

HOW TO HOLD YOUR AUDIENCE

STEVE CAMPION suggests five steps for creating a truly compelling sales presentation

If you've been asked to present to a potential client, you want to be sure that the presentation engages and informs them, and that they leave understanding what you offer and why they need to buy it from you. So, here's how:

1 BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT YOUR MESSAGE

The golden rule of planning any presentation is to focus the audience and how your product or service can meet their needs. When you're busy, even a seasoned salesperson can fall into the trap of simply wanting to knock out the next deck of slides. This is when you need to take a breath and remember that it's not about you. It should be about your customers and the problems that they need to solve, such as operating more efficiently or being more competitive in the market. Just how will your product or service be of value to them?

Consider your goal for the presentation too. A strong and memorable message from Stephen Covey in his bestselling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is, "Begin with the end in mind". This is especially true when it comes to sales presentations. You are much more likely to achieve your aim, maybe to make an immediate sale or to arrange a meeting with senior decision-makers, if you have a clear message that is important to your customer.

2 PLAN THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

To make the magic happen and create a powerful, impactful presentation, I strongly advise stepping away from the keyboard. Grab a pad of sticky notes and write one key point on a page. The great virtue of this method is that you can move the points around until you have the perfect structure that will help your audience to



follow your presentation easily and support your message. Once you have your key points, add a story or anecdote for each of them (each on a separate sticky). For example, your point may be that your taxi company has more drivers than anyone else. Add a story of how a client had been able to get to the airport after a last-minute flight change. Although you need to include facts and figures, it's the stories and emotional connection that will make your presentation memorable to your audience.

The presentation guru Nancy Duarte says: "Presentations fail because of too much information, not too little". For each slide, ask yourself the question, "Does it help this audience understand this message?" If the answer is "No" remove the slide. If someone asks you a question where the information suddenly becomes more relevant, you know you can retrieve it then.



“Presentations fail because of too much information, not too little”

3 CHOOSE INTERESTING AND APPROPRIATE VISUALS

There are lots of tools available to create visual aids, but of course the content of the slides is much more important than the tool you use. Look for images that support your points and stories. An authentic picture of a happy child playing could set the scene when introducing your new line of toys. For free-to-use photos, try unsplash.com, gratisography.com or searching online for “creative commons”. There are also low-cost photo libraries such as istockphoto.com and shutterstock.com. Best of all would be to use your own photos. Photos or quotes from your current customers can be particularly helpful, and much more interesting than a generic slide full of company logos. Remember that you and your message are unique, so by striving to avoid bland, generic stock photos and clip art you can



STEVE CAMPION is from Toastmasters International, a not-for-profit educational organisation that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of meeting locations. Visit: www.toastmasters.org

make your images equally bespoke and powerful.

You may be required to use a corporate template. This can seem restrictive, but it’s also an opportunity to get creative. Ensure that the images you use are consistent with the corporate style and colour scheme, but don’t fall into the trap of thinking that every slide needs to contain your logo (unless your organisation insists on this). If you’re 10 minutes into a presentation and people don’t know who you are, then a logo isn’t going to solve the problem!

I recently saw a vendor pitch with 221 words on a single slide. Yes, I counted. And no, I’m still not sure what their message was. So, use text sparingly and use a large, clear font. Text can be useful for quotes or to emphasise a point that you’ve just made.

Always remember that people can’t read and listen to you at the same time, so always pause after revealing something on the screen.

4 DISCUSSION, NOT MONOLOGUE

A good sales presentation isn’t a dramatic monologue. It’s a discussion with your potential or existing customer. Try sharing some statistics and charts that show relevant information about their industry or market, and then ask if they have a similar experience. This allows you to build credibility and rapport, and to adjust your course if necessary.

5 REHEARSE, AND REHEARSE AGAIN

You only get one chance to deliver your presentation to your potential customer, so rehearse until you’re thoroughly confident. Try practising it with a friend or colleague to get their feedback, and ask them to be hypercritical. It is just as important to rehearse before meeting an existing customer as a new one – there is danger in being complacent.

Always check what equipment you’ll need to use when presenting and pay particular attention to connectors for screens and projectors. Bring spares of everything possible in case something goes wrong and take a power extension cable too. Having your presentation on a USB stick can get you out of trouble in an emergency. If you’ll be attending a meeting with a colleague, make sure that they have a copy of the presentation too. Get some practice at connecting everything up – or better still, do so beforehand – as nobody likes 10 minutes of awkward small talk while you try and get your presentation on the screen. Finally, just in case the technology fails completely, take some handouts with you as a fallback option.

Follow these five steps and you’ll keep delivering the most powerful messages possible.