



Presentations Benefit From A Process Approach

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Although many professional service providers find themselves reluctant to deliver them, presentations remain one of the most effective business development tools available. Presentations can help you increase your visibility by differentiating yourself from others and enhance your credibility by clearly articulating your professionalism and expertise. If you'll look at creating an effective presentation as a logical process, you'll quickly realize that it doesn't entail a Sisyphean task each time you're given the opportunity to be in front of prospects and clients. A process has the advantages of being both learnable and repeatable, so once you master it, you can streamline development time and increase the returns. Here's a straightforward process for designing, developing and delivering effective business presentations.

Step one involves creating the basis to develop an effective relationship with the target audience. To fully comprehend what will motivate them to action, you must first discover any beliefs, attitudes or values that prevent them from accepting your call to action. Adapting your material to their frame of reference means you'll be more successful in developing messages that resonate with their own experience. Demographics tell part of the story, but through more active research such as interviews and surveys, you'll reach a deeper level of understanding.

Step two focuses on creating clarity of purpose. What's the one specific reason you're giving the presentation? What's the response you expect? Avoid framing your expectations in terms of intangibles such as "enhancing appreciation, creating awareness" and "motivating." Desired outcomes should focus on observable actions rather than mental states. That way, you'll have a better measure of your success.

Step three centers on creating structure. An effective introduction will overcome preoccupation by capturing attention, overcome apathy by showing the audience what's of value for them and overcome uncertainty by laying out a roadmap of the presentation. The body will contain key messages that support the strategic goal. An effective conclusion provides a sense of psychological closure, reinforcement of the key messages and a call to action. The clearer the structure, the more likely you are to move the audience to their destination.

Step four demands creating trust and rapport so you can make a favorable impression and give the audience reasons to believe you. We tend to like people who are similar to us, so when you can show how much you have in common with your audience, chances are higher they'll trust you. Providing evidence for your key messages in the form of examples, explanations, expert testimony, statistics and narratives will make them more credible. If you've spent the time to thoroughly research your audience in step one, you'll have a good idea of which types of evidence they find persuasive. For some, an emotional proof point can be every bit as effective as a logical one.

Step five involves creating influence through your choice of compelling language. Your language creates the perspectives, involvement and mental states that move your audience closer to action. You can make it more powerful by choosing active verbs and descriptive nouns and avoiding cliché's and wordiness. Realize that language choice is strategic rather than merely stylistic. Creative metaphors can often provide the mental shift necessary to help audiences see problems and solutions differently.

Step six requires creating the illustration of your ideas through appealing to the visual channel of communication. Creating visuals late in the process helps ensure you don't overemphasize their importance. Unfortunately, far too many people begin writing their presentations by jumping prematurely to this step and trying to dump information into a PowerPoint template. A good analogy is the author of a novel, who, rather than beginning with plot lines, character development and creating suspense, instead concentrates on font types, page layouts and the look of the book cover. Effective visuals are those that can be clearly seen and quickly understood.

Step seven completes the process by creating interest in the delivery of the presentation. Good speaking shouldn't draw attention to the speaker just as good acting doesn't draw attention to the actor. The best delivery resembles natural and authentic conversation. The three biggest impediments to effective delivery are monotony—which leads to boredom, vocalized pauses—which cause distraction and speaking too softly—which undermines credibility.

Creating your business presentations through a process approach will remove most of the anxiety caused by treating presentations as an event. You'll be much more focused on the audience instead of yourself, so you'll be less apprehensive. You'll reduce preparation time because with a clear sense of purpose, all subsequent decisions about what to include and how to structure the material become clearer. Finally, you'll be able to concentrate on getting the business, instead of getting over with the presentation.



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.