



PREFACE

Thank you for choosing to download this report. Inside these pages you will find useful, practical advice that will help you improve your presenting and public speaking skills (even if your presentation is tomorrow morning).

I decided to write this report because time and again I see people make the same preventable mistakes when they have to deliver business presentations or need to speak publicly at a social event.

Allow me to point out that I will use the word “presentation” throughout this report. When I say “presentation” I am not talking about PowerPoint or Keynote. “Presentation” means the delivery of information to an audience, with or without slides, ie. public speaking. When I refer to what is created by PowerPoint or Keynote I will say “slides” or “slide deck”.

So, who am I to give you advice on delivering presentations? Well, what follows is a little about me.

I’m actually from the technology sector; not a sector brimming with confident and capable public speakers, I’ll admit.

Throughout my career in technology I needed to watch a lot of people deliver presentations; from company financial reports and company restructuring to new technology rollouts and design walkthroughs.

Almost 100% of these presentations were awful!

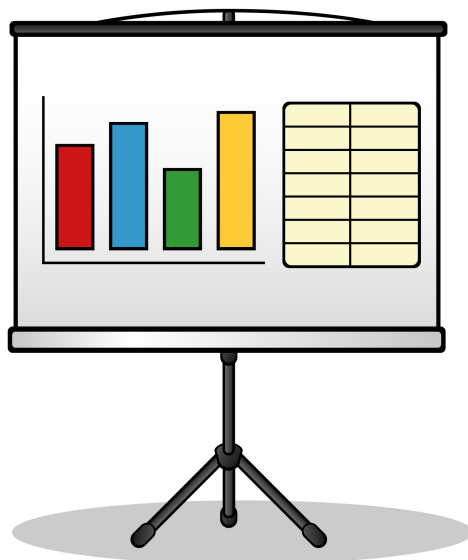
Most of the time they were so bad that the presenter did nothing but read through bullet points on their slides. To add insult to injury they expected us to be excited by the information they were reading in a monotone. Throughout these presentations I was always left wondering, “Why call us all into a room so you can read the information on some projected slides to us. Save us all some time and just email the slide deck to us, that way we can read it in our own time.”

These days I am a business trainer. I actually train people how to deliver effective and engaging presentations.

Throughout these pages I want to share strategies with you to help make your next presentation wonderful.

I have split this report into two sections. The first is the main section where I go through everything I know about presentations in detail. The second is a cheat sheet you can use if you need to deliver a presentation an hour from now or tomorrow morning and you need to make adjustments to your presentation style in a limited time (I've listed the points in order of what has the potential to make the most impact).

Happy presenting!



PREPARATION

No one wants to hear the word “preparation”. It sounds like a lot of hard work, right?

Actually, the way most people prepare to deliver a business presentation is much harder work.

Think about the situation. You are at work and your boss asks you to do a presentation at next Monday’s meeting about the project you’re working on.

Most people will do one of two things:

- Instantly load up PowerPoint and start writing endless bullet points on endless amounts of slides

- or -

- Write out the presentation word for word and try to memorize the entire thing

Both strategies are a huge time suck and very inefficient ways of preparing for an engaging presentation. If you put endless bullet points on your slides the strong likelihood is that you will spend most of your presentation time reading those bullet points to the audience. If you write out your presentation word for word you’ll probably spend most of the time trying to remember exactly what you wrote down, delivering what you can remember in a flat or embarrassed way.

On top of being a huge time suck the above two methods can also lead to a lot of additional stress prior to and during delivery of your presentation.

So what is the alternative?

The alternative is to prepare to deliver your presentation as the SME (subject matter expert).

There is a reason your boss asked you to deliver the presentation; there is a reason the leader of your social group asked you to speak publicly about your fundraising activities; there is a reason your colleagues

nominated you to address the executive management team about your team's progress... you have been identified as the subject matter expert!

The SME is the best or most-qualified person to talk about a particular topic. The best person to introduce the iPhone back in 2006 was Steve Jobs. He was the SME. He knew the iPhone inside out.

When you are preparing for your presentation you should always prepare as the subject matter expert.

In the coming pages I will describe how you can do this and the impact it will have on your smooth and confident presentation delivery.

The general flow that I use when preparing for a presentation is as follows:

1. Outline and develop my presentation
2. Rehearse
3. Create slide deck in PowerPoint/Keynote
4. Rehearse with slide deck

Notice where PowerPoint is in the steps? Number 3. Not number 1! If we start by creating our slides first we lock ourselves in to a particular flow of presentation delivery. We don't give ourselves room to move or change "because we've already created the slides!"

