

explore, engage, execute, evaluate

Advanced Presentation Skills

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Notes to accompany Advanced Presentation Skills Workshop

Introduction

These notes are designed to accompany the Advanced Presentation Skills workshops delivered by CMBD Ltd.

They include some of the more basic aspects of presenting as revision notes if required as well as helpful information on some of the more advanced techniques, points and tips.

There are four main aspects to presenting effectively and getting your message across.

- Preparing a Presentation.
- Preparing Yourself.
- Delivering a Presentation.
- Handling an Audience.

These are dealt with in detail in the following sections.

Delegate Notes

Preparing a Presentation

Defining your purpose

The start point for preparation is to clearly define your purpose in getting up to speak. What do you want the audience to do as a result of having listened to you? When considering your aims, three things are likely to influence you,

- The type of message you want to deliver.
- The nature of the audience.
- The physical aspects of the venue.

Review the purpose of your presentation, is it too simple or too detailed, how might the audience receive your message, modify your purpose or style if required.

Assessing Ability

Do not try to be anything other than yourself. There is nothing worse than trying to be humorous if you can't tell jokes! Focus on your strengths and use them to the full. If you have a good clear voice, use it well. If you have a talent for making the audience laugh then tell a relevant story. Identify any fears or concerns you have about the presentation and address them. If you are unfamiliar with the venue then visit it in advance.

Knowing Your Audience

Find out about your audience.

Some relevant questions may include,

- Expected size of the audience.
- Average age.
- Ratio of male to female.
- Is the audience well informed about your subject?
- Has the audience chosen to attend or been asked?
- What do they have in common?
- What prejudices might they hold?
- Cultural makeup of the audience?
- Do they know you?

Plan to involve your audience if you can. Obviously the size of the group will influence you here but make sure that your material is clear, precise and easy to follow.

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The Venue and Logistics

Effective presenting is about confidence and reducing stress on yourself. Make sure that you know the venue and organise your schedule to allow sufficient time for travel and set-up.

Does the equipment work and are you familiar with it. Are your notes, materials, slides or PowerPoint presentation in order?

A microphone is only required for large audiences or in the open air. Make sure that you test it in advance if you are using one. Hand-held or podium microphones tend to restrict movement so consider a radio mike or clip-on microphone if you need to move about.

Clarifying Objectives

It is important to think clearly about your objectives. What response do you want from the audience? For clarity, structure your presentation around three or four main points only.

Remember the 3 “E’s”. A successful presentation will have three essential objectives,

- To educate – the audience should learn something from your presentation.
- To entertain – the audience should enjoy your speech.
- To explain – all parts of your presentation should be clear to the audience.

An adult audience has a limited attention span of a maximum of 45 minutes. They will absorb only 30% of what you say and can take on board no more than 7 concepts. Limit yourself to 3 or 4 main points and follow the rule of telling the audience what you are going to tell them, telling them it and reminding them what you have just told them.

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Structuring a Presentation

Your presentation needs to have a clear beginning, middle and end.

There are a number of different ways in which you can structure your material and the style you use will depend on the circumstances. For a formal presentation, it may be best to present your points in sequence, summarising each point as it is made and introducing the next topic. Remember that the audience may assume that the first point is the most important. For a more informal talk, it may be appropriate to overlap the points; this can encourage debate and audience participation.

It is usually helpful to outline your material to clarify the structure, for example,

Why induct staff fully into the organisation?

- Fulfilment of legal requirements.
- Staff familiar with procedures and what is expected of them quickly.
- Better moral.

What does induction involve?

- Initial induction session.
- Introduction to the workplace.
- Specific training programme.

Expected outcomes

- Better productivity.
- More motivation as hygiene factors covered.
- Lower staff turnover.

Always plan to open effectively and close memorably. The audience attention is at its greatest when you start and finish. Attention can be seriously lacking in the middle of a presentation and repetition of main points is essential.

Decide if you are writing a speech that you will deliver word for word or if you are going to use note cards or bullet points. The latter leads to a more relaxed style of presentation but requires you to know your subject. The cards or bullet points remind you where you are and allow you to signpost to the audience what you are talking about at that moment in time.

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Using Audio-Visual Aids

The use of AV aids can add substantially to a presentation and provide impact.

They can also distract and be overused.

The main issue is to use appropriate techniques and avoid overcomplicating things.

The basic item is a flipchart. Prepare complex things in advance and make sure that your writing, diagrams, charts etc are clear and large enough to be seen from the back of the room. Avoid continuing to talk to the audience while you are writing and don't stand in front of the finished article.

Remember that the audience will need time to absorb anything complex that you show them before they will listen to you (this applies for all visual layouts). Give them time to consider what you have just shown them before making your points.

Overhead projectors can be useful for graphs, charts etc but make sure that the slides are the right way round, the right way up, that all of the screen is in focus and turn it off when you have finished with it.

Projectors and PowerPoint presentations are becoming more common. Keep it simple and don't use a feature just because it is there. The main purpose of any visual aid is to add to your impact and clarify the purpose of your talk. Don't get carried away and allow sophisticated techniques to distract. Also remember that the more complex the show, the greater possibility of something going wrong. At the end of the day, if the power fails, can you still deliver an effective message?

