

The Perfect Pitch

I recently heard a professional speaker state that it takes twenty to thirty “practice runs” to perfect a speech. A few days later his comments reverberated through my head as I noticed that my presentation of a new program to a prospective client was somewhat disjointed and possibly confusing. It suddenly dawned on me that an effective sales presentation requires as much preparation as an excellent keynote speech. As I thought more about it, I realized that the best salespeople I have encountered all had a well-rehearsed presentation.

This isn't to say that they read their lines from a script. What it does mean is that they have practiced delivering key pieces of information. When they talk to new prospects, they present this information consistently and concisely. They don't stumble or falter. They know what to say and they make sure their prospect understands the key points.

Here is a four step process how you can use this concept to perfect your sales presentation:

First, identify the key points you want to make in your presentations. List each point down on paper and determine the best order for discussing each. Write key words that will reinforce your points and add to your presentation. This outline will then become the foundation for your presentations. The more complex your product, the more detailed this outline should be.

Next, develop an analogy, testimonial or story for each of your key points. Explain how existing customers have benefited from using your service or product and give specific examples. For instance, *“Mary Brown at ABC Organization told me that her company has saved over \$2500 in the last six months after using our premium line of products. What she has particularly liked is the fact that the ordering process is now streamlined and more efficient.”*

Learn to incorporate the use of story telling in your presentations to give them more impact. Use the names of people and companies you have worked with. Use personal examples or draw from the experience of other people. As with step one, write out the key points of each example to clarify exactly what details you need to discuss.

The third step is to create visual aids. The purpose of these aids is to reinforce specific points and help your customer or prospect clearly understand your presentation. Show them a selection of your products. Because I sell an intangible item, I bring copies of my seminar workbooks for new prospects to review.

A prospect who is considering doing business with you for the first time will naturally have some concerns and hesitation. Give them testimonials from existing customers if they appear unconvinced or show signs of hesitation. Testimonials can help alleviate those concerns.

The last step is to practice. This means verbally rehearsing your sales presentation and it is the most critical aspect of the entire process. Concentrate on the delivering your key points and incorporating your analogies and stories. A strategy that makes this process easier is to practice each element of your presentation separately. For example, my standard keynote presentation consists of five concepts. Rather than rehearsing the entire speech, I practise each component separately. This is easier and more convenient than trying to remember an entire 60 minute presentation.

Make sure that you also practice using your visual aids. I once made the mistake of incorporating a new aid into one of my presentations and failed to rehearse it before I delivered it for the first time. As a result, I fumbled with it and looked ill-prepared. Needless to say, it was a painful lesson to learn.

One word of caution – avoid trying to memorize your presentation. This causes stress as you try to recall exactly what you want to say. Instead, focus on learning the key elements, and the specific points or examples you want to make. In fact, there is nothing wrong with outlining these key points on an index card so you don't forget.

As you implement the four strategies identified above, consider using a voice recorder to record all your presentations. Many sales professionals record their presentations and critique them afterwards. This helps them hear exactly how they sound to their prospects. As you listen to your recording, you will hear how often you say, “um” and “uh.” You will notice stammering, stumbling and other vocal mistakes. This is a very effective method to quickly improve your verbal presentation skills.

As a final point, analyze each presentation with a prospect. Take a few moments immediately after each sales interaction and identify what you did well and what you could have improved.

This may seem like a lot of work but in most cases it can be completed in a relatively short period of time. Remember, the larger the sales opportunity, the more important it is that you deliver a well-rehearsed sales presentation.

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