STEP 1 – OUTLINE AND DEVELOP

UNDERSTAND YOUR TOPIC

If you have been asked to deliver a presentation on a particular topic there's a strong chance it is because you are the subject matter expert. Therefore you will have a good understanding of your topic.

If you find yourself in the situation where you are not the subject matter expert (maybe your boss has asked you to do a talk in his or her absence) then you need to ensure you have a good understanding of the topic before you go any further.

Why is it so important to understand the topic? If you don't understand the topic it is very hard to deliver a fluid, engaging presentation because you will always be focused on trying to remember information. You'll always be focused on your notes or your slides.

The best presenters talk from what they know. They talk naturally, from memory and rarely, if ever, need to rely on notes or bullet points on their slides.

Before going any further please ensure you have a full understanding of your presentation topic.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

The first stage of preparation should be to understand your audience.

Who are they?

Why are they going to be in attendance?

How can you frame your presentation in a way that benefits them directly?

What things are they unlikely to want to hear?

Only by considering these questions, and gearing your delivery around the answers, can you truly put together an engaging presentation.

CREATE AN OUTLINE

Stop!... Please don't sit down and create a line-by-line description of your presentation. Writing out the steps that you'll follow the whole way through your delivery won't work. Writing everything line-by-line will prompt you to try to memorize your presentation.

Trying to memorize your presentation is a sure-fire way to kill your delivery.

When you write everything out line-by-line or try to memorize your presentation word-for-word you kill the natural flow of your delivery. If your delivery doesn't come across as natural then your presentation just becomes the standard, boring presentation that your audience has no reason to care about.

Here's how to create an effective presentation outline:

1. Sit down with a blank piece of paper and decide what your presentation topic is. Write your topic down. Your topic should be a blend of the message you want to get across, what you need the audience to do, and how it will benefit them. Take for example a presentation about the company's current financials. Let's imagine they are not great. The topic could be, "Mid-term financials update", or we could develop this further to be "Turning our financials around to grow the business and increase everyone's bonus." If you were in the audience of this presentation, which topic would you be more likely to engage with?
2. Below your topic create three or less subheadings. The subheadings are the points that support your topic. I recommend three points (or subtopics) maximum because more than that and your audience may struggle to remember the main points of your presentation.
3. Consider the sub-sub-points that will support your three subtopics and write those supporting points under each subheading.

Your results might look something like this:

Turning our financials around to grow the business and increase everyone's bonus

- Current status of financials
 - More competition
 - Flat growth
- New marketing plans
 - Introduction of low-cost product
 - Increased marketing exposure in similar areas to our competition
- Forecasts for the future
 - Fast growth in the near term after launch of new product

That's it! That's your outline. Going forward, we are going to use this outline to prepare the presentation delivery, from practice through to slide deck creation.

STEP 2 – REHEARSE

What's that you say? "Why are we rehearsing when not a word of a speech has been written and no slides have been created?"

Firstly, we are going to rehearse without having planned a script so that you are able to "talk" about the presentation material rather than "recite" it. The problems with memorizing a script and reciting it are many. You won't be able to remember it word for word and your attempts to do so will make you look un-natural, even robotic. You are more likely to forget information as you struggle to remember minutia from your script. Your audience will be able to tell that you are remembering directly from a script and therefore less likely to be engaged, and less likely to trust you.

Secondly, we are going to rehearse without slides. To deliver a truly natural and engaging presentation where the audience actually "listens" to what you say, you need to be able to do it without slides. Imagine for a second that you arrive at the meeting room or auditorium and the projector has just blown up. You can't use slides, so you're not going to deliver anything? Think about how bad that would look.

Regarding delivering without slides, consider that you are the presenter, not the slides. Too often, when delivering business presentations, slides are used as a prompt and the presenter just reads the bullets on the slides to the audience.

If you are just going to read the slides to me, email them to me and I can read them at my desk and don't need to waste time coming down to the meeting room.

To reiterate, you are the presenter, not the slides. You are there to deliver the presentation and the slides are there to support you. Not the other way around. If you support the slides the audience will not be listening.

The third reason we are going to rehearse without script or slides is that it will greatly improve our slide design.

Imagine you have a slide deck teeming with bullet points, graphs, and images. There is little white space on any of the slides. How do you think your audience will behave when you deliver your presentation?

Most likely their attention will be divided. They will spend 50% of their time reading the slides and 50% of their time listening to you.

Now imagine you are reading a newspaper or a magazine and your spouse is trying to talk to you at the same time. You aren't reading properly and internalizing the information from the pages, and you aren't listening properly and really hearing what your spouse is saying.