Rehearsing

Very few of us can get up and deliver the perfect presentation without rehearsing it. For a start, it is the only effective way of judging how long we are going to take. The main purpose of rehearsal is to become familiar with our material. One of the keys to effective and memorable presentations is spontaneity. Only when you can deliver your material from bullet points do you get the flexibility and confidence that shows that you really know your subject.

Get feedback from colleagues or friends if possible. Do you have any distracting mannerisms? Is your choice of words and phrases appropriate? Are you using jargon and is the purpose of the presentation clear?

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Preparing Yourself

Believe in yourself!

For the vast majority of presentations, the audience want you to succeed!

Behave naturally, be yourself and the audience will warm to you. Always think of a large audience as a small group and talk personally to everyone. If you have prepared and rehearsed properly, you will come over in a confident and natural manner.

Appearance, Body Language and your Voice

Common sense dictates that your first impression is the lasting one. Dress appropriately for the occasion and stand correctly.

Remember that up to two thirds of communication is non-verbal – smile!

Keep eye contact with the audience as much as possible.

When we are nervous, the supply of adrenaline to our blood can have the effect of speeding up our speech and raising the pitch of our voice. Remember to speak slowly and clearly when you start to compensate for this.

Tension can be caused in the muscles when we are nervous, this can make our posture seem strange and cause a quiver in the voice. Simple stretching and breathing exercises can help to overcome this. Take a brief walk, stretch if possible or whatever works for you as an individual.

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Delivering a Presentation

Controlling the Nerves

The secret to a good delivery is to be yourself; anything else looks strange and sounds insincere.

The most experienced speakers feel some sort of nervousness before they start.

Thorough preparation before you start will give you confidence, rehearsals will have made you familiar with your material, knowledge of the venue and the equipment will take away stress.

Run through the following points to reassure yourself

- Unless they are hostile for some reason, the audience want me be to successful.
- Although you might be nervous, the audience will assume that you are not.
- You have a message that the audience wants to hear.
- Be wary of being overconfident – nobody likes a know-all.
- Nerves can add a sparkle to your performance.
- The audience is interested in what you are saying, not how you are feeling.
- Enthusiasm and sincerity always show.
- Time spent relaxing before the presentation helps you to concentrate during your performance.
- The more you present, the better you will get.

Delegate Notes

Speaking With Confidence

The way in which material is delivered can have four times the impact of the words alone. The way in which we emphasis various words, our tone, speed and body language, are all vital aspects of a presentation.

Make sure that you are properly introduced to the audience or that you take sufficient time to introduce yourself. Don't overdo it but you are starting to establish your credibility.

Consider the pace of your delivery, don't speed up and down for the sake of it, but do pause after important points and take the opportunity to renew eye contact with the audience.

Use body language and gestures to re-enforce your message. The way that you stand can convey confidence, a relaxed style or the use of a hand gesture can emphasis a key point.

Eye contact, however, is the key tool to establish a rapport with the audience. With a small group, you should make contact with each individual on an equal basis. Remember to include people "out in the wings". If someone is sitting to your left or right it is too easy to ignore them and they will switch off.

Large groups require a different technique and the key is to pick out suitable people in the audience to talk to in rotation. Always pick the people on the extreme left and right, as well as suitable friendly faces throughout the group.

Using Gestures

Bear in mind that the larger the audience, the larger your gestures need to be. A large audience would miss a normal technique of counting off a couple of points on your fingers. You need to greatly exaggerate such gestures, moving from the shoulder rather than the elbow or wrist. This will feel strange and unnatural at first but will appear normal to the audience.

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Developing your own Style

With experience, you will learn to make the best use of your talents to make an impact. This may be your voice, your stance or your ability to tell a humorous story. Whatever you do – be yourself.

Some key Do's and Don'ts as a simple checklist.

- Do use simple and clear language to achieve clarity.
- Do use eye contact at every available opportunity.
- Do keep pauses specific and use them to emphasis important points.
- Do use a clock at the back of the room (if possible) to keep an eye on the time.

- Don't apologise to an audience for your lack of experience or knowledge.
- Don't hesitate or mumble, if you lose your way stay calm until you get back on track.
- Don't drop your voice at the end of sentences, it sounds as if you are not sure.
- Don't lose sight of your purpose and the clarity of the message.

Closing Effectively

The most memorable part of your presentation should be the close. This is the point at which you remind your audience of your main points and tell them what you want them to do. Remember that their attention increases dramatically when you signal the end is in sight. Words such as “finally” or “in conclusion” have quite a dramatic effect on the audience.

Tell the audience how many issues or points you want them to take away with them. Make sure that you finish on time. Work out in advance what you can drop if you run short of time and leave things unsaid rather than bolt them on at the end.

Some tips for finishing strongly.

- Summarise your presentation in one or two strong sentences.
- Consider the use of alliteration to make an impact. The use of several words beginning with the same letter helps to create a lasting impression. Restrict this to three words.
- Use pauses to emphasis key points.
- Leave a pause between your close and any question and answer session.
- Don't appear to be in a hurry to leave.

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Handling An Audience

Judging the Mood

Observe the reaction to previous speakers or take a view of the atmosphere in the room. If the audience appear bored or distracted, you may need to adapt your style to get their attention. Ask a question requiring a show of hands, for example.

Continue to take readings during the course of your presentation, if people are talking to others they are not listening to you. Keep your body language positive.

