

apply to another, however. Schmerling describes the process as negative migration. And if a candidate with something to hide knows that one company runs background checks and another does not, he is likely to apply to the one with looser procedures.

In some cases, whole industries attract these migrants. "I have been doing this for 20 years, and at any

moment there will be an industry where bad people flock," says Schmerling. "It used to be the securities industry in Boca Raton. Now it is the Internet."

In dotcom companies, he says, 15 to 20 percent of searches throw up significant issues. "These are people who are 28 years old and have a civil docket sheet that looks

like the rap sheet of an inner-city gangster," he says. "If you want to make a fast buck, that's the place to go now."

(Excerpted from "Background Investigations," by Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson, which appeared in the March 3, 2000, issue of the *Financial Times*.)

Brian J. Lewis, P.E., F.ASCE

Winning Presentations Blend Great Technology with Skill and Preparation

Successful business presentations require a combination of top-notch hardware, sophisticated software, and finely honed presentation skills. Boston-based presentations expert Claudyne Wilder, author of *The Presentations Kit, 10 Steps to Selling Your Ideas*, offers these steps for delivering winning presentations:

1) Channel your nervousness. Practice out loud and with the technology you plan to use in your presentation, suggests Wilder. "Before you get in front of a live audience," she says, "put yourself in a good mood; get to know some of the people in your audience in advance."

2) Define your objective. Knowing what you plan to achieve will help focus your presentation. "Research your audience," says Wilder, "and present using a format that meets your objectives, such as benefit selling, report progress, or teaching skills."

3) Organize everything. Preparation and organization are essential to giving polished presentations. "Make your notes brief and readable," suggests Wilder, "and cut out unnecessary details. Review your talk in advance with someone not familiar with your subject. Then take out jargon or buzzwords and be sure to spell out and explain acronyms."

4) Create and use visuals. It is important to select the visual media—electronic media, overheads, slides, and hard copy—that will best meet the objectives of your presentations. "Vary the visuals," says Wilder, "and have a backup plan in case something is inoperable." When creating visuals, it is important to thoroughly edit them in order to ensure accuracy and eliminate typos. Finally, when making a presentation, she says, "Be sure to talk to the audience, not to the visual."

5) Energize yourself. Energy creates energy, so when making a presentation, it's important to energize yourself, says Wilder. "Project your voice and use examples to keep your voice lively," she advises. "It's also important to make eye contact, gesture, and

change the pace of the presentation."

6) Motivate your listeners. Establishing rapport with the audience will keep them interested and attentive. "Control the room temperature and setup so everyone can see you and your visuals," says Wilder. "Dress appropriately for your role and appeal to all senses—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—by using pictures, exercises, sounds, questions, and examples."

7) Conclude with conviction. A confident voice and an energetic stance help convey conviction to an audience. "Plan concluding sentences and practice them out loud," advises Wilder. "And vary your conclusion with a combination of facts and opinions."

8) Manage questions. Give guidance to an audience when you start a presentation by telling them when to ask questions—either during the talk or at the end. "Talk to the whole audience when answering the question," advises Wilder. "Answer briefly and then ask if they need more information on that subject now. It's also a good idea to prepare a second conclusion for after the question-and-answer period."

9) Recommend next steps. Help the audience put what they have learned from your presentation to work by recommending next steps, says Wilder. "Clarify people's roles and responsibilities regarding the next steps," she adds.

10) Take the leap. The best presenters adapt their own personal strengths to be effective. "Use your unique talents and tailor your talk to the audience. Be passionate in speaking about your subject and, when it's appropriate, use humor," says Wilder. "And always remember to just be yourself."

(Excerpted from an article by Gregory Sandler in the February 2000 issue of *Constructor*. More information on honing your presentation skills is available on-line at [www.wilderpresentations.com].)

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