What can we take from this? If you create slides where the audience is forced to read them, most likely they are not going to internalize much from your presentation because they won't really be reading and they won't really be listening.

Finally, many books have been written about good slide design and how the content should be prepared in a minimalist fashion; keeping content to a minimum; preparing slide decks like those you have probably seen Steve Jobs present with. These books are all good, I actually highly recommend *Presentation Zen* by Garr Reynolds. However, after delivering hundreds of presentations to varying audiences, I feel that good slide design comes from the preparation phase rather than the actual time in front of PowerPoint or Keynote.

So, at this point I highly recommend that you grab your outline and practice delivering your presentation based on that outline.

How should you practice?

Put the outline on a desk in front of you, stand up and practice delivering as if the audience is sitting right there. It may feel silly at first, but you'll get the hang of it pretty quickly.

As you practice, and practice again and again, you'll find you need to rely on your outline less and less. When you start to feel this way remove the outline. Refer back to it when necessary.

At this point I should say that I no longer practice this way. One reason is that I am comfortable going over the presentation topic beforehand and just talking about it. If I make a mistake along the way I laugh about it, make a joke of it, involve the audience, etc. The other reason is that after having delivered so many presentations I am now comfortable in front of an audience. I know how to move in front of the audience, talk to the audience, and be silent in front of them. Rehearsing standing up will help you with this.

YOUR TONE

As you rehearse your presentation you should consider the tone that you are using for your delivery. As much as possible you should keep your tone conversational in nature.

What if I'm doing a formal business presentation?

Even if your presentation is to the executive management team, even if you are presenting to an audience you've never met before I encourage you to keep your tone conversational. This is because a conversational tone is very engaging.

Let me repeat that: a conversational tone is very engaging. By saying "conversational" I am not telling you to be overly casual or impolite. Think of someone like Steve Jobs delivering a presentation. He talks to the audience, tells them stories, makes eye contact, and gestures as he would if he were having a conversation with a friend.

I bet if you find a manager at your company that has delivered many, many presentations their presentation style will be quite conversational. That's because over time presenters understand that the audience is more receptive to this style.

Remember, you don't have to be perfect first time. It is far better to deliver presentations in a style that feels comfortable for you. I have coached many people and the advice I give them is always the same "If something doesn't feel natural, don't force it because it won't look natural."

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

As you rehearse and become better at delivering the content of your presentation, your visual communication becomes extremely important.

There are several elements to visual communication. Nothing can be perfected in your first presentation but over time each element naturally gets better. The elements of visual communication I believe you should consider (in order of importance) are:

- Eye contact
- Gestures
- Body position
- Movement

EYE CONTACT

Making eye contact with your audience can be difficult at first because you are feeling so self-conscious. The trick with eye contact is to remember you want to have a conversational tone. Make your eye contact as natural as possible by imagining you are having a conversation with the people in front of you.

We should also consider why eye contact is so important.

Importantly, it builds a relationship between you and your audience. To re-use the example of your spouse trying to talk to you while you read; You've got your head stuck in a newspaper or magazine and your spouse is trying to ask you question or tell you about something. Given you're reading, and not really listening, you're not making eye contact. Because you're not making eye contact there really isn't much of a relationship or connection between the two of you at that particular moment.

Eye contact assists you to know when the audience is following along or if you have lost them. Imagine you're not making much eye contact and half your audience doesn't understand what's going on. The fact you're not making eye contact means you miss the visual cues you'd usually receive when people are struggling to understand something. Result? You disengage some or all of your audience.

Finally, eye contact is important for maintaining credibility. Imagine someone is relating a story to you and the whole time they are avoiding eye contact... Would you trust them? Probably not. Therefore it is vital that you make eye contact with your audience so that they trust you and what you're telling them.

Making eye contact is just a matter of glancing at members of the audience. You don't want to look at any one person for too long for the same reason that fixed eye contact during a one-on-one discussion is uncomfortable.

Take care not to spend all your time looking over the audience at the wall behind them. This is perhaps worse than occasionally glancing down because it makes it clear to the audience that you want to avoid eye contact.

GESTURES

The rule for gestures is "be natural".

Too often texts on presentation skills tell the would-be presenter to match their gestures to what they are saying. This results in presenters practicing what gestures to do during their presentation. Can you imagine how un-natural this looks?

With gestures, don't fake it. Refer to the conversational rule discussed earlier. Imagine you're talking to a friend in the shopping mall or in some other social setting. As you talk to them and describe things you gesture with your arms to help explain and emphasize what you're saying. Your gestures should be like this during your presentation.