Dealing with Questions

Always tell the audience how you are going to deal with questions in advance. Generally it is better to hold a session at the end of your presentation.

Key points to consider.

- Your response to the questions can be as important as the presentation itself.
- Most questions can be anticipated in advance and can therefore have considered responses.
- Don't take any question personally, it shows.
- Don't be hasty in giving a response; It is good practice to repeat the question back to the audience before replying. It ensures that people at the back of the room know what you are being asked and buys you thinking time.
- Seek clarification if you are not sure of the point being raised.
- Answer questions one at a time.
- If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to don't waffle. Simply tell the audience that you will find out and get back to the individual concerned.
- Don't get sidetracked, if asked a question that is not relevant, offer to talk to the person concerned about that issue after the event – and move on.
- Direct difficult or “naughty” questions back to the audience. “That is an interesting observation – does anyone have a comment?” or “would anyone like to respond to that point”.
- Always be polite and don't try to be clever with people
- Keep control, don't allow more than one person to speak at a time.

Loaded questions are designed to pick fault with your arguments, undermine you or embarrass you. Have a few tried and tested responses available.

“I was not intending to cover that issue today”.

I do not have sufficient time to go into that today”.

Although you are avoiding the question, it will ease the pressure and allow you to get back to relevant points and genuine questions.

Coping with a Hostile Situation

Occasionally strong feelings and different opinions cause difficult situations.

Stay calm, you are in control. Be polite but firm. Losing your temper will get you nowhere. Everyone deserves a hearing but don't allow people to dominate the proceedings.

Avoid prolonged eye contact with someone who is hostile. Emphasise any points of agreement and if you are stating fact rather than an opinion make this clear. If you are stating an opinion, be honest about it, it is your presentation.

If problems occur between members of the audience, you will be considered the mediator. Tell the protagonists that they will both have an opportunity to state their case. Then move them on by reminding the audience of the purpose of the presentation.

Sometimes you will be faced with an unresponsive group. It may be that they are not hostile, just quiet. This can be as difficult to deal with as real hostility. Try to involve people by asking a few general questions, reassure people that they will not be made to look silly or foolish, the silly question is the one that is not asked.

If you get nowhere, give them the answers to a few questions that you anticipated might be asked. Someone in the audience will be grateful.

A long pause may work in getting someone to speak up.

The best way of dealing with difficult situations is to gain experience and take every opportunity to learn. Ask your colleagues to give you awkward and difficult questions to test your response.

Delegate Notes

Presentation Structure

Every presentation has a beginning, a middle and an end. It may seem obvious but if you follow this approach there should be no great problems.

Starting a presentation

This is the most important part of the presentation and serves two main purposes

1. To act as an attention grabber for the audience
2. To let your elevated levels of adrenaline and testosterone racing through your blood stream settle down, so that you can relax into your presentation

This may well happen while the audience are finding their seats and wondering what is going to happen next. There is no right and wrong attention grabber, but here are some of the ones that I have found to work.

1. A funny story (if humour is your thing - but avoid religious, sexual, sexist or racist jokes)
2. A video clip, but if you use one, make sure that it is less than 60 seconds
3. Unusual statistics about your industry or about your audience
4. A cartoon. I personally use the cartoons from Ted Goff
5. Suspense (e.g. walk on with a cardboard box and place it in the middle of the stage - but don't tell people what it is there for)

The middle of a presentation

A good presentation technique is the **rule of three**.

The rule of three is based on the technique that people tend to remember three things. In oratory it comes up all the time. Here are some examples:

"Friends, Romans, countrymen"
"The good, the bad and the ugly"
"Blood, sweat and tears"

Think about - if there are only three points that I would like to leave my audience with, what would they be? There you have the middle of the presentation.

All you now have to do is to think of ways of illustrating these points and then you have the bulk of the structure of the presentation.

The end of the presentation

The end is more important than the beginning. There is a psychological factor called recency. This is where people remember most the last thing that they are told. This particularly applies to lists.

So the ending of the presentation is key.

There are a number of techniques that can work well, but they should be all related to the main structure of the presentation.

Ideas include;

1. A funny story (one that encapsulates at least one of the main themes of the presentation,
2. A high energy video clip,
3. Relieving the suspense (you may be wondering why I brought this cardboard box onto the stage...)

If you are really struggling for ideas, and want to play it safe, you could simply recap on the three main concepts that you have put forward in the middle section.

The Rule of Threes

Good speeches are peppered with lists with three items

1. "Friends, Romans, Countrymen" - William Shakespeare in Julius Caesar
2. "Blood, sweat and tears" - General Patton
3. Our priorities are "Education, Education, Education" - Prime Minister, Tony Blair

They are used in religion...

1. "Father, Son and Holy Spirit"
2. "Faith, Hope and Charity"

... in Public Safety

1. "Stop, Look and Listen"

... and in the film industry

1. "The good, the bad and the ugly"
2. "Sex, lies and videotape"

Putting it simply if you want your message to be remembered put it into a list of three.

Think about - if there are only three points that I would like to leave my audience with, what would they be? And then use no more than three themes per slide.

Here are more examples of the rule of three.

