

6 Ways to Make Your Sales Pitch More Powerful

When you have an opportunity to pitch for a new piece of business, there's a palpable sense of excitement, isn't there? Yet that excitement can quickly turn into disappointment when the presentation doesn't go as planned.

The scenario often plays out like this: you begin by positioning yourself and your company, and just when you feel like you are on a roll, you get interrupted. The client has questions. Before you know it, your agenda has been hijacked and you are unable to accomplish what you intended. Sound familiar?

This situation is particularly frustrating when you know your proposal is spot on, but it may be your presentation that's getting in the way of achieving success. Read on to learn my best tips for nailing your pitch presentations to get the results you're after.

1. Start with the end in mind

Before you plan your content or create a single slide, consider the purpose of your presentation, both for you and for your prospect.

What are you trying to achieve? (Hint: It's more than "pick me, pick me!") What do you want your audience to do or say? What do you need to do to "move" your listeners to take action or try something new?

Getting the results you want means understanding your prospect's needs. Consider how your products or services can achieve the following:

- Solve problems or improve processes
- Reduce costs or increase earnings
- Increase market share
- Create opportunities
- Develop talent



2. Make it client-centric

That being said, don't make the common mistake of making the presentation all about you and your company. Nothing will make your audience tune out faster. Even worse, they'll sit frustrated while you recite your company profile, until they finally interrupt in hope of getting you to address their questions and concerns. Remember that your presentation must speak to your client's goals, which (in most cases) means helping them make money. So why not jump right in to the part they're waiting to hear?

Craft a compelling story that lets the client know you see the situation through their eyes and shows your ability to add value. Instead of reporting a bulleted list of your accomplishments in response to your clients' questions, demonstrate your knowledge and experience by telling appropriate stories or citing examples that clearly highlight your expertise.

To win even bigger points, tell them something about themselves that they don't already know. A client accomplished this by analyzing their prospect's marketing efforts and revealing a pattern that the company had not recognized.

Again, it can help to put yourself in their shoes: if the roles were reversed, what would you want to hear?

3. Grab their attention

Want to hook them with your opening sentence? Skip the "thank you for inviting us" intro. Instead, start with a story, startling statistic, or little-known fact about their industry that shows you understand them. Remember, to be effective, your opening must be both attention getting and related to the topic.

4. Ask for participation

Getting your listeners involved turns a one-way presentation into a conversation. When you get them to answer a question or share an example, they experience what you're talking about first-hand and in turn may reveal critical information or insight.

Here's a little-known tip about asking someone a question. Say their name first, BEFORE asking the question: "Lisa, could you describe your process as it is now?" This tactic avoids catching someone off-guard if the person wasn't paying attention and didn't hear the question. Everyone snaps to attention when they hear their name.

5. Prep as a team

Make sure every member of your pitch team understands his or her role and responsibilities. Decide who will open and close, and who will deliver which content, ensuring there are no weak links in the chain.

If you want to give your audience the best possible impression of your team, it's absolutely essential that you rehearse your entire pitch as a team, including your hand-offs from one speaker to the next! Team rehearsals allow you to know what everyone plans to say, thus eliminating duplicate content, contradictions and awkward transitions. As a result, your entire presentation will be smooth and polished, which can serve to differentiate you from your competition. Work as a team, presenting with a united front.

6. End strong

If you're a fan of Shark Tank, you know that every successful pitch ends with a resounding call to action. After summarizing your key ideas, answering questions and comments, making suggestions for the next logical steps and thanking them for the opportunity, make your last words memorable so they will resonate with the client. A strong, determined finish leaves no doubt about the advantages and benefits of working with your company. For a recent IT pitch, the team concluded with, "Experienced enough to solve your problem, small enough for you to know you will be a valued client."

The next time you're preparing for a pitch presentation, give these strategies a try. I have seen many clients use them and gain big wins. As you achieve results, let that excitement and confidence carry forward to your next presentation. Before you know it, hijacked presentations will be a thing of the past.