Of course, if you say the number "three" it's okay to hold up three fingers, or to count on your hand. However, it's not okay to force yourself to hold up three fingers. If you are forcing yourself your audience will be able to tell. If your audience feels you are forcing yourself then it makes you look nervous and potentially your audience loses confidence in you.

BODY POSITION

When you think about body position, consider your posture, how relaxed you are, and how open you are.

Let's start with posture. All through school your parents and teachers probably repeatedly told you how important good posture is. And it is important. Good posture is important to project confidence. Imagine a presenter with a body position that was a little bent over and hunched at the shoulders... no confidence there.

When we think about posture, it's also important not to have a rigid body position. No matter how good your posture is, if your body seems fixed or rigid it will make you look nervous. It is good to have a confident posture but to also treat your body like jelly, ie. relaxed.

This brings us to being relaxed. The more fixed or straight up and down your body is the less confident you'll look. Loosen up as much as possible before you take the stage.

Finally, try to be as open as possible. Having an open body position, avoiding crossing your arms in front of you or behind you, projects confidence. This single act alone when you first take the stage relaxes your audience because they instantly feel you are comfortable talking to them and have confidence.

MOVEMENT

Movement relates to how you move around the stage or the front of the room.

During your presentation standing in one position is okay, but it can make you look nervous. It can make you look nervous because prior to your presentation you've probably built up some nervous energy. Now that you're in front of everyone you release it through movement. If you're standing in one position it comes out as hand rubbing, rocking back and forward on your heels, or stepping from side to side.

Adding movement into your presentation style does two things: It makes you look like a professional presenter (for example, Steve Jobs doesn't stand in one position when he is presenting), it also allows you to work off nervous energy without the audience realizing.

STEP 3 – CREATE YOUR SLIDE DECK

So you've rehearsed your delivery?

You can do your presentation from beginning to end without slides and without a memorized script?

If so, move forward, if not please go back to step 2. I can't emphasize enough how much better your presentation will be if you can deliver it without slides prior to creating your slide deck.

Assuming you're ready to create your slides, don't boot up PowerPoint or Keynote. Keep your computer out of sight for a moment and instead grab your notebook or a blank sheet of paper and a pen.

Authors that sit down at their computer and just start typing their next manuscript may be successful, but if they haven't planned anything beforehand then they will end up doing far more revisions to the story's structure before it could ever be considered ready for publishing. The same goes for your presentation. If you just fire up PowerPoint and start adding information to slides it's likely the structure is not going to match your rehearsed delivery well enough to be effective.

On paper you are going to plan out your slides.

Why don't we do this in PowerPoint or Keynote with the slide sorter? Because as soon as you sit down at the computer you enter a very fixed frame of mind which can prevent you getting the best results.

Draw a series of boxes on the paper. Start running your rehearsed presentation through your mind. Whenever you get to a point in your presentation that you feel is something you would need to emphasize, write a word that represents the point in a new box. Keep doing this until you reach the end of your presentation.

This may mean that you end up with many boxes in comparison to the number of slides you would usually create. Don't worry about this... we'll develop them further. Do remember though, it is far more effective to have a single point or topic on each slide than to have one slide with many general points.

As a next step, go through each of the boxes and consider the word you've written in each box. What is going to be best to emphasize the point? A picture? A single word? A sentence? A graph? Decide what works best and sketch it into the box.

