



Tips For Speaking To An International Audience

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I've had the opportunity to deliver, coach and witness numerous international presentations. This experience all points to one lesson—in addition to the careful preparation required for any presentation, those for an international audience demand extra attention.

In any presentation, one of the keys to success remains a focus on the audience's frame of reference. However, when that audience is international, you'll need to step out of your own frame of reference and focus on making the presentation salient for your target group. The saying "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" is excellent advice. The goal is to "localize." Here are five key areas where you can apply the localization principle:

1. Language: Even if most of your audience speaks English, it may not be their first language or "mother tongue." Avoid using clichés, slang and acronyms that may have meaning in your own culture, but not theirs. Remember that even in English-speaking countries, there are a number of differences. An American "elevator" is a "lift" in the UK. Spelling is also different. "Center" in the US is "centre" in British English. "Judgment" is "Judgement" and "organize" is "organise." To make matters even more confusing, some countries in Southeast Asia use the American spellings while others use the British spellings. In the preparation for your presentation, find out what the accepted practice for your venue (place) is and adapt both oral and written materials.

2. Measurement: I once attended a presentation in Manila where German publishing company presenters talked about cost-benefit analysis solely in terms of deutschmarks. It made little sense to the Filipinos, who had infrequent experience with this currency. It's always a good idea to translate monetary units into the currency of the country you're speaking in. This shows sensitivity to the culture as well as respect. If your audience will contain people of several nationalities, the US dollar and the Euro are widely understood and usually provide an effective way to express monetary units.

Unlike the US, the rest of the world uses the metric system for measurement. Use the measurement system your audience understands. For example, if you're talking about the amount of land needed to erect a new building, they will probably understand "4 hectares" more easily than "10 acres." If you're talking about distance, "480 kilometres" will make more sense than "300 miles." The same is true with measuring temperature in Celsius rather than Fahrenheit. There are several good conversion programs you can download to your computer or handheld device. They make translating information into different frameworks quick and effective. You'll find several at www.onlinecalculators.net.

3. Visuals: Visuals often transcend cultural differences because they rely on proportion, balance and quantity. Use visuals that are truly "visual" in nature—don't simply read from a

series of text-heavy slides. The strategic use of visuals may also help compensate for language problems. Be sure to pay attention to details.

At a seminar where the national flags of participants were to be displayed as a sign of courtesy, I noticed that the Indian flag was hanging upside-down. It was an easy mistake to make, since the tripartite colors of the Indian flag don't make the correct orientation obvious. Had it not been corrected in time, it would have been a serious insult to the Indian participants. Small details can have big consequences.

4. Equipment: Presenting in a different country can introduce a number of technical difficulties. There are different types of plugs, different voltage requirements, and different video formats. In the US, the standard video format is NTSC. In many countries in Asia, the format is PAL. If you are showing a video, it means you must have a monitor, VCR and videotape that are all compatible. Outside the US "multisystem" equipment that will play both formats is common, but request it before you arrive. Also, make certain you have the appropriate conversion plugs and adaptors for all your electrical equipment.

5. Support Materials: Baseball, basketball and football may be fertile ground for sports analogies when speaking to an American audience, but soccer is probably more appropriate for many international audiences. Try to use examples that are geographically close, stories that will have cultural relevance and expert opinion that has credibility with your audience. Humor is a risky proposition even at home, so be doubly cautious when using it in front of an international audience. Be sure to test its effectiveness with a small sample before the presentation.

Remember, the more you are able to localize your presentation, the greater are your chances for achieving results. When you focus on the audience's own frame of reference, you are acknowledging their importance. Apply that principle in these five areas and you'll be on your way to becoming an international success. For Internet resources that focus on cross-cultural issues, go to <http://www.peakcp.com/resourcelinks.html>



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