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" - the American Declaration of Independence

"Government of the people, by the people, for the people"- the Gettysburg Address

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics" - Benjamin Disraeli

"This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning" - Sir Winston Churchill

"Never before in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many, to so few" - - Sir Winston Churchill

"There are three principal ways to lose money: wine, women, and engineers. While the first two are more pleasant, the third is by far the more certain."
Baron Rothschild

"Veni, vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered) - Julius Caesar:

"Unwept, unhonored, unsung" - Sir Walter Scott

"Duty - Honor - Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, and what you will be" - Gen. Douglas MacArthur

"The rule is: jam tomorrow, and jam yesterday, but never jam today" - Lewis Carroll. Through the Looking Glass.

Voice tips

Common problems in vocal delivery during a presentation include the voice sounding;

1. aggressive
2. unconvincing
3. bored
4. emotional
5. monotonous

Here are some basic tips from a Professional Voice coach that may help you to improve your vocal delivery.

Before giving your presentation:

Be well prepared and rehearsed - write out your text in full, reduce to note format,

Rehearse your speech aloud making eye contact with your audience.

Look after your voice! - Drink plenty of water the night before - avoid red wine cheese and anything with caffeine.

On the day:

Remember to breathe - in a pressured situation, the untrained voice can become constricted, and the breathing shallow.

Find your balance - knees unlocked, head up and shoulders released down.

TBS sequence - think, breathe, and speak!

New Thought, New Pitch - vary your pitch to convey a new point or message.

Multimedia

Having got in front of the prospective customer, do we make the most of what we have to sell? In a recent survey of sales managers and sales directors we confirmed our suspicions that 80% of IT salespeople turn up, plug in their laptop and start paging through their PowerPoint presentation, desperately trying to get through the material without letting the prospective customer fall asleep!

We've got so much to say about ourselves that we use far too many text-based, bullet point slides and wonder why after an hour our audience has glazed over and are asking for a copy of the slides so they can count off how many more they have to sit through.

At the end of the presentation have we differentiated our message, left a lasting impression and given ourselves a better than average chance of winning some business? Or have we just done the same thing as the company that pitched in front of us did or the competitor sitting in reception, waiting for their turn is going to do?

It is vital that we ensure that we deliver our messages with clarity, high impact and in such a way as to differentiate our proposition. The prospect of using anything more complex than bullets on PowerPoint was until quite recently too prohibitive in cost to be considered. However, good audio visual multimedia presentation technology is now available and easy to use.

A picture is worth a thousand words. What price for several thousand pictures in an animated sequence combined with sound? The audience reaction is immediate; they sit forward and pay attention. Mix in a bit of humour or make it topical and one has created a lasting impression in the mind of your prospective customer. Now, pity the competitor sitting in reception. You've just raised the qualifying height of the bar!

I would not propose using multimedia and sound to the exclusion of the traditional bullet-point slide approach, but used together, you and your proposal immediately stand out. Explaining a complex solution using flat and often uninspiring material is tough to do. Use 3D animation and watch how much more quickly people grasp the concept and your message. And incredibly, if this is done well, people will want to watch it again and show it to their friends and colleagues.

Consider that for a moment. Your prospective customer asks you to replay the message! I can't recall in 20 years of selling ever having had a prospective customer ask me to replay the last 20 slides. And finally, when we have finished presenting, we are able to leave an interactive, multimedia CD covering the points we just discussed, which can then be circulated internally by our prospective customer or viewed across their internal network. I'm not

sure that you will remember that happening very often to your traditional static PowerPoint material.

Another unsurprising fact is that not all salespeople are good presenters. They are typically an exception rather than the norm. Consider the help that using the multimedia approach bestows on the presenter. There is an opportunity to help all those people (representing the majority) who struggle to inspire an audience. How much business has been lost because the presenter failed to connect and engage with an audience - never happened in your company? How many times has your company ended up simply competing on price because the prospective customer didn't see the differentiation in the proposition? Have you ever felt that the audience really didn't grasp what your product or service could really deliver in terms of commercial benefit?

Imagine for one moment what it takes to describe unscrewing the lid of a jar using bullet-point text only. Compare this with a five-second animation. Which one would comprehend faster and which would you remember?

Using 3D animation, sound and video is not for the faint hearted. You're going to be outside of your comfort zone, you're going to have to stop talking and start watching and listening to your prospective customer! That sounds potentially interesting too! And you are going to have to risk getting an immediate reaction from the audience! Are they going to love it, or hate it, or be amused? Our experience says all three but the key thing is they want to talk about it and tell you about it. Not next week, but right there and then! Feedback from the prospect! Hallelujah!

If your reaction so far is positive but cost is causing you concern, let us consider return on investment (ROI). Firstly you need to appreciate that there is significant expense associated with managing a prospect through a sales process. For example in the IT industry, dependent upon the product or service, to identify, qualify, sell to and hopefully close a new account will certainly cost 1000's of pounds and potentially, for larger systems, tens of thousands of pounds. Faced with these facts doesn't it make sense to invest some money in trying to ensure that you improve the closing ratio?

Typically securing one new customer is going to easily cover the cost of having created a set of 3D animations, designed to support the process, particularly if you create the material using highly talented offshore resources at very competitive rates.

In practice, you can build a library of material that you can re-use; not only for external presentations but also for training, exhibitions and to incorporate into your online marketing material. Furthermore, you can create material with a long shelf-life by explaining the concept rather than just illustrating the product. The ROI therefore will be very positive. You will have differentiated your messages and greatly improved your chances of winning business.