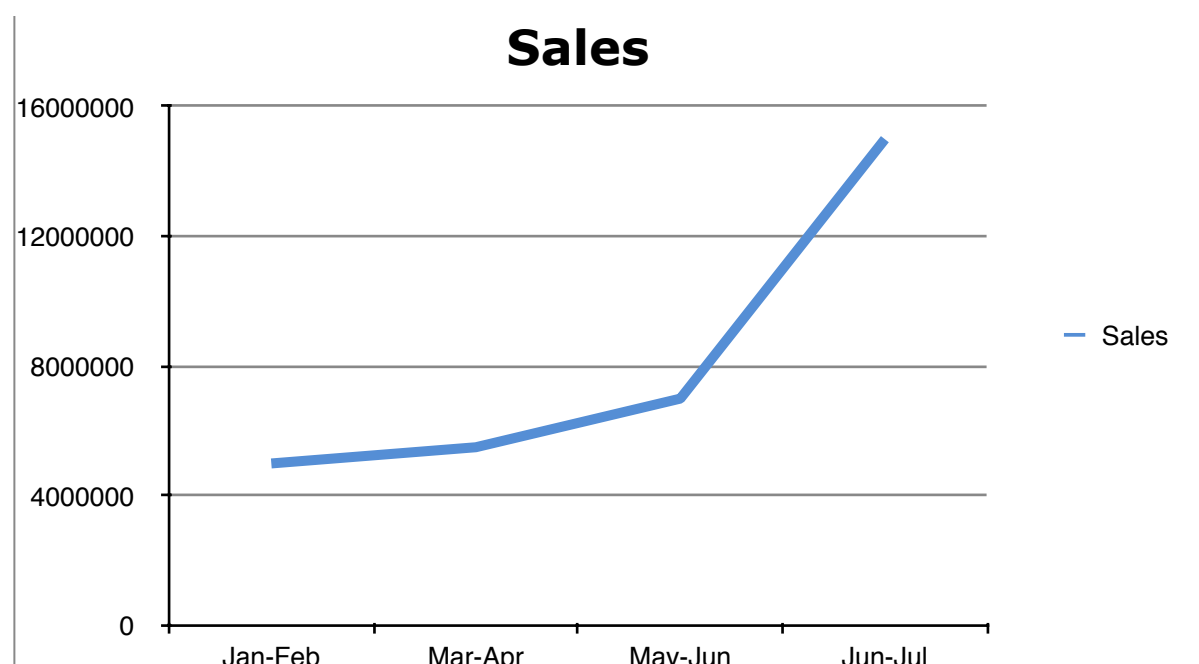
With more content drawn into each box, run through your presentation again in your head and check if it flows smoothly. If it flows well you're ready to move on to the next step, if not you may want to refine it by taking content away or adding more.

ADDING IMPACT

One of the reasons that slide shows are eternally boring is that presenters put all the information on a topic onto the slide at the same time.

Let's take the example of a general manager who is giving a company-wide presentation to show that despite slow sales at the beginning of the year, the new marketing campaign has increased sales 200%.

In the above example, it is likely that the general manager is going to have a slide with a graph that shows sales in January/February versus sales in July/August. There is nothing wrong with having a graph in the general manager's slide deck, but I want you to consider how much impact the following statement would have if read while the below graph is shown on-screen:



General manager says: *“At the end of February our sales were at the worst level for the last three years. We had to do something. We launched a recovery project called Project X where the sales and marketing teams worked closely together. I’m now happy to report that sales volumes increased in July/August to a whopping \$15,000,000!”*

The problem with the slide above is that it has no impact. The audience already knows exactly what the presenter is going to say before he says it. The audience knows (because they are looking at the graph on-screen) that sales were \$15,000,000 for July/August. By the time the presenter says, *“a whopping \$15,000,000!”* the audience are already thinking, *“Yeah, I know.”*

So how do we improve the impact of our slides?

The answer is to design our slides in a way that the fantastic, shocking, or surprising results are not shown to the audience until we actually are saying what the results are.

For example, we could format the graph so that we only show the results up to June. When the presenter says *“a whopping \$15,000,000!”* he clicks and the slide changes to reveal the rest of the graph with July/August results. You can do this through the use of two slides or through animations.

Another option is not to use a graph. Instead, one slide shows a down arrow and the number \$5M. When the presenter says *“a whopping \$15,000,000!”* he changes the slide to reveal an up arrow and the number \$15M in a much larger font.

As you are running through your hand drawn slides, consider impact. The more impact your delivery and slides have the more likely it is your presentation will be remembered.

DESIGNING YOUR SLIDES

The time has come.

It’s time to open PowerPoint or Keynote and start making our slide deck.

Everyone has their own ideas about what good slides should look like so I'm just going to give you some standard guidelines to follow. I won't get too specific because often you will have to use company-designated slide formats anyway.

CONSISTENCY

It doesn't matter what fonts, what kind of images, or what headers you use they will always look better if you opt for a consistent look. If your first slide uses the Arial font then stick with that font throughout. If you go with a blue and red theme for your stacked bar graph every stacked bar graph should use a blue and red theme (unless there's a very good reason for using different colors).

WHITE SPACE

Consider the display advertising in newspapers. You probably ignore all of it, right? Imagine if you opened the paper and there was a half-page display ad with nothing more than a word and a phone number in the center. You'd probably pay attention to that because it's mainly white space.

If you have a lot of white space in your slides you help the audience to understand what the key point is you want them to focus on at that exact moment in time.

MINIMIZE TEXT

It's okay to write on your slides, but try to keep it to a minimum. There are many reasons for this but I'll list some that I think are most important.

Firstly, it is important to minimize text to keep your audience focused on what you are saying. If your slides are text-heavy (read: sentence or bullet-point heavy) you encourage your audience to stop listening to you and to read your slides instead.

