The very idea of standing up to address your peers offers very little appeal to most sensible people; why would anyone want to risk the embarrassment of public humiliation? Well, there are several reasons actually, all of which will help you and your practice but as with most things in life, preparation and practice are the keys to making it seem natural. As Mark Twain famously noted: “There are two types of public speakers; those who are nervous before they start, and the liars.”

Speaking in public should mean you have something you want to share with others, be that a clinical case study, a point of view or a call to action. There is clearly no point in addressing a room full of people unless you have something to say, although unfortunately there are many people – not just in dentistry who have chosen to ignore that rule and seem to enjoy the sound of their own voices.

Start small
Start with a small audience such as a local BACD study club or networking meeting where you can give a ten-minute presentation on a topic that you really know and are passionate about. For example: a case you treated where you can show before and after images and discuss why you made certain treatment decisions. That will draw the audience in as they weigh up your course of action against what theirs might have been presented with a similar case.

Personal experience is always useful when speaking in public; people like to hear stories and you will usually get a response out of sharing your mistakes or something that you have recently learned; such as a new technique in veneers.

Helpful
There is a comprehensive range of books, DVDs, online and face to face courses available to improve your public speaking and presentation skills.
skills and those are very much a matter of personal choice but for what it's worth, I found these tips particularly helpful:

a) Plan the entire lecture and rehearse it. The skill is to make it look like you are ad-libbing and it just flows but this only comes from rehearsing over and over again. I remember watching Chris Rock on tour and thinking how spontaneous he looked. Then watching him on Youtube and seeing the exact same performance in three other countries - the only thing that changed was the background. Even his stage position and gestures were identical and that only comes from practice.

b) You will get nervous, so speak to a few members of the audience before your talk so you see some friendly faces when you get up to speak. Make eye contact from time to time to deliver certain points.

c) Write down your introduction and learn it. It will help make your thoughts clearer and help the audience understand what to expect. Also you are much less likely to be nervous as you know exactly what you are going to say.

d) Don’t have too many slides or too much text on each slide. Your audience will end up reading the slides and not engaging with you. Only put on a slide what you want people to remember, ideally an image that will resonate with them and act as an aide-memoire for you. Their attention should be on you, not your slides.

e) You need to strike a balance between entertainment and education.

Try comedy!
I’ve always loved watching stand-up comedy and thought standing up in front of a room full of strangers and trying to make them laugh would be absolutely terrifying. But never one to resist a challenge, I enrolled at the Comedy School in London under the directorship of Keith Palmer where once a week for seven weeks I sprayed on triple deodorant, spent most of the morning beforehand on the toilet and at last found a use for my Christmas funny socks. The socks were no use but the course was fabulous.

The more you put yourself out there the more confident you will become and you will be amazed at the impact public speaking can have on your dentistry and your business by raising your profile. And, once you get over the initial nerves, you might be pleasantly surprised by how much you enjoy public speaking - I love it!

About the author
James Goolnik is talking at the BDTA Showcase on Friday 21st October.
He is the immediate past president of the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and a member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), Association of Dental Implantology, British Society Of Occlusal Studies and the British Dental Association. His book 'Brush' about having an outstanding career in Dentistry, whilst having a life, is a bestseller on Amazon with all the profits going to Dentaid. He has just been voted the most influential person in Dentistry in the UK.

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