Creating versatile, re-usable material to ensure that you always deliver your message consistently.

Competition is fierce. Differentiation is vital and creating maximum impact can only provide a more competitive edge. If getting each appointment is expensive and increasingly difficult. Doesn't it make sense to consider something that makes your messages more memorable and potentially animates your audience?

Presentation Design

Avoid bullet points

Bullet points are easy, but not a great way of communicating. It is very reassuring to have our speaker notes on the screen, but better if you can memorize them instead.

Use pictures where you can.

A picture is worth a thousand words and can dramatically help you to connect with your audience. This is particularly true where you have an international audience and English is not their first language.

Keep the word count down.

We often see slides with lots of words on them. The audience struggle to read them, and while they are reading, they are not looking at the presenter. Where possible, use fewer words and as a maximum use no more than 40 words per slide.

Try to use only one concept per slide.

If you have three points to make - don't cram them all on a single slide - use three separate slides.

In a very memorable speech Management Guru Tom Peters delivered 50 slides in 20 minutes. He simply used a slide where most speakers would use a bullet point.

Emulate best practice.

We find it very useful to look for inspiration in best practice presentations. It can often be quite difficult to find, so we intend, over the next few months to bring you more examples of best practice presentations.

Also if you look around the rest of the site - you should find many more ideas on presentation design.

Presentation Hints and Tips

Produce an unusual statistic.

It could help build some connection with the audience. I love the one by Vic Reeves - 93.7% of statistics are made up on the spot. Radio shows are filled with "strange but almost true" quotations.

Live with the fear.

All presenters end up as very nervous before a presentation - a situation commonly known as "bricking it". We have given literally hundreds and the fear never goes away. It is a combination of adrenaline and testosterone. Learn how to harness it, just like an athlete has to. It happens to the best of us.

Realize that you will come down.

I love this quotation from the great performer Robert Houdini that I found in the book - Carter beats the Devil by Glen David Gold.

"It is well known that a magician feels no suffering while on the stage; a species of exaltation suspends all feelings foreign to his part, and hunger, thirst, cold, or heat, even illness itself, is forced to retreat in the presence of this excitement, though it takes revenge afterwards"

When the testosterone wears off, you will come down with a low. If you have done well you will have been on a high - sometimes known as that Presentation Sensation. Realize that when this goes, often in the evening - you will feel low or even depressed.

No matter how well the presentation goes - you will come down later - usually in the evening. This is only temporary.

Clean your shoes.

You will be on display. Your audience will be looking at how well you are turned out. They will look at your shoes. Make sure that you have cleaned them.

The eyes have it.

Maintain good eye contact with the audience. Don't keep contact with only one group of the audience. Spread your attention around the room.

No-one ever complained of a presentation being too short.

Long presentations can turn off the audience and be boring. Say what you have to say. Stop and shut up.

A picture is worth a thousand words.

Use pictures instead of bullet points and your message retention should increase. Research suggests that this could be by a factor of five.

Avoid the jargon.

People really do play buzzword bingo. Whether it the "TLA" - Three Letter Abbreviation or the "Paradigm Shift" you don't want the audience to be scoring points at your expense

Involve the audience.

Happy Computers have made a great success of their coaching business by involving the audience. Their motto seems very apt.

"Tell me and I will forget,
Show me and I will remember,
Involve me and I will understand".

Make the presentation interactive - if you can.

KISS.

No - not kiss the audience - Keep It Simple Stupid. Reduce your presentation to simple concepts and your audience should be able to follow you. If you go beyond their understanding they will switch off.

Don't use PowerPoint sound effects.

It may seem funny to have applause at the end of a slide, or a screeching sound for a new bullet point, but it will turn off the audience.

Check out the room before your presentation.

Make sure the room has everything that you need and make sure the presentation works on the screen. If possible go up the day before - or at least an hour beforehand. This will avoid any nasty surprises on the big day.

Don't drink the night before - and certainly don't get drunk.

Alcohol recovery or a hangover will be the kiss of death to your presentation. Alcohol will drain all of the enthusiasm from your voice. And if you've had a drink before you go on, your voice will be slightly slurred. Best avoid it; the time for a drink is after, not before.

Don't lock your knees.

When you get to the lectern, unlock your knees and act as if you were about to catch a ball. It will relax you and make it all flow much more smoothly.

Take a spare tie.

You don't want a gravy spot on your tie before you speak. If you have a meal before you speak take a spare tie with you.

Always leave handouts.

You have gone to a lot of effort to produce your presentation. Leaving handouts will reinforce your messages, and will help them to remember your presentation when they look at them again. Always include your contact details so that the audience can contact you.

Memorize your speech.

Do not read from your notes, unless you have frozen or not prepared. It will sound flat and stilted. If you have learnt your speech it will sound natural and you will even have the chance to ad lib, if the opportunity arises.

If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail.

This is one of the biggest mistakes I see. People think that they can "wing it", but in reality those who appear to be "winging it" are often very well prepared. Every one of Frankie Howard's muses such as "ooh, now where was I?" was in the script and well rehearsed.

It takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech. - Mark Twain.