Next, the more text you add the more difficult your slides become to digest. If it takes your audience a long time to digest what is on your slides, that's time that they aren't listening to you and are fast losing interest in your presentation.

Additionally, with lots of text on your slides it makes it hard for your audience to understand what the main point is. Make it clear what the main point is and you'll get a more attentive, engaged, and responsive audience.

Finally, by making your slides text-heavy you become the support for your slides rather than the slides supporting you. To get the most out of your presentation the audience should be listening to you not reading your slides. Perhaps you need to share a lot of information with your audience. In that case I recommend putting that information in handouts rather than on your slides.



STEP 4 – REHEARSE WITH SLIDE DECK

KEYBOARD OR CLICKER?

When you are delivering your presentation should you use a remote clicker or just press the keyboard to advance your slides? Ultimately this comes down to personal preference and comfort.

Personally, I always use a remote clicker and I am very comfortable with it. I like the clicker because I can move anywhere in the room. If you don't have a clicker you are bound to stay close to your computer (which may not be an issue if you're always presenting in a small meeting room).

A clicker adds impact to your delivery because it is not obvious when you are changing slides. Consider what we talked about previously about impact. When you click and say "*a whopping \$15,000,000*" it is far more impactful than moving forward, pressing the keyboard, and saying the same thing.

A clicker comes with a laser pointer, which enables you to point at something on the screen if you need to emphasize it to the audience. Without a clicker you'd need to point with your hand, which means reaching in to the screen and creating a shadow. Having said this, of course you are going to design your slides in a such a simple way you won't need to point at all to emphasize anything.

If you are going to get a clicker I highly recommend the Logitech Professional Presenter R800. This is a robust laser pointer that just works beautifully. I've been using this model for the last three years. You can order through Amazon.

If you do decide to use a clicker, my strong advice is get into the habit of changing slides without pointing at anything. Very deliberate pointing or hand movements when you are changing slides looks unprofessional and reduces the impact of your delivery.

ADDING IMPACT TO YOUR DELIVERY

There are many things that you can do to add impact to your delivery.

If I had to pick the number one thing that will improve the way your presentation looks and is received by the audience, I could summarize it in one word:

Confidence

Nothing will improve your delivery like confidence. You can learn as many presentation tricks as you like, but unless you have a certain level of confidence, everything will fall flat.

There are many levels of confidence. It's easy to just see "confidence" as feeling comfortable standing in front of an audience. But as a presenter you'll never be 100% confident when you first stand up on front of an audience.

Let me explain what I mean by confidence and why it is so important.

OVERALL CONFIDENCE

I want to let you in a secret. This is a secret that it took me nearly four years of presentation delivery to work out. It wasn't until I was delivering a session to an extremely diverse audience that I realized this amazing secret.

It's a secret that the best and most well known presenters know. A secret that can give your presentation the flair that your audience will remember long after they've watched your presentation.

The secret is:

The audience will let you get away with anything as long as you do it confidently.

Within reason of course; Keep your clothes on during presentations and you should be good.

This is an extremely important thing to realize. Because everything you do that will add impact to your delivery can come from this small piece of knowledge.

It took many hundreds of presentations, with me playing the fool to try and engage the audience, before I realized that audiences are willing to go along with anything that comes out confidently.

What this means is, no matter what happens try to appear confident about it. If something doesn't go well, don't apologize for it (unless you did something rude or offensive). If something goes really well take it in your stride as if it was planned all along. Practice being comfortable with imperfection and if you make a mistake, laugh or joke about it: the audience will appreciate this.

CONTENT CONFIDENCE

Whenever you deliver a presentation it will pay to know your material as best you can. If you don't know the topic or the material well it will show when you deliver your presentation.

Before you start planning your presentation, make sure you know your topic in-depth. When you are delivering, if you get asked a question that you can't answer or you don't look confident in your reply the audience will notice.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

Self-confidence is not something that can be taught. Your self-confidence will improve with each presentation that you deliver. The more you deliver, the more you find what works for each presentation (generally) and you'll also get a feel for how you can modify your delivery when you get a tougher audience.

When I first started delivering presentations it was a boring affair. I would stand next to the projected slides, clicking through while I talked, asking the audience random questions. As I delivered more and more, and my self-confidence grew I used a more dramatic and fluid delivery style. The thing that really helped my self-confidence was the response from the audience: When I tried doing something different with my delivery style, like sitting on the ground in front of the audience talking in a softer voice, I got an instant response from them. 99% of occasions the response was positive.

