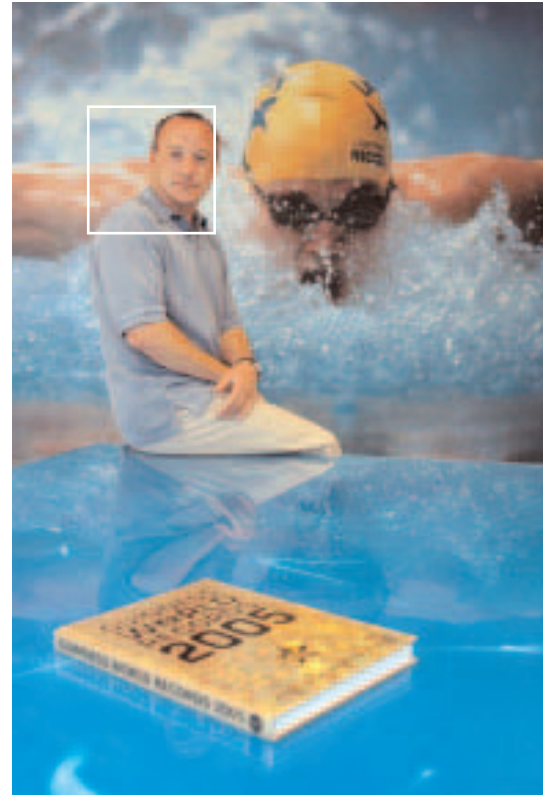




# Alistair Richards



Alistair, Chief Operating Officer at Guinness World of Records, has enjoyed a blue-chip management career that has taken him to the top of one of the world's best known publishing ventures.

Its main publication, Guinness World Records, is a record breaker in its own right. With sales of more than 100 million copies in 100 different countries and 37 languages, it is the world's best ever selling copyright book, even outselling Harry Potter.

Richards has been a convert to the SCQuARE process for business planning ever since he was sent on a course during his first job at Colgate-Palmolive. He joined the company as a graduate in business studies. SCQuARE was part of the induction package for new joiners to the management team. Within nine years he became the company's sales director.

Richards says SCQuARE was widely used and liked by managers within the organisation as it offered both a rigorous thinking process and an effective management tool for managers

who had to produce plans to cope with a variety of issues. It was the starting point on which all plans would be developed, be it the overall business plan or a national account plan.

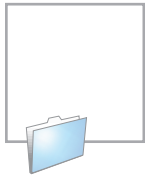
He also says that SCQuARE was particularly useful during his time at Colgate-Palmolive for what he describes as high-pressure internal planning meetings with senior management. In particular, there was an annual forum in which management would discuss how they could develop major national accounts like Tesco and Sainsbury. Key account managers would have to sell their ideas for improving sales and relationships with these retailers to the senior management team.

Invariably, these meetings would feature a PowerPoint presentation, a sense of business theatre and some degree of pressure on the presenter to deliver a convincing plan. However, the intention was that out of these meetings would come the overall document which the business would use as the basis for negotiations with the retailers and to finalise trading terms each year.

In 1995, he left Colgate-Palmolive to become sales and marketing director at Hasbro Toys, where he eventually became its regional MD, marketing globally recognised bands like Action Man and Monopoly into key and varied markets like the UK, the Nordic countries, Holland, Turkey, Israel and South Africa.

“A PROPERLY PREPARED PLAN WHICH CONTAINED THE CORRECT ANALYSIS OF THE KEY ISSUES WOULD NOT JUST GET YOU THROUGH THE PRESENTATION, IT WOULD ALSO EFFECTIVELY PROVIDE YOU WITH A LARGE PART OF THAT WORKING DOCUMENT,”

“When I joined Hasbro, it was a company without tools, process or training in relation to planning. Culturally, it was very different from Colgate-Palmolive and was almost entirely focused on prices and



packaging. I believed we were more than a distribution arm of a multi-national with major tangible assets like Monopoly and Action Man. I had to convince the UK company, and then the International president, that we needed change management and a new business culture,” explains Richards.

“At Hasbro, I first used SCQuARE as a way of working out where we were. As a tool, it gave me the capability to analyse what was good and what was bad and to test my own analysis.” He thought that his proposals for change management would be a difficult internal sell. “They were toy people and to them I was a toothpaste person new to toys. Their values were all about newness, freshness, novelty whereas my natural focus was all about account management and the values of brand building,” he explained. However, his concerns proved unfounded and his ideas were adopted. As with many SCQuARE plans developed for an internal audiences, much of the content could be used in subsequent pitches to external audiences.

“The retailers were sophisticated customers looking for more. By using SCQuARE, I could get our managers to speak their language. They judge the performance of sales, products and brands and use the same measurement criteria we developed in our plans at Hasbro. Culturally, they find a way of positioning arguments in headlines, which is also exactly what SCQuARE does,” says Richards.

Now he is running a publishing, broadcasting and products & licensing

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business with a team of 35 managers to support him. The broadcasting outfit makes TV programmes, mainly in the UK, France and Germany, which are sold into the US, the Nordic countries, Spain and Japan. It owns over 350 hours of programming. Its need to pitch to the major national networks like ITV and NBC in order both to get commissions and sell shows is one of the reasons he has sent much of his team on the SCQuARE course, including his TV sales manager and the heads of TV, marketing, international sales and publishing. He has also sent the head of IT on the course so that he can clearly understand the planning process, the template his fellow managers use and the process adopted.

“I want them to have the skills to work up their own ideas and to have the ability to test these ideas for themselves,” he explains, as this allows him and the team to run the business with a huge degree of autonomy.

Although he says he has found that using SCQuARE plays less of a role for himself personally than it did at either Colgate-Palmolive or Hasbro, he believes that it really helped him when he arrived at the job and immediately had to write the business plan for the way forward.

It was, he says, a strange time for the business which had just been bought by HIT Entertainment PLC, the licensing company which owns the rights to Bob The Builder and Thomas the Tank Engine amongst others.

He was originally tasked with running it and making it sellable. He used SCQuARE to explain to the organisation what he wanted to put in place. His plan, chiefly aimed at HIT’s CEO and head of Mergers & Acquisitions, used only headlines.

It identified what disciplines needed pulling both together within the organisation and how it should structure itself to deal with its highly seasonal selling peaks (Guinness World Records is traditionally published in September, but the majority of its sales are in the intense November/December pre-Christmas selling period). The plan focused on two key objectives: 1. to create a slim-line and effective management team 2. to make it a number-focused business with a core process and financial targets.

Three years later, the plan has worked. HIT has since decided to keep the business rather than sell it. It is clear that SCQuARE has played a pivotal role in Alistair Richards’s management career. A convert himself as a graduate trainee at Colgate-Palmolive, he has continued to advocate its value and has since recruited new managers to the SCQuARE process at both Hasbro and Guinness World Records.