

Sound check: How to avoid presentation dangers

By Virgil Scudder

You've been invited to give a presentation at a prestigious professional gathering. So, you spend countless hours preparing — shaping what you plan to say and developing visuals to illustrate your points.

You're on your way to success — or are you? Some speakers find that their efforts have less impact than they should because they neglect the details.

It all comes back to one important premise: Communication is not what you know or what you say. It's what the audience takes away.

The most common mistakes concern pictures and sound. The audience can't hear the speaker clearly or easily read the visuals. As a result, you lose impact and, possibly, the audience itself.

Here are some tips to help you and your presentation garner positive reviews.

• **Check your sound and visuals before you start.** Insist on having access to the room at least 15 minutes before you present, preferably with a technician present. To be sure that you can be heard in all areas of the room, test the placement of the microphones and the volume. Also, you need to check your audio and visual

aids to make sure the technical system is working properly. AV failures have doomed many compelling presentations.

• **Get your technical act together.**

Practice pushing the buttons you'll need to use when it's showtime. Don't let a technician do it for you in rehearsal and then leave you to do it for yourself when it counts. You need to be confident in your ability to operate the equipment.

• **Keep it simple.** Design your slides in such a way that they can easily be seen and understood, even in the back row. The most common mistake in creating presentations is crowding too much onto one slide. Don't use any font that's smaller than 20 or 24 point.

• **Rehearse.** Go over your presentation several times before the day you



deliver it — preferably videotaping yourself so you can see what you need to improve on. It's also a good idea to practice in front of family members or colleagues to get their feedback. Just knowing your subject is not enough; you need to deliver your points in a smooth, confident and professional manner.

• **Start and end on time.** It shows respect for the audience and that you have your act together — you're professional, credible and well organized.

• **Find an interesting opening.** Since people often come into these ses-

sions a few minutes late, make your opening remarks interesting, entertaining or humorous (if possible), but not essential to understanding what is to follow. Humor is a great weapon for getting people's attention. If people walking past the room hear the audience laughing, then they are likely to come in and take a seat.

• **Remember the Q-and-A.**

Leave sufficient time at the end and insist questioners use the microphone so everyone can hear the question. If they fail to do so, then politely ask them to repeat the question, speaking into the microphone — even if you heard it clearly. If there isn't a microphone for the audience, then repeat their question before you answer it so everyone in the room can hear.

Following these steps will help ensure that your presentation receives the attention and response that your efforts deserve. **T**



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Giving presentations that deliver results: Ten tips to help you own the room

By Robbie Hyman

Do you have to give a presentation, conduct a meeting or lead a conference call? Here's how to make the room become your domain, hold your audience's attention — and get results.

1. Greet attendees as they arrive

Your presentation actually begins before you utter your first word. It starts when the first attendee enters the room. Get there early and introduce yourself to people as they arrive. You'll feel much more relaxed during your presentation if you've met each attendee. For conference calls, remember to greet people who are physically entering the room you are in as well as new attendees who dial into the conference.

2. Make your statistics interesting

It can be boring for the audience if

you discuss stats, revenues or other numbers in your presentation. Rather than running through a list of figures, try to spice up the information.

Don't say:
"Current projections for the upcoming fiscal year are \$50 million."

Make it interesting. Try:
"Good news! For next year, we're on track to make \$140,000 a day."

3. Tell stories

To be an effective presenter, you need to engage your audience intellectually, but also emotionally. Telling stories helps you connect with their emotions.

Don't say:
"Increasing communication across departments will save the company substantially."

Make it memorable. Try:

"Want to know why it's critical that we all know what's going on in other departments? In the 1990s, Volvo had an excess of green cars. People just didn't want them. So Sales and Marketing offered special deals — and the cars started selling. But no one explained this to Manufacturing, who thought this meant that customers liked green cars again — so they started making more of them!"

4. Use concrete language

Whenever you speak, your goal is for the audience to hear what you're saying, remember it and take whatever action you want them to take. So don't speak in abstractions — use clear, concrete language.

Don't say:
"Our goal is to position ourselves as the industry leader and differentiate

our offerings in the marketplace."

Make it concrete. Try:

"Why are we better than our competition? We need to answer that question for ourselves. Then we need to get out there and tell the world."

5. Create images with your words

This is a live presentation, not a written memo that your audience members will be able to review at their own pace. They're only going to hear your speech one time. The more important your message is, the more important it is for you to provide them with images that they can hear, visualize and remember. Plant an image in the audience members' minds. Let them see what you want — a prospect opening a magazine that features your products.

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