12 TOP TIPS TO HELP YOU DELIVER AN AWESOME PRESENTATION

1.

ENGAGE, EDUCATE AND ENTERTAIN

GREAT PRESENTERS STAND OUT BECAUSE THEY ENGAGE THEIR AUDIENCE, THEY EDUCATE THEM AND TO A DEGREE THEY ENTERTAIN THEM.

ITS THE COMBINATION YOU SHOULD BE SEEKING IF YOU WANT TO DELIVER AN AWESOME PRESENTATION OR A WINNING SALES PITCH.

Engage your audience with a 'Big Start', educate them by sharing things they ordinarily might not know or would find it difficult to find out and entertain them by bringing energy, life and humour to your presentation.

Tick all three boxes and you are well on your way to presentation success!

All the other 11 points below will help you deliver an engaging, educational and entertaining presentation, speech or sales pitch.

Gain the immediate attention of your audience by starting with a bold statement, or an unexpected statistic or a challenging question. These will be the first words you say.

Use your voice to maintain the interest and attention of your audience. Use volume and tone to emphasise a point and pausing to allow your message to sink in. Use your body to interact with your audience through hand and arm gestures and by moving around. Use eye contact with those in the audience you particularly want to engage with.

2.

BE SURE OF YOUR PURPOSE

Any presentation or pitch is aiming for something to happen, for something to change.

If the outcome of your presentation or pitch is that nothing changes then what was the point of it in the first place?

All presentations and pitches are a form of marketing.

It is likely that you are presenting or speaking because you are looking to attract or win customers, either immediately or at some point in the future, raise your profile, secure funding, motivate and inspire your team, work with suppliers, distributors or wholesalers etc…

If you're going to have a successful presentation or pitch then **determine the purpose** of your presentation by asking yourself these questions:

Why are you presenting?

What are you hoping to achieve?

What do you want the outcome to be?

The answers to these questions might include:

- Raising the profile of your organisation, your products and services and/or yourself
- Demonstrating your expertise and experience
- Educating your audience by sharing information and advice not readily available elsewhere
- Getting talked about/fly your flag/ put yourself on a career promotion radar
- Attracting new customers
- Gaining a meeting, referral or order
- Getting hired
- Standing out from your competitors
- Inspiring and motivating your team
- Attracting investment into your organisation

Every presentation or pitch needs a predetermined purpose otherwise how do you know if you have been successful?

So instead of firing up the PowerPoint grab yourself a **large piece of paper or a flipchart** and in the middle write down or sketch visually the purpose of your presentation – everything that you then do to build the presentation needs to revolve around that purpose.

Many presenters create presentations that contain far too much information and as a consequence run on too long. These are the presenters who have usually not considered what the purpose of their presentation is and have simply put into the presentation everything that they want to share with the audience.

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3.

AUDIENCE FIRST, YOU SECOND

Many presenters tend to work on the basis of thinking that they will include in the presentation what they would like to tell the audience rather than think about what the audience would actually like to hear.

There is a big difference between the two and you can easily tell the difference when you see a presentation being delivered.

The presenters that create their presentation around what they would like to tell the audience usually kick-off the presentation with lots of stuff about themselves - how great they are, why they are number one in their sector, the awards they have won, their wonderful building and their expensive coffee machine etc…

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I'm sure you have sat through numerous presentations that start like that.

The presenters who have really given some thought to their audience can fairly easily be spotted because they start in an entirely different way.

They barely, if at all mention themselves, but start their presentation with a clear focus on some of the problems that they think the audience would like to solve within their own organisations.

These presenters have done their homework.

They know who is going to be in the audience and what they would like to gain from the presentation.

They know the sort of things that will really engage the audience and get them to take some action at the end of the presentation.

Who are you presenting to?

Find out who will be your audience - particularly if you are in front of a small group. If it's an event ask the organiser for a list of who's attending.

What do you know about your audience?

Find out about your audience - do some research via their company websites and personal Linked In profiles. If you are speaking at an event, arrive early and after set up checks do some 'meet and greets'. If you get to know a few members of the audience that will help you deliver more confidently.

What is your audience expecting?

Many presentations and pitches fall flat because the presenter has created a presentation with content they themselves think is important without considering what the audience want to hear, see and learn.

A good starting point is to assume the audience have no interest in you, your company, your product or service - they are only interested in what your product or service will do for them.

Remember that your audience by inviting you to pitch or present have already decided you are of interest to them. They want to be informed, educated, inspired and to a degree entertained.

They want to learn something they don't already know or could easily find out.

