

STAND and DELIVER

Sharpen your presentation skills to capture new clients with these winning tips from an expert speaker

By Cam Marston

The greatest sales tool you possess is not your Web site, promotional materials or experience. It is you. Simply put, your ability to communicate is your number one sales tool. Whether speaking one-on-one or addressing thousands, your presentation skills will win or lose you more sales than all others combined. The problem? Most people don't develop or refine their speaking skills.

The most common mistake people make when speaking to any size audience is that they put too much importance on the *accuracy* of the information and not enough on the *delivery*. Assuming the audience will judge you positively or negatively solely on whether your information is correct is a misperception. While getting the information right is indeed very important, accuracy matters little if facts are delivered in a way that is unmemorable.

As a wise man once said, "The prophet who cannot communicate is at the mercy of the dunce who can."

Don't spend the majority of your preparation time becoming familiar with information and ensuring it is accurate. Beginning today, spend an equal amount of time practicing your delivery, which is what makes your presentation come alive. Rarely do facts alone have enough gusto to make a significant impression on the audience. While you cannot completely control

the reaction to your presentation, you can greatly influence it by delivering your information effectively, persuasively and memorably.

How do you deliver an outstanding presentation? Practice. I wish it were easier than that, but practice is the key. Here are the basics:

Use the full range of your voice—talk fast, slow, loud, quiet. Keep mixing it up as the content demands. *Do not speak in a monotone voice.* This will hinder even a one-minute presentation and absolutely destroy anything longer. Liven up your voice.

Use big, bold gestures. Make your hands and body a part of what you're saying. Be careful of fidgeting with rings, pocket change or ink pens. Don't squeeze or "wash" your hands. These nervous habits will distract from your message. You may not notice you're fidgeting, but your audience certainly will.

Use facial expressions that mirror the content. Your face is a tool, so use it. A blank face is boring. It is *monotonous*—another presentation killer. Smile, raise your eyebrows, squint—use all the facial expres-

sions you can. It will keep your audience engaged.

As you practice, imagine your audience in front of you. This will help you control your nerves when the presentation finally begins. Imagine their faces watching as you practice your gestures, vocal range and facial expressions.

Some words of caution—too many people have adopted bad habits when it comes to presentations. Avoid these universal “don’ts”:

Don’t think you can “wing it.” You may have delivered an impromptu wedding toast that was a smash hit and brought the house down. Now you think you’re the invincible improviser: “Just throw me into the fire and prepare to be amazed.” If this is your attitude, your end is near. Winging it is a fickle tactic, just as likely to ambush you as to make you a hero. Eliminate the odds of failure and spend time preparing.

Alcohol is not “conversation lubrication.” Never drink prior to speaking. Like winging it, this will hinder you as many times as it will help. If you repeatedly rely on alcohol, your logic may evolve into, “If I was pretty good with two drinks, think of how good I’ll be with three or more!” Wrong—disaster dead ahead.

Never show your nerves. Audiences will reflect the way you look. If you start energetically, your audience will respond the same way. If you start serious, your audience will adopt that attitude. If you show your nerves, your audience will be nervous for you, stop listening and watch for your anxiety to appear. Keep in mind

that only two percent of the nerves you feel are visible. They won’t see them unless you draw their attention.

Don’t take your speech with you to the lectern. You’ll end up reading it and speeches that are read are consistently terrible. Write your speech, learn it forward and backward, make some simple reference notes on index cards in big print and go for it.

Rely on your recall, but do not memorize your speech. Memorized speeches sound just that—memorized. Boring. Don’t do it.

Whether good, bad, right or wrong, our culture is one where good

speakers are instantly recognized as highly credible leaders and experts. Good presentation skills will put you ahead of your peers and competition more quickly than will years of diligent, nose-to-the-grindstone work. Fair or unfair, this is the truth. Learning to be a great speaker is an investment that pays off immediately. Spend some time honing your best marketing tool—you. □

Cam Marston (cam@marstoncomm.com, www.marstoncomm.com) teaches presentation skills to executives. He is a popular presenter at the IREM Education Conference and frequently speaks about generational issues in the workplace.

VITAL SIGNS

The pulse of your property management is dependent on communication; signs are vital for wayfinding and safety. **SIGN★A★RAMA** has over 500 locations that deliver quality signs, on time, every time at competitive prices. Call 1-888-58-SIGNS to connect to the **SIGN★A★RAMA** nearest you for free evaluation of your vital signs.

- ◆ Custom Interior & Exterior Signs
- ◆ Free Estimates
- ◆ Expert Design
- ◆ Personalized Consultation
- ◆ Financing Available

SIGN★A★RAMA®
THE WORLD'S LARGEST SIGN COMPANY

1-888-58-SIGNS

Copyright of Journal of Property Management is the property of Institute of Real Estate Management and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.