

Do You Have Perfect Pitch?

Ten tips for persuasive presentations.



by Dianna Booher

GOOD MORNING. WE appreciate meeting with you today. My name is Simon Shultz, business development manager, and I'd like to introduce my team to you. They're here to help me answer any questions you have. Now, I'd like to tell you a little about who we are and what we do."

Another day, another proposal, another supplier, another presenter. And if the parade goes on for a few hours, buyers grow weary. Although your clients or prospects may not say "I'm bored," you sense their frustration. What can you do to your presentation?

These 10 suggestions deal with the finer points of sales presentations:

1. Influence, don't just inform. Information overwhelms us. Your role is to make the available information actionable for your buyers. To do that, you'll need to use positive, specific, persuasive, precise words. Powerful phrasing and graceful grammar pack a powerful punch on a buyer's memory and emotions—their feelings of pleasure, fear, safety, discomfort, pride, acceptance, or rejection. Also use logic: reasoning and conclusions drawn from facts, information, opinions, or ideas. Build trust by being trustworthy, showing prospects that they can trust in your principles, values, and integrity. To persuade, you need to use the best words, establish your credibility, and identify the best strategies with each buyer—an appeal to emotion, logic, or both.

2. Act against your own self-interest. Make buyers aware of decisions made in their best interest. You may routinely do that anyway, but buyers need to know when you do that because it builds trust for larger issues. For example, if you think an extended warranty doesn't make sense for a customer, let the buyer know a warranty is available but that you recommend against it. Or, if the buyer selects black tiling for break rooms and you know that black shows scratches and requires more care, you might suggest the beige. Such candid advice leads to trust—but only if your buyer understands that you're passing on such information at your own expense.

3. Use the experience factor. Buyers can argue about your facts, data, surveys, and research. They can disagree that your product or services outshine the competition. They can doubt that your offering will resolve their problem. But no one can dispute your experience when you state an opinion or respond to a question during your presentation. Your experience can be accepted or rejected, but it's still your experience and irrefutable as such.

4. Tell failure stories. We've all learned to tell success stories. But there's also power in telling case histories about clients who did not have stellar success with your product or service—if the reason for their lack of success was due to their own decision-making, not your product or service. It underscores what other customers did



wrong (for example, waiting too long to buy, not using your design team to install and customize their product, not buying a warranty) and helps the prospect not repeat the mistake. Talking about failures of other product users adds credibility to your success stories. Don't use names with the failure stories, because prospects may fear you'll tell others of their own mistakes.

5. Prefer understatement to overstatement. It's always more effective to let your prospect add to what you've promised rather than discount it because it seems too good to be believable. Present the range of results you have achieved. Generally, it is better to promise only the minimum gains. Otherwise, you set up your client to be disappointed. If the minimum gains are worthwhile to them, maximum gains will be the extra that makes them long-term fans.

6. Know when to use exact numbers and when to round them. Exact numbers are more credible because they can be verified more easily and either confirmed or discounted. Rounded numbers are easier to remember. Provide specific numbers the first time you cite results or outcomes, and summarize with rounded numbers on repeat mention of the data.

7. Make statistics and facts experiential. People digest numbers with great difficulty. Yes, pie charts and bar graphs help. But if you can, go beyond that. For example, survey your buyers by asking them to raise their hands in response to a few questions; then equate those findings to the survey you did previously. Are they typical of the rest of the employee population? How so? Supporting statistics lend credibility to what you say, if you do all you can to help your buyers digest them.

8. Never shy away from underdog positioning. Some people have a profound penchant for rooting for the underdog. Acknowledge that you're the lesser-known brand and supplier, and focus on the effort you intend to expend for the client because of that one-down situation. Avis has done well with the underdog status as their brand.

9. Plant questions you'd like competitors to address. As you present your solutions, bring up issues that raise red flags in your buyers' minds about the capabilities of your competitors. In your key areas of strength, you will suggest issues that, if not handled well, might create pitfalls and resulting fear in the minds of your buyers. By raising these issues, you suggest to your buyers that they should ask your competitors about these concerns.

10. Never just walk through your proposal—give a guided tour. Your buyers will beat you to the end every time. Buyers follow their own route, which is usually not the one you'd prefer. While you're still on page two, they're on page eight, checking out pricing. You have no control of what your buyers hear or pay attention to while you talk. In fact, your proposal will compete with you for attention.

Instead, carefully select which parts of your proposal to present orally. Then if you want to refer your buyers to a specific page, do so—after you make your key point about that page. **SSE**

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ACTION: Make your pitches more persuasive.