4.

KIT CHECK

Here is a quick checklist of all the things you need to consider:

- **Venue**
- **Seating**
- **Equipment**
- **Screen**
- **Audio**
- **Internet Connection**
- **Clicker**

Venue and Seating :

It is rare when you are presenting to be in a venue that is purposely designed for presenting. Most of the time you will find yourself in a conference room, a hotel function room, a restaurant or possibly even a cinema.

If you are presenting at an event then if possible visit the venue 3 weeks prior to the event so you can get a feel for the layout of the room, where you will be standing or sitting and where the audience seating is in relation to where you will be as the presenter. If it's not possible or practical to visit the venue ask the event organiser to provide some details of the set up to include:

- Where will you be presenting from?
- How will the seating be laid out?
- Where will the screen and projector be?
- Is there an audio system?
- Will a microphone be used and if so what sort (fixed position, handheld, wireless lapel)?

If you are presenting in an office or company conference room do the same checking. Don't be afraid to arrive early and fiddle with the seating if it doesn't work for you as a presenter. I hardly ever turn up to at a conference room or office for a presentation without moving something!

If you are thinking you're likely to move things around make sure you arrive before everybody else, you don't want to be fiddling around with seating arrangements as your audience are trying to sit down!

You don't really want any surprises when you arrive to do your presentation so do your preparation research throughly.

If I'm presenting I like to move around so I can create a sense of interaction with the audience. At some venues that may not be possible - the only microphone may be fixed to a lectern, the projector may be screen facing thus restricting where you can stand, the room may be cramped so you have little space to work with.

Remember though that in most cases you want the audience to be focusing on you not the screen. Knowing the layout and structure of the venue in advance will enable you to plan where you will present from. If you want to move around try and use a clip on wireless mic so you've got your hands free.

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Equipment, Screen and Audio :

If you are relying on your host to supply a **projector and screen** find out how they work together. It's not easy working with a projector that sits on a table and beams at the screen - every time you go near the screen you get dazzled by the light, it will create a shadow and you become the screen with words and images being projected onto your clothing! If you can occasionally stand in a line between the audience and the screen thus forcing the audience to focus on you rather than what is on the screen. Clearly if you are working with a projector that's going to beam stuff all over you this is something you don't really want to be doing, hence the need to know in advance how the projector works with the screen.Ideal if the projector is overhead, better still if it sits near the screen and beams up.

Screens are often not big enough for the rooms and audiences they are serving. You will have to be prepared to plan your presentation around the size and 'viewability' of the screen. Try and make sure your slides fill the screen - if the projector and screen are portable move them around to suit you. If it is clear the screen isn't big enough for the room and audience consider ditching the slides.

Top Tip: arrive early and run some of your slides - go and then stand at the back of the room and see if you can see the detail - be prepared to make a few last minute changes to font sizes if they can't be seen. You can get away with the odd slide where you say 'I realise some or most of you won't be able to see the detail on this slide' but if a number or even most of your slides can't be easily seen by the audience in terms of the detail on them then you need to be ready to leave them out. This is also a good reason for having few words on your slides.

It's probably a good idea to assume any screen you haven't seen will be smaller than you expect and prepare your slides accordingly. If the screen turns out to be bigger than expected your slides will be very impactful!

Microphones can be really useful but those who don't present regularly can find them difficult to handle. Find out before you arrive if a mic is available or is usually used. My rule of thumb : those who think they don't need a mic are the ones who usually do!

My preferred choice of microphone for doing a presentation is a wireless lapel one which means you have no cables to worry about, there is no restriction on your movements and you don't have to hold anything in your hand.

If you are going to use a microphone a simple test is to ask someone to stand at the back of the room and then for you to speak normally to check that they can hear you clearly. If you use a handheld microphone then the top of the microphone needs to sit just below your chin. You don't need to 'eat' the microphone in order for it to work! Indeed if you have it too close to your mouth it will distort the sound.

Test the mic before the audience arrives and then trust that it works when you go 'live'. Tapping the top of the microphone and asking 'Is it on?' or 'Can you hear me?' is not very professional and will disrupt your opening.

One area of **audio** that is often overlooked is when presenters use videos with sound. I have witnessed several times where the presenter has played the video and then to their horror realised the sound quality is very poor or even occasionally non-existent. A simple check would have enabled them to realise that.

If you decide to run a live link during your presentation check the connectivity works ok. It can be very distracting when a live link fails. Similarly check how your device (laptop, phone or tablet) connects to the host's screen / audio. I always carry with me various connectors and cables. Download the Apple TV app as some host venues will enable connectivity through that which is ideal as it is totally wireless.

