to clarify the problem is a simple, but highly effective, way of overcoming this.

Be positive and constructive

No one likes to start a conversation in a negative way. Do your best to communicate messages in positive and constructive methods. If you are in a performance review, address any weaknesses as new opportunities to learn and grow for self-improvement. In a team meeting, lead the discussion with a "structure", but guide the conversation with "flexibility".

Communicate in order to make better decisions

You are not going to get every decision right. You can, however, communicate your options and the pros and cons of decisions to your colleagues in order to help you and the business to make more effective decisions.

Better teamwork

The teams that you manage like to feel involved, and communicating with them is one of the easiest and cheapest things to do. Let your team members know what is going on, what the objectives of the business are and listen to their feedback.

INNOVATION STRATEGY

When innovation and business objectives are equally valued, broadly promoted and fully communicated, a culture naturally exists that fosters alignment of the two. In order to achieve this cultural shift, top-down business objectives need to be communicated throughout the firm. It then becomes your team's responsibility to align their innovative activities to support the objectives of the business.

Create a plan

The business should have a strategy roadmap which shows the firm that the impact of aligning everyone's objectives creates more value than working in silos. Objectives should be related to creating product enhancements, intellectual property and continuously improving operations.

Be more joined up

Jointly developing technology, product, service and business innovation, roadmaps encourage discussion and debate and help the firm to forge links between teams that guide actions and keep everybody moving in the right direction.

Lead from the top

Fundamentally, innovation should be an integral part of your business objectives. The Chief Executive of your business should create and communicate a business strategy that includes an innovation pillar in addition to the usual pillars such as financials, sales, IT, etc. Each business unit should have a number of objectives that cascade from the overall business strategy and each unit should have at least one objective that encourages innovation within their team.

Focus on growth

Growth of most businesses is fuelled by innovation. Whether that innovation is faster, cheaper or better products / services, the business will grow as a result.

Innovation means finding solutions

Everything in business can ultimately be boiled down to "finding a solution to a problem", but not every problem should be solved with an innovation. By taking a portfolio approach to your business you can identify problems for which you already have solutions. Outside of those, there will be problems that require improvements to an existing solution, and those that require entirely new, differentiating solutions. That's where you need to focus your innovation efforts in order to gain a competitive edge in your market.