Off the cuff should mean well planned. I once heard a tale about someone who went to the Garrick Club and accidentally left wearing Enoch Powell's coat. In his pocket was a small pile of postcards, with his speech written on them. The speech started with the words "I never expected to be asked to speak this evening!" The professionals do it - so why shouldn't you?

Presentation Myths

Here are a few of the myths that we hear a lot.

1. Tell 'em what you're going to tell them, tell 'em and tell 'em again.

If you want your presentations to sound stilted and formulaic then this is the technique to use. Oh, and it sounds better in a monotone voice. Otherwise give this a wide berth.

2. Don't use PowerPoint as it will distract the audience.

This is one of the biggest lot of old cobblers, and yet has been included in an article in The Times this year. According to research by the psychologist Albert Mehrabian, 55% of a presentation is visual. So unless you have a voice like chocolate, then not using visual slides, you are on a hiding to nothing. What we say is don't use bullet points as they are a very poor way of conveying your message.

3. Clip art makes your presentation look groovy.

Wrong! Clip art makes your presentation look old fashioned. And unlike house antiques an old fashioned presentation makes you look like you are behind the times. A bit like wearing fashions from three years ago. I once remember getting a laugh using the clip art of the duck hitting a computer with a mallet - but that was ten years ago. If I put it up today I perhaps would get them laughing - but more likely that they would be laughing at me!

There are lots of high quality real pictures that you can use instead of clip art. Use them instead and your presentation should fly. Yet if you go to the Microsoft web site you can still see them extolling the benefits of clip art. And I'll let you into a secret, I've seen some Bill Gates presentations and attractive as they are there is not a single clip art in sight.

4. Martin Luther King didn't use PowerPoint.

Martin Luther King may not have used PowerPoint, but he was also a great orator, and he had practiced his speech many times. If you are great at public speaking, fine - don't it. But if you are not, then a visual PowerPoint presentation (no bullet points) should give your presentation a real lift. Professor Albert Mehrabian showed that 55% of a presentation is visual - so if you don't use visuals, then the odds are against you.

Boring Presentations

Reading the audience - Are you sending them to sleep?

Presentation training has a lot to answer for. To help you overcome nerves, they teach you to focus on one person in the room who is smiling at you. The problem is that this can lull you in to a sense of false security. You may just have missed the fact that you are sending them all to sleep.

Here are the twelve telltale signs that the audience is not listening. They;

1. start to look down
2. touch or rub their face, hands or hair
3. eyes glaze over and look at the screen (this is easy to mistake as sitting listening intently)
4. fidget
5. yawn (often with a hand covering their mouth)
6. flick through their notes of the conference catalogue
7. make copious notes or jot down things they have forgotten to do (this can be mistaken for jotting down key points)
8. sigh heavily
9. lie back in their chair and cross their arms
10. scan across the room
11. whisper to each other quietly
12. tap their feet

Please note that out of politeness the audience may clap at the end of your speech (although not for long) and if you see people afterwards they may say well done.

How to spot if the audience is listening

On the other hand if they like what you are saying the audience will;

1. Sit intently listening to your speech
2. Smile

Flick their eyes briefly between the audience and the speaker

Visual Communication of Ideas

Karl Fast is a doctoral student from the University of Western Ontario, in London, Ontario, Canada "**Information Visualization: Failed Experiment or Future Revolution?**".

"Now I'm going to illustrate some of the basic principles of information visualization by taking a simple example and building it up. I am not going to explain techniques like the perspective wall, or the differences between geometric and semantic zooming. Rather, this is just a simple example to illustrate the basic ideas."

When was it above 20°C during this month?

Mon	Sun
15 17 19 15 22	10 15
15 10 11 15 20	12 18
14 23 12 15 18	12 17
13 11 21 10 29	12 17
29 12	

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With a little time we could work out the days, but if we are to add in some simple visual colour coding.

Now when was it above 20?

Mon	Sun
15 17 19 15 22	10 15
15 10 11 15 20	12 18
14 23 12 15 18	12 17
13 11 21 10 29	12 17
22 12	

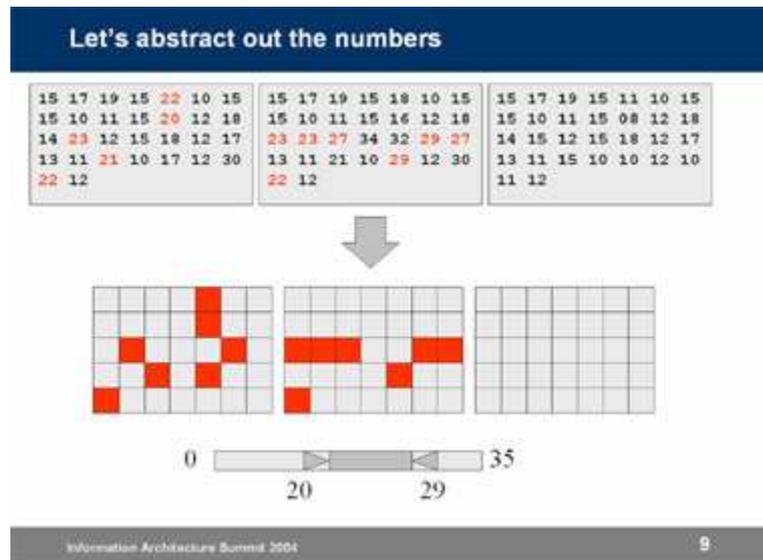
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This illustrates the power of visual perception. Graphic designers use this all the time when creating posters. They know how to make some things stand

out. But information visualization aims to exploit this in a different way: through interaction.