A few tips if you plan to include a video:

•Ensure the venue has a good audio system so the soundtrack can easily be heard by everyone
•Keep it short - 30 seconds is usually the most people can focus on a video
•Make sure the video is relevant to the message of your presentation
•Make sure all of the audience can see the video - if the screen isn't big enough to do this don't run the video

- Don't use a video to get cheap laughs - the video may be hilarious but that in itself can distract from the core message you want to get over
- I'm not a fan of starting with a video but it might work for you - especially if you are feeling nervous and would prefer something (the video) to be the focus of attention at the start of your presentation or pitch other than yourself.

I'm never keen when presenters start their presentation by showing the corporate video. To me that is a version of 'drum banging' and very often corporate videos are beautifully put together and well designed but are highly unlikely to have been specifically created for the start of a presentation and therefore can look and feel out of place.

Presenters often use the corporate video at the beginning by saying here's an introduction to our company but when designing the start of the presentation you need to be focusing at the beginning on your audience and not on yourself.

I recently saw the MD of a large regional telecommunications company come up against a hotel venue set up that simply wouldn't allow him to show a video. The irony wasn't lost on him or the audience so if you are to use video check well in advance that it will work!

Check also how your slides will progress - is there a 'clicker'? or will you press a button or will someone else press a button?

Try and be in control of clicking if you can - having to nod or ask someone else to move each slide forward can make the presentation feel quite clunky. If you are using a provided clicker have a quick practice with it beforehand so you know how it works – again it can be very disruptive, particularly at the beginning of your presentation, if you are fiddling around trying to make the clicker work.

If you are going to use your own laptop or tablet for the presentation or pitch I would advise investing in your own clicker. It is amazing how many presentations get off to labouring start simply because the presenter is trying to work out how the clicker works.

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5.

FEELING NERVOUS

The vast majority of presenters and speakers, no matter how experienced, feel some degree of nerves before they present. Nerves though can give you an edge and set you up for the presenting experience. It is very easy to say but in an ideal world you want to convert the adrenaline that is making you feel nervous into adrenaline that makes you feel energised and positive and really looking forward to delivering your presentation or pitch.
Being too nervous though can make presenting a difficult experience and one you may not want to repeat.

Here are a few tips to help overcome your nerves:

It's not just you - all presenters suffer from some sort of nerves. It's a good thing to feel a bit nervous. It creates some adrenalin and gets you ready to give a 'performance'. Remember your audience have come to listen to you because you have lots of valuable information to pass on to them.

Breathe & Exercise - in the time leading up to your presentation take some deep breathes - in through the nose and out through the mouth - this will help you relax and calm your nerves. Also lose some of your adrenaline and help stay calm through some light exercise - go for a walk, outside ideally, or stretch your arms.

Preparation - knowing you are well prepared and rehearsed will add to your confidence which in turn will reduce your nerves. Not rehearsing will not help your nerves. The more you prepare the more confident you will feel.

Venue and Equipment - most presenters worry about the equipment - will it work? etc...Getting to the venue early and having a through equipment check reduces the number of things to worry about. If you are doing a presentation to a large group try and visit the venue prior to the event so you are familiar with the equipment, seating etc....

Have someone introduce you - you can then concentrate on the presentation and not your own introduction. Top tip: Write your introduction and take a large typeface printed version on a postcard for the organiser to use. If you leave the introducer to decide what to say about you, you never know what they might say!

Glass of Water - have one handy. If you suddenly panic during the presentation take a drink and use that time to re-gather your thoughts and calmness.

Notes - Prompt points on your note cards are a back up if you forget where you are or what's coming next in the presentation. Secondly they give you something to hold. Sounds silly but holding on to something, albeit a couple of postcards, can be a confidence booster.

Clothes - wear clothes you feel good in and that will switch you into 'presentation' mode.

First 10/15 seconds - in most cases you ideally don't want to be word perfect when you are delivering your presentation because that can make you sound too scripted. However I do think nailing your first 10 or 15 seconds is a good thing to do so you know exactly what you're going to say at the beginning. This will also help you get off to a good start, and once you are up and running your nerves will quickly disappear.

Laugh, Think Positive and Enjoy It. You can do this. You are well prepared. You've done all the equipment checks, the audience is looking forward to your presentation. Presenting can be great fun. As your confidence soars so does your sense of enjoyment. Laughing reduces stress.

6.

