



Lose Less Business With Better Presentation Skills

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Presentations offer a variety of benefits as a prospecting tool. They're low-cost, they position you as an advisor rather than as a salesperson and they can be highly-leveraged. But when delivered without a carefully thought out strategy, presentations can actually damage your credibility with prospects. Here are five common mistakes to avoid that will help you lose less business

1. **Concentrating on what you want to say instead of what you want to accomplish.** A focus on what you want to say usually results in information overload. You'll be tempted to include irrelevant or extraneous information just because it's available. You should approach each speaking opportunity with a clear goal in mind. What do you want the audience to understand or act upon after you speak? Is it to set an appointment, request additional resources or something else? Without goals, you'll have no way of measuring the success of your efforts. A strategic goal drives the content of the presentation by serving as its architecture. It will guide you in developing your key messages, proof points and supporting visuals. Until you can state your goal in a single, simple, declarative sentence, you haven't clearly defined your goal.
2. **Wasting time in your introduction building your firm's credibility.** If they're in the seats, the initial sale has already been made. I've seen far too many introductions where the presenter squandered valuable time talking about his firm and himself instead of overcoming preoccupation and outlining benefits. Realize the audience cares far less about how long you've been in business, how many partners and associates the firm has and how many credentials they boast than they care about what you can do for them. Experts say the most effective storytellers show rather than tell. The same holds true for credibility. Don't tell the audience why you're credible; let it show through your use of examples, case studies and experience. You'll gain far more rhetorical currency with the second approach.
3. **Letting expertise get in the way of influence.** In today's market, expertise only pays the price of admission—it's the expectation. By itself, it's insufficient to differentiate you from others or position you uniquely. After all, it's not the engineer with the greatest command of math and physics or the insurance professional who best understands the nuances of different policies who brings in the most business. Instead, it's the expert who can best explain the value he brings to the table who turns out to be the firm's true rainmaker. Experts too often believe the facts will speak for themselves

and fail to provide an adequate context and frame of reference to make those facts understandable and actionable.

4. **Using PowerPoint inappropriately.** Electronic slide shows have their place, but things have spun out of control to the point they need to be put back in their place. Unfortunately, many presenters have begun to use PowerPoint shows as electronic speechwriters. Slides have morphed from visual aids to content creation tools—a function they're ill suited for. The most effective presenters begin by conceptualizing the development of their ideas along some hierarchical structure or other thought pattern. Merely dumping text in a blank slide makes a poor substitute. PowerPoint shows also make poor teleprompters, although the word apparently hasn't leaked out given the number of presenters who actually use them as such. A straightforward perceptual principle applies here; we can read faster than someone speaks. The audience leaves anyone who simply reads his slides word for word in the mental dust.

5. **Focusing on yourself or the message instead of the audience.** Presentations are designed and delivered from one of three focal points, the speaker, the message or the audience. Speaker focused presentations tend to rely only on the speaker's frame of reference (which the audience may not share), contain lot's of "I's" and "me's" and are often interpreted as arrogant or patronizing. Message focused presentations can be too heavily data-laden, too technical and too full of facts and statistics at the expense of examples and illustrations. If we accept the definition of effective communication as *gaining the desired response from an audience*, it follows that you'll develop the most effective presentations by focusing on the audience. That means using language, examples stories that resonate with them.

The payoff from a presentation may not always be immediate, but keep the bigger picture in view. It can help establish your credibility, increase your visibility and start to build relationships. The keys to success involve planning, providing value, adapting to the audience frame of reference and keeping your PowerPoint in the back set instead of the driver's seat.



Joe Sommerville shows professional services firms how to increase visibility, enhance credibility and close more business. Download the first chapter of *RainMaking Presentations: How to Grow Your Business by Leveraging Your Expertise* at www.RainMakingPresentations.com.