But we can abstract away the numerical data, transforming it into a visual representation. Note that these boxes could represent almost anything, not just temperature. We are moving away from a system designed specifically to deal with temperature, to a framework that can handle a wide range of data.



This is one of the best examples of visual communications to portray information that I have seen in a while and it demonstrates that some simple concepts can be highly effective.

The other half of your Presentation – The Audience

By Jim Endicott, of Distinction

Sometimes you can just tell. Maybe it's their body language or something in their eyes but you just get a feeling about some audiences. That was certainly the case one Friday morning last fall. As I set up for the presentation, the group slowly funneled into the room...

Some seemed interested in what I was doing while others were visibly distant. I guess this is where we learn a lot about the skills we bring to the table.

One size rarely fits all

One size fits all may be true with sunglasses and socks, but when it comes to presentations, presenters need to exercise some discretion in the volume and detail of content delivered. Because of the time it takes many to create a presentation in the first place, presenters often try to leverage that investment by using the presentation in its entirety with every audience. Here's why that rarely works. Each audience represents a group with a unique set of filters that our presentations are viewed through. Senior staff members may be looking for summary information from you and might just be sizing you up for a promotion based on your knowledge of a certain topic.

A group of product engineers embrace detail because that's the world they live in. A group of marketing or public relations individuals may be looking for more visually oriented materials and less text. Same presentation - three unique audience perspectives. To create truly good presentations we need to get into our audience's skin and see our content through their eyes. Unsure how to do that? Take someone out for a lunch and ask.

I've learned to trust my instincts and with the group I now stood in front of, I needed to have a very strong opener. I wasn't too worried about those who already seemed interested but the others had to come along quickly so their disinterest did not impact the entire group. I enlisted their assistance as newly deputized presentation consultants to help me evaluate one rather inept presenter - Dilbert. Several years back, I found a perfect screen saver of Dilbert delivering a presentation in his inevitable style. He was doing everything wrong, and from the looks of the characters around the conference room table, he had lost them long ago. At first, the critique from the audience was pretty slow. "He has his back to the audience" one person said. Another added, "He's not making eye contact with them." (This was actually a trick answer. No one has ever really seen Dilbert's eyes) "His overhead transparencies are really horrible." Now we were on a roll and the comments came quicker and with keener insight. We had a few laughs at

Dilbert's expense but it pointed out some interesting things. It's always so easy to spot inadequacies in others, but so hard to see them in ourselves.

Conscientious and objective self-examination is not a natural thing for most of us - all the more reason to enlist the aid of objective coaches.

The importance of good strong starts

I can't emphasize enough how important the first 5 minutes are to a presenter. Whether we like it or not, audiences will make decisions in those critical moments that will impact their attention for the balance of the presentation. For that reason we need to carefully think through how we will start. We need to convey that this presentation will be different than what they are accustomed to. A concise and well-told personal story that clearly ties in your theme, an unexpected voiceover from an industry expert, asking your audience to respond to a certain question that causes them to relate to their own experience - all techniques to start strong but it doesn't end there. They're also making decisions about you. Be open and personable. Also, your agenda slide will validate for them that you're taking them down a path that is relevant. Spend 30% of your pre-presentation practice time working on the first and last 5 minutes.

I was off to a pretty good start. Just 15 minutes into the presentation I seemed to have their attention. Then I made an unfortunate miscalculation. I moved into what I call the MARCOM (Marketing Communication) Value Matrix. The whole purpose of this series of visuals is to bring a group of new or seasoned presenters to the point where they look at their presentations in a different light. Until we have a genuine sense for the "stakes" every time we get up to present, we will always treat the presentation as an after-thought, a necessary evil. This little illustration normally resonates with my audiences but somehow this time it wasn't working. This business practical perspective did not resonate with this audience. Whether they simply lacked the personal experience to relate to the example or they wanted something else from me - a third of the group started to fade. How I brought them back in the next minute would determine success or failure for the morning.

Reading your audience

It's not enough to simply prepare ahead of time for our presentations - we need to sense the mood of our audience during the presentation. As I watched a recent football game, I was reminded about how much planning went into that game. As much as they prepared however, the players would still call audibles (a spontaneous change in the play initiated by the players before the snap of the ball). There's a lesson in that for us as well. If the level of detail seems to be sending our audience into La La Land, insert an unplanned interaction with the audience to draw on their experiences or move to more summary statements until you find a topic that resonates with them. If the senior staff seems restless, stop and ask if the information being

provided is helpful. If the audience seems to stay riveted on the screen and not you, perhaps you need to black out your screen (B key during PowerPoint Show) to refocus their attention on you.

Suddenly, the bell rang signaling the end of first period sending the twenty students scrambling for the door. A few stopped to thank me for coming while others seemed to be more enthralled with my small multimedia projector than anything I had said that morning. Every semester I join Cheryl Bailey's PowerPoint class at Newberg High School for an hour to help them look at the next few months as not something to simply endure - but rather an opportunity to learn an essential life skill. You see, whether we like it or not, we'll always be presenters. In the future, those students may be presenting to class of high school peers, a prospective employer, a college class or perhaps to a Board of Directors. The ability to distill our thoughts into applications like PowerPoint, create meaningful images to support our story and deliver it with some level of confidence can be career changing if not life changing.