Why do audiences respond positively to most things the presenter does, if done confidently? I can't give you a definitive answer, but from being an audience member myself on many occasions I believe it has something to do with the audience not wanting you to fail. If you were to stutter and stammer shyly throughout your entire presentation it would be uncomfortable for you, but it would actually be more uncomfortable (even painful) for your audience to watch. They want you to succeed because this is more comfortable for them. This is an important thing to remember when you're delivering: *they want you to succeed!*

YOUR INTRODUCTION

Most presentation introductions are terrible. I'm sure you've seen them. The presenter is standing on stage, rustling through papers or messing around with the computer or projector just beforehand. The presenter will then say, "Thank you all for coming. Today I'd like to talk about HR's new flexible work policy."

If this is the kind of thing you're planning to do, please don't.

The first problem with the introduction is that by standing at the computer or projector playing with switches or rustling through papers you make yourself look nervous. If possible, get into the room 10 minutes earlier, set everything up and be ready to go (and relaxed) when everyone arrives. I find the thing that relaxes me most about my presentations is when I have everything set up a little bit early and I have time to sit down and clear my head before anyone gets there.

"That's great," you say, "but I can't set up earlier. I'm presenting in the middle of a meeting and will have to set up in front of everyone." No problems. I have had this happen to me many times. To get around the uncomfortable silences as you set up equipment, test everything's working, and center yourself do the following: Pose a discussion question to the audience before beginning to set up. For example, "Please have a quick discussion. Please come up with a list of the things that frustrate you most about the current work policies." This buys you 5 minutes and allows you to get setup without the uncomfortable silence. It also has the added benefit of breaking the ice between yourself, as presenter, and the audience.

The second problem with the introduction above is that it is really stale and boring. The audience expects you to go with something like this because it's the standard.

When I first started out presenting I used the standard, "Thank you for coming today, I'd like to talk to you about..." but every time I did it I felt there was something wrong with this style.

I felt like I could engage the audience throughout my presentation using a conversational tone, but this kind of introduction didn't set the scene for a conversation.

I read a little bit about "hooks" and how you can use various devices to engage your audience instantly. A hook is something you do to engage your audience upfront. I'd like to share a technique I use in my presentations to start off on a more informal tone. It has worked so well that I still use it today in most of my presentations:

As you walk onto the stage, hold up one hand (as if you're asking an imaginary teacher a question) and ask the audience a question. It's as simple as that! The most effective questions are ones that will lead directly into the topic of your presentation.

For example, our original introduction was: "Thank you all for coming. Today I'd like to talk about HR's new flexible work policy."

Let's change it to: "Who is happy with current work policies?"

Or maybe: "Who thinks the current work policies are as effective as they could be?"

What happens here is that you have posed a question to the audience knowing that most people don't think the current work policy is effective. After you ask the question pause and make eye contact with the whole audience. You may see some hands raised.

Next, ask the reverse question while raising your hand again: "Who isn't happy with the current work policies?" At this stage you'll probably see more hands raised.

Pause for a moment, and then proceed to poll some audience members on why they said yes or no. This should lead easily in to your presentation topic. Once you've polled them you complete your

introduction by saying: “Today I’d like to share with you how HR are going to make the work policies more effective for you.”

You can then continue with your presentation.

What has happened here?

First of all, you have gained the respect of the audience because they see you’re confident. You’re not opening your presentation in the “same old-same old” fashion.

Next, you’ve only delivered a question and the topic of your presentation, but you’ve already built rapport with them. That makes them more engaged and willing to listen to what you have to say.

Finally, you’ve set the tone of the presentation that it will be relaxed and conversational in style. The audience will appreciate this, because no one likes to sit through boring, monotone, slide-driven stuff.

THE BODY OF YOUR PRESENTATION

You can deliver the body of your presentation in any way you like (staying conscious of eye contact, body position, gestures, and movement that have already been discussed).

Throughout your presentation, if you’re maintaining eye contact with your audience, you may notice times when the audience appear to be losing interest. The first thing to be aware of is that it’s not about you. Audiences lose interest or appear bored for all presenters. You could be doing your presentation at a time when the majority of your audience are tired, like the in the afternoon at the end of the week, or just after lunch. Your audience could be hungry just before lunch. Your audience could have other commitments they are worried about (business or family). The important thing is not to take it personally.

Following, I will go through some strategies I have employed over time to either keep an audience engaged or turn them around when I feel I have lost them.

QUESTIONS

Questions are a key way to keep the audience involved and engaged.

Think about when you are having a conversation with a friend: You don't want to sit and listen to the other person drone on and on about a particular topic, right? In order to keep both people engaged in discussion, the discussion needs to be a two way street.