AVOIDING 'DEATH BY POWERPOINT'

'**Death by PowerPoint'** is a common ailment suffered by many audiences!

How many business presentations have you been too when the speaker's message is dominated not by them but the mountain of slides they insist on sharing with you?

Most of them? All of them?

Here are some ways to avoid 'Death by Powerpoint' happening to your audience:

Ensure that each slide you use has earned its place.

Keep the content of each slide to a bear minimum.

Most slides contain far too many words.

Work on the basis that a slide is a prompt for your audience not a script for yourself, in other words the slide reminds the audience of the key point you are making at that particular juncture of your presentation.

If your slides are littered with words your audience will start to read them which means they are not listening to you. You don't want to be competing with the slides, they are complimenting what you are speaking.

This is a key message. Most presenters forget that they are the most important aspect of the presentation, not the slides. If you want your audience to 'buy into' your message then remember that people buy from people, they don't often buy from screens.

So start with one word on your slide.

Does one word get the message over?

Maybe you need two or three.

If you start using six or more then challenge yourself as to why.

Don't write in sentences.

This will only encourage the audience to read from the screen and stop listening to you - most audiences won't be good at listening and reading at the same time.

Jargon / Acronyms

Only use jargon and acronyms on your slides if you are confident everyone in your audience will understand them. Same applies to abbreviations. If you put something on screen that your audience doesn't know the meaning of there is a danger they will switch off or be trying to work out a meaning and stop concentrating on your message.

Images / Diagrams

Use ones that are relevant and clearly communicate or add to the message you are giving.

Videos

Keep them short.

The Marketing Department PowerPoint Template

This is a real bug bear of mine!

It's when each slide in a presentation has the company logo, catchline, web address etc...on every slide.

Why is that needed?

Are you worried that between slides the audience will forget who you are?

The corporate presentation template leads to a predictable deck of slides, each one looking and feeling the same ....bring on 'Death by PowerPoint' !

Most presenters are given the corporate presentation and asked to add a bit of their own stuff to it.

The upshot of this is threefold:

Firstly the presentation is surrounded by the corporate template

Secondly it is far too long

Thirdly most of it will be about the company (the drum banging as I referred to previously) and not therefore aimed at the audience.

The bottom line is that marketing people and designers rarely understand what makes a presentation achieve its purpose i.e. achieve a desired outcome. They just think it needs to drum bang and look pretty.

So challenge the corporate, marketing led PowerPoint template.

Ditch the slides and use props instead

Not having slides will make you stand out from other presenters. Having a couple of memorable props relevant to your subject could make you stand out even more. Not having slides also gives you one less thing to worry about.

7.

THE BIG START

GO FOR A BIG, BOLD START NOT A MUMBLING, BUMBLING ONE!

Don't start your presentation with an excuse or apology:

"Sorry I've got a cold"

"Apologies if you can't hear me but my voice is croaky"

"I'm a bit disorganised as I only found out about this last night".

Your audience don't want to hear the reasons why you're about to deliver a poor presentation! That's not why they are there.

Gain the immediate attention of your audience by starting with a bold statement, or an unexpected statistic or a challenging question.

Make these the first words that you say. It does take a bit of practice to start like this which is why I advocate rehearsing those first 15 seconds or so.

Once you have captured the attention of your audience with the big start then explain what is going to happen - the 'tell what you are going to tell them bit' - effectively a summary of your presentation and what's in for them:

'Over the next 15 minutes I'm going to share with you three ideas that will help grow your business, that will cost you very little to implement, will be relevant to whatever product or service you offer and will potentially have an immediate impact on you / your business'

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8.

THE KEY MESSAGES

FOCUS ON, REGARDLESS OF THE LENGTH OF YOUR PRESENTATION, 3 KEY MESSAGES.

When you start to plan the key messages that you want to share check that they fit with both your Purpose and what you believe your audience are expecting from your presentation.

A lot of presenters get this bit horribly wrong simply by using what I call the '**kitchen sink effect';** they tend to throw everything at this part of the presentation which means the audience can be left feeling totally bamboozled as products, services, ideas etc rain down on them at a great rate of knots.

Your presentation is not a re-enactment of your website or your brochure.

It is not an A-Z of all your products and services.

This is the part of your presentation when you really do need to **be a ruthless editor.**

If you focus on three key messages, regardless of how long you have to present, your audience engagement opportunity will rise and there is a good chance that one, two or even all three of your messages will be remembered and acted upon.

