



Plan your sales pitch down to the word *by Alan Brooks*



Dragons' Den style pitches to panels are becoming increasingly common in all

walks of business life. Most of us have sat through a fair number of presentations - possibly have made quite a few as well. But how many really hit the mark and won the prize? And in how many did the presenters talk themselves out of the deal rather than landing it?

Successful pitching, whether it's to a financier or a potential customer, takes planning and time. It's a subject that has many books and training courses devoted to it. But here are ten brief pointers to getting the result you want.

Before the day

1) People buy people

So no matter how expert you and colleagues are, audiences will not see this expertise if you cannot communicate properly; and they will not buy. Choose a team which demonstrates your depth of skill - customers and financiers will want re-assurance that it's not only the senior people in your business that can deliver. They will also see through the Director who is not close to the project or customer, but comes along to look impressive and wings it.

2) Do the research

Don't trot out the standard presentation. Find out as much as possible about those who will be there. Ask for any guidance on how they want the presentation to run. Ask how the decisions are going to be made following the presentation. And then tailor your approach accordingly.

3) Rehearse

Confidence sells. Never script (unless you're professionally trained it will sound very wooden!) but know your messages and who's saying what. Anticipate the obvious questions and how you will tackle them. Rehearsing in front of people you know is uncomfortable, but it pays dividends on the day. If you are relaxed you will focus more on your audience and less on yourself. You will pick up the mood of the meeting and adapt to it more easily. You won't miss the buying signals.

4) Put equal care into the written document

If your dragons are seeing a number of presentations on the day, or if your financiers need to take the case on to a credit committee, the written document is an important sales tool.

On the day

5) Study the audience for communication preferences

Have the radar switched on in those opening moments of introduction before you're on your feet. Is their speech pattern fast or slow, high volume or barely a whisper? How formal or

informal are they? What body language will give you clues? If you respond appropriately, you can gain an edge.

6) Start with a BANG!

Research shows that an audience remembers two things more than anything else. The beginning and the end. So give them something to remember! Tell a relevant story. Evoke a hypothetical situation ("Imagine that you are..."). Appeal to a shared experience or a common memory. Find something that will make you stand out in a positive and relevant way.

7) Us or them?

Have you had to sit through someone spending half of their presentation telling you in detail about the history of their business, when that's of no relevance at all to you or the decisions you need to make? Focus on your audience, not yourselves. Relate to them directly, their experiences, their situation (use the words 'you', 'yours').

8) Be inclusive

Talk to all of your audience, not just some. If you know some of your audience already that's an advantage, but don't fall into the trap of accidentally excluding others.

9) A few points, well made

One often quoted rule of thumb is that a good presentation should contain no more than FIVE

key points. Any more detail can be summarised and/or provided in notes and other back-up afterwards. Use the time to deliver with enthusiasm and confidence - audiences relate to someone who is excited about what they are saying and what they do.

10) Take yes for an answer

Listening to someone talk themselves out of a deal their audience said yes to 10 minutes ago is a painful experience - for all concerned. Sadly it does happen. Watch for the signals from the audience. If you are lucky enough to get a thumbs up there and then, suggest a next step and wrap up. If possible finalise the details in a more informal environment. If you're pitching to a panel at least one member may simply be going along with the consensus. Talking further can only provide them with ammunition to object.

Whether pitching for investment or sales, coming second can be far more costly than declining the opportunity because it's not right for you. A pitch takes time and resources. So above all, do it well, or not at all.



If you would like to learn more about how we can assist you with preparing and planning for particular sales pitches, please contact Alan Brooks on 020 7022 0054 or email acb@hydemarketing.com