A surefire way to maintain engagement and interest in your presentation is to treat it like a conversation and interact with your audience. Ask them questions and try to use the information they give you in your presentation.

As I mentioned previously, opening your presentation with a question is very effective. Additionally, asking questions throughout your presentation keeps the audience on their toes.

Got a point that is particularly difficult to explain? Ask the audience for their thoughts. Get the audience to discuss a point for a few moments and report back their ideas: Get them to "explain" it.

THE UNEXPECTED

Your audience know what to expect... You are going to deliver a bog-standard presentation, you're going to read your slides to them, and it's going to be boring. Even if you deliver it confidently, they'll be bored.

That's what they're expecting, right? It's a business presentation, so no-one is expecting anything stellar.

The audience expects a particular type of presentation, so occasionally give them something a little different. This will display your confidence, but also keep them engaged.

Some things I often do during presentations that all serve to keep the audience interested and engaged:

- Sit down, cross-legged in front of the audience and deliver part of my presentation (it is important not to do this right at the beginning though)
- Ask an audience member a difficult question. While they hem and haw about the answer, I tell them I'm going to dance until they give me an answer. I then proceed to do a "dance" (actually, it's just shuffling my feet)
- Ask everyone to stand up during part of my presentation and get them to move around a little or swap seats. This is especially

useful if your presentation is really long (you'll of course need to use your best judgment about whether to do this or not... it may not be taken too well if you're presenting to the executive management team)

CONCLUSION

Now that we have been through these elements of delivering a dynamic presentation, please pick one or two key areas to focus on in your next presentation. Once you have mastered these points pick another few items to include in subsequent presentations.

Remember: You'll get better and better the more times you deliver.

Use the included cheat sheet and worksheets prior to your next presentation.

Happy presenting! ☺

CHEAT SHEET

Below are a list of categorized elements that will serve to improve your presentation style. Each of the elements has a short description. If you have a presentation in a few hours time then consider using elements from this cheat sheet to improve your presentation in a short time and then come back to the main report at a later date when you have more time.

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Eye contact

You look confident when you make eye contact with the audience. Don't look at any one person for a long time. Just make a point of scanning gently throughout the audience as you deliver your speech.

Movement

Want to look like a professional presenter? Add some movement into your presentation style. Not fast, jerky movements, but slow, steady, purposeful movements as you walk across the stage or towards the audience. Movement all helps you readjust your eye contact from person to person without having to move your head constantly.

Gestures

As you are presenting, imagine it as a conversation between you and someone you know rather than a formal affair. When you have a conversation with someone you know you generally use your hands to describe or emphasize what you are saying. Do the same throughout your presentation for a professional effect. Importantly, do not practice and memorize gestures that align to your script. Doing this makes the gestures appear unnatural and forced and comes across as amateurish.

Body position

Throughout your presentation maintain an open body position. Don't cover your body for long periods of time by clasping your hands in front of you or behind your back... this will make you look nervous. Additionally, maintain a confident and relaxed stance.

DELIVERY

Start with a “hook”

Begin your presentation by asking a question instead of standard, boring introductions. If your presentation is about the launch of a new marketing campaign, perhaps begin by asking the audience, “Who thinks our marketing campaigns could do with a revamp?” Ask the question while you hold your hand in the air to encourage the audience to respond. After you get some responses follow up with, “Well today I’m going to tell about the new marketing campaign that is going to seriously revamp things.”

Start with the screen off

If you can, begin your presentation with the screen and talk to the audience from the center of the room. Do the first 30 seconds to a minute of your presentation with the screen off to encourage the audience to focus on you.

Treat as a conversation and interact with the audience

The more you talk to the audience in a conversational tone the more engaged they will be. You will be more relaxed and therefore will project more confidence.

Don’t fret over mistakes

If you make a mistake laugh at it, simply correct yourself, or move on. Fretting over small mistakes and apologizing every two minutes makes you look as though you lack confidence.

Use presenter view if possible

When delivering your presentation use the presenter view with PowerPoint or Keynote so that you can see which slides are coming next. This improves your verbal transitioning and your confidence.

SLIDE DESIGN

Minimize content on slides

Try as hard as you can to have minimal content on your slides. Slides full of information are confusing for your audience and they will end up spending all their time reading rather than listening to you. Use white space liberally.

Don't show all the information at once

If you have something impactful to say, eg. "We doubled profits last month!", "Allow me to introduce our latest product!", don't have the impact information showing on your slides while you give the background, or preamble. Showing it later, ie. when you deliver the impactful line, will add major impact to your presentation. If the audience sees the impactful information while you are giving the background or preamble, they will be unsurprised, even bored, when you deliver the impactful statement.