This is the educational part of your presentation. Your audience are primed for learning. The key messages should pass on information to your audience they are unlikely to know or cannot necessarily easily find out. If I sit there thinking 'I know all this' or 'I've seen all this before' my level of interest is bound to drift, so this is where being a really ruthless editor of your content comes into play by focusing on what your audience want to hear not what you think you want to share with them.

Aim to tell a story around each key message in order to bring it to life and make it easier for the audience to remember and ideally link all your three messages together so it feels like one continuous story rather than three very separate and isolated parts. People like stories, especially if there is some humour involved. Of your 3 key messages make the last one the best and most impactful one.

If you feel that you need to have more than three key messages then you can of course create what we might call sub-messages within the core context.

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9.

THE ROUSING FINISH

ITS THE LAST THING YOUR AUDIENCE HEAR FROM YOU, SO DON'T LEAVE IT OUT!

Many presenters simply stop. A summary enables you to remind the audience of all the key messages that you have passed onto them, the reasons why they should be interested in you and how to do that. The end of the presentation is the last that the audience will hear from you, so make it count.

Even if you have lost some of your audience's engagement during the middle part of your presentation a strong finish will draw them back in and leave them knowing exactly what you would like them to do next.

A summary therefore should be exactly that:

'Over the last 15 minutes I have shared with you three ideas that will help grow your business, that will cost you very little to implement, will be relevant to whatever product or service you offer and will potentially have an immediate impact - those ideas were (brief summary of each one)

Sound familiar?

It should because it is virtually a replication of the words that you said right at the beginning of your presentation.

This is the 'tell them what you told them' bit.

This is also your chance to tell the audience what you would **like them to do next**, effectively to spur them into action. This could be to ask questions at the end of the presentation or it could be to meet with you immediately after the event finishes or to collect from you some literature so that they can keep you on their radar or fix up a meeting with you etc….

Your summary needs to be very positive and to create a feeling within the audience that whatever it is you are talking about they want to do something.

Unfortunately many presenters fail to deliver a great summary, often many of them fail to deliver a summary at all, they just simply stop and say thanks very much and that's it.

Sometimes this is simply because they have run out of time. To ensure this doesn't happen to you practice delivering your presentation in 80% of the time allocated to you. This will help you avoid over running on time and ensure that you have time to deliver that rousing finish to your presentation.

10.

RUN ON TIME

DO NOT OVER RUN ON TIME!

If you have been given 10 minutes for your presentation take 10 minutes or less but not more.

Presenters who overrun even by a couple of minutes can be seen as acting disrespectfully to the organisers, the next speaker, and the audience.

At an event you risk being hauled off before you have finished your presentation.

Ensure you have a good chance of running on time by practicing delivering your presentation in 80% of the time you have been allocated.

Run through the presentation two or three times and time it.

In practice you need to deliver a 10 minute presentation in 8 or 8.5 minutes. This will give you a buffer on the day when you start elaborating or adding some additional bits when speaking.

11.

PRACTICE

REGARDLESS OF YOUR PRESENTING EXPERIENCE YOU NEED TO PRACTICE YOUR DELIVERY.

Rehearsing will help you run on time, it will help you present with minimal notes, it will make you sound and look knowledgeable, it will help you overcome nerves and it will give you the confidence to deliver a really good presentation.

Practice your presentation two or three times.

You don't want to be word perfect but you do want to know that you aren't going to mess up.

Make the practice conditions similar to those on the day so if you're going to be standing up when presenting stand-up when practising.

Time your practices and aim to deliver the presentation in 80-85% of the time you have been allocated.

This will help you avoid over running on time on the day.

12.

ENJOY!

IF YOU ENJOY YOUR PRESENTATION SO WILL YOUR AUDIENCE!

If you clearly enjoy your presentation there is a very good chance your audience will enjoy it too. And as we tend to hire people we think we would enjoy working with, then you enjoying your presentation bodes well for your audience engaging your services.

Good luck !

If you need help you to deliver awesome presentations or winning sales pitches here are 3 ways I can help you:

1. Company programme for between 4 and 8 delegates - a half or full day training programme which is highly interactive with a focus on understanding all the key components of a great presentation or sales pitch and then practising the delivery.

2. Key Presentation Delivery - working with you and your colleagues for around 3 hours over 1 or 2 sessions on the delivery of a planned forthcoming key presentation or sales pitch.

3. One to One Coaching - An individual three hour programme designed to help you :
- Overcome nerves about public speaking
- Deliver a forthcoming presentation or sales pitch
- Prepare and deliver a keynote speech.
- Create and deliver your 'elevator pitch'

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