I may not have totally won the battle that morning but I got them thinking. All things considered, that was a big success. Besides, next semester I'd know I'd get another crack at a whole new batch of future presenters.

10 tips for Sales Presentations by Kevin Davis

1. Find out in advance how much time you'll have.

Have you ever had a key decision-maker leave in the middle of your presentation because he or she was out of time? You aren't holding the attention of a prospect who is looking at the clock! At the beginning of the call, ask how much time the prospect has set aside. Then adjust your presentation to take no more than 60 percent of the allotted time. Why only 60 percent? Because your prospect's decisions to act typically occur at the end of a meeting, so you want to allow enough time to resolve any remaining issues and reach an agreement.

2. Another question I ask at the beginning of every sales presentation is, "Since the last time we met, has anything changed?"

If your competitor gave them a presentation yesterday you may have a few new hurdles to overcome. And the sooner you know what those hurdles are, the more time you have to plan a response.

3. The next question you want to ask is "Where are you in your decision process?"

If they tell me they have scheduled presentations with three suppliers, and I'm the first presenter, I know the chances of them agreeing to a decision at the end of my presentation are virtually nil. Why? You play the customer. Suppose you schedule appointments with three suppliers -- would you make a decision at the end of the first presentation? No, because it would take more time, energy and stress to cancel the appointments than it would to just go ahead with them.

Also, you wouldn't cancel them because comparison is necessary to recognize value. Recently one of my clients showed me his new sales brochure -- he was obviously very pleased with it. My immediate reaction was that it looked okay but it did not strike me one way or the other. Then I asked him to show me what he was using before -- and then I KNEW how much better this brochure was than the last! It was the comparison that allowed me to recognize the improvement. Your customers need comparison too, to recognize your value. So if it happens that you're the first presenter, don't go for the close -- because you would be asking for something you can't get -- and your customer will think you are pushy. Instead, come up with a reason to come back and see them after their other presentations -- when they will likely be in a position to make a decision.

For this reason I prefer to present last because it's closest to the customer's point of decision. And that's....

4. The fourth key to effective presentations -- try to be the last presenter.

If I'm the final supplier to present, and I've shown why I'm their best choice, it's only reasonable to ask for a commitment to buy. In one of the largest sales opportunities I've ever worked on -- I was the third of three presenters to a committee of seven decision makers, the most senior of whom was the executive vice president, a Mr. Burns. About 10 minutes before the conclusion of my presentation the phone rang -- Mr. Burns' cab had arrived -- he had a plane to catch. As he stood up I said, "Mr. Burns, before you leave, may I ask you one final question? He said, "Sure." I asked him, "Now that you've evaluated all the options, is there any reason why my solution is not your best option?"

He said, "Yep!" And out it came -- his final concern about my solution... It was a concern that I was ready for -- I had anticipated that it would be a concern -- but I never got the chance to respond to it because his comment triggered a firestorm of conversation around the conference table. Mr. Burns missed his cab -- but several other decision-makers drove him to the airport so they could continue their discussion. A few weeks later I learned that, in the car, a lower-level decision-maker had resolved his concern -- and I won the sale! This example also points out that today, as much as 90 percent of the sale takes place when you're not there. So you've got to make sure that the prospect(s) championing your cause have the tools to sell other decision-makers for you.

5. A good sales presentation starts with a quick review of the customers' goals and objectives.

Then list on a flip chart each of the customer's buying criteria. This list of criteria is your outline for an effective sales presentation. Show how your solution meets and exceeds each decision factor.

6. Throughout your presentation, get reaction from your prospects.

After demonstrating a capability you could ask, "How would this be an improvement?" or "How would this help?" Interactive presentations keep prospects more involved and interested.

7. Communicate all of your unique strengths.

Today, it's not enough to show that you can meet your customer's needs. Your customer wants to know two things: can you do what we need done and how can you do it better than the other options we are considering? So, you must have some reasons why you are their best choice. And to ensure that my strengths are understood, I always prepare a flip chart titled "Why We're Your Best Choice." Here, I put at least three reasons why I am the customer's best choice. Many times I'll list seven or eight reasons. The more reasons you

have, and the more compelling those reasons are -- the better your chances of winning the sale.

8. Use visuals in your presentations

Because a picture is worth a thousand words. Support your important ideas with a picture, show images on an overhead, flip chart, or laptop computer. Keep your visuals simple. One idea per image. Make it interesting, relevant and readable.

9. If your customer is not in a position to make a decision at the end of your presentation, schedule another appointment.

Come up with a reason to get back in there.

10. Last, but not least, have fun and be yourself.

If you want to persuade other people, you must connect with them on a personal level first. Think of John Madden, the football commentator. Madden is successful because he makes emotional contact by just being who he is. To put more impact in your sales presentations, connect with your prospects by just being YOU.

In sports, when two teams are evenly matched, the winner will be the team that executes its plays the best -- the team that makes the fewest mistakes. To deliver a winning sales presentation, you must do the same. When you implement these 10 tips in your sales presentations you'll win more sales!