



Tips For Better Panel Presentations

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Using presentations as part of your business development is a cost effective and high impact strategy to increase your visibility and enhance your credibility within your target market. One of the most productive applications of this strategy is presenting on an expert panel organized by a trade or professional organization. After all, such an appearance means you've literally been christened an "expert." While the opportunity is rich in potential, speaking as part of a panel presents its own set of challenges. Foremost is the fact that many things are out of your control. You'll have very little input on the room setup and seating arrangements. It's unlikely you'll know what the other panelists plan to say or if they might even contradict your own position. If you follow another presenter the moderator allows to exceed her time, you'll have to quickly adapt your presentation. However, even after weighing all the potential challenges, it's usually a good idea to accept the invitation if it puts you in front of your potential clients. Appearing on a panel with high-profile speakers will enhance your own credibility.

Gather as much information as possible about the panel and your specific role on it. Find out who else will be speaking and in what order. How long will you have to speak? What other events will immediately precede and follow your presentation? What Audio / Visual equipment is available for you to use? Will each of the speakers have a microphone, or will you have to share one? Remember the classic Aretha Franklin song *Respect*? When you deliver your panel presentation, you'll increase your chances of success if you practice the three R's--*Respect the time, Respect the other panel members and Respect the audience.*

Respect time

Your moderator or panel organizer should provide you with your time guidelines. Ask them to be specific. If you have twenty minutes to present, should you speak for the entire twenty minutes or reserve some time for questions? Be clear about the expectations. Adhere to the guidelines you're given. If your standard presentation doesn't fit within those parameters, adapt it. A speaker who goes overtime can throw an entire day's schedule off. Audience members generally expect that time will be divided equally among different speakers. When you exceed your share of time, they stop listening and start wondering when you're going to conclude. Recognize also that panel moderators span the entire range of enforcement from "Time Authoritarians" (who will begin passing notes to the offending speaker or gesticulate obnoxiously once the speaker has exceeded his allotted time by just thirty seconds) to "Time Wimps" (who, out of a sense of deference to the speaker, will refuse to intervene no matter how egregiously the offending speaker drones on). Your best bet lies in preparing for both extremes and neither materializes.

Respect the other panel members

Organizers sometimes invite speakers with opposing views to create interest or controversy. When you're faced with such a situation, you'll gain little by trying to prove the other speaker is wrong or by trying to make him look bad. Audiences tend to be quite unforgiving of any behavior that could be interpreted as bullying. Some people have a habit of interrupting others before they've finished speaking. The intention may be to demonstrate passionate advocacy for their cause, but audiences often construe the behavior as rudeness. Keep fully engaged with the rest of the panel when you're not speaking—that means no texting or checking emails on your Blackberry. Maintain awareness of your nonverbal behaviors as well. You need to project an impression of interest and active listening.

Respect the audience

Forget the saying "There's safety in numbers." Audience members tend to focus on individual speakers rather than the panel as a whole. Remember to maintain eye contact and look directly at individuals when answering their questions. When a question is so specific it has little relevance to the majority of the audience, provide a brief response, then offer to follow up with the individual after the presentations conclude. You'll quickly lose interest if people think the information isn't pertinent to them. Finally, remember that panel presentations typically take place in larger venues. That means you'll need to adapt any visuals so everyone in the room easily sees them.

Confucius wrote "*Respect yourself and others will respect you.*" While great advice in general, it's particularly apt in the context of presentations.



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.