The Secrets of Killer Presentations

Why we care: What good is a presentation if no one remembers it? Here's how to captivate audiences with a clear, factual and memorable presentation of the information they want to hear. **Take this free quiz** to learn your presentation style.

Start with a clear objective. Ask yourself: As a result of this presentation my audience will **have learned____/ be asked to ____**. These two objectives are *why* we give presentations in the first place! Don't be afraid to ask your audience: "What's the one question you need answered today to make this a successful use of your time?" Exercise: Drill down to the essence of your topic by describing your presentation point in 30 seconds, then one sentence, three words, one word, and finally, one letter.

Say less and make the words you do use more valuable (why Twitter's 140 character requirement is effective). Trim off the excess by staying focused on your objective. Exercise: Tighten your presentation by applying the technique of PechaKucha (only 20 images allowed with each shown for only 20 seconds). Read Mark's Forbes article on the technique of PechaKucha here. **Format slides using Assertion evidence design.** Eliminate the typical title and bulleted lists and use a) an assertion in the title and b) evidence to support your assertion in body of slide. (See program slides for examples).

Total recall when we hear just information is about 10% when tested 72 hours later but add visual content and that number shoots up to 65%. It's called **Pictorial Superiority Effect** so **use less text and more visuals.** Every image or graphic should have a **discernible point** that's easily and quickly understandable and that makes folks say "Dang!" Visuals should pull the audience's attention where you need it go. Try **Spatial Cueing** by circling or otherwise pointing to the most important part of a chart or data to tell audiences "look here!" **Sum it up** as you go. In an hour-long presentation, for example, give a **summation message** every 10 minutes (like a 'tweet' that recaps what you said). Your summation can be part of your slide deck, done it on the fly (don't be afraid to let your audience watch you keyboard or draw) or use a flip chart (and then take a picture of it at the end and send it to your audience). Sending out a slightly longer recap (like this Talking Points Memo) is another way to provide value, reinforce your presentation and stay connected.

Use highly visual language (words that sound like pictures). **Concrete words** and phrases like "dead body" or "happy clown" get remembered for their high imagery 2 to 3 times more frequently than **abstract words** and phrases like "essential nutrient" or "significant result." The majority of presenters suffer from abstract word disease. Avoid abstract words including: complete set, annual event, useful purpose, original finding, critical condition, reasonable request, constant attention, adequate amount and significant result. Also avoid irritating and empty words such as "you know", "like I said", "to be honest", "sort of" and "kind of."

Structure your argument to support your presentation <u>before</u> making your slides. Use the **blueprint model** (find diagram in program slides) to architect your core argument. This provides easy flexibility to drop in or swap out pieces of your presentation to accommodate what individual audiences want to hear.

Don't bury your lead! Use a **startling fact** to distill your message into something that grabs (and keeps) your audience's attention.

Speak to the Personalities in Your Audience. There are four major presentation styles that identify how people like to give and get information; no one is better than the other. **Closers** want communication that is short and to the point. Give Closers the bottom line first to gain their buy in. **Directors** want communication that is logical and consistent. Closers respond best to a linear presentation that goes from A, to B, to C---all the way to Z. **Data Scientists** want the cold hard facts and the numbers. The more specific you are the more successfully you'll allay the Data Scientists' suspicions and win their buy in. **Storytellers** want to build an emotional bond with feelings (the "f" word). Use emotional language and steer clear of hard facts and numbers with Storytellers by telling them who will be involved, who else is doing it, how they're going to feel about it, and what their reaction will be. Read Mark's Forbes article that explores the 4 presentation styles here.

Your audience will tell you what they want to hear---if you ask them. Diagnose your audience's preferred presentation style with the question: "What can I share with you today?" Look for verbal indicators. For example, Data Scientists may respond with suspicion: "Where is the data coming from?" Closers with: "Where does this get us?" Directors with: "What happens first, second, third, etc?" and Storytellers with: "Who else will be involved?" If you're into your presentation and it's clear that you've **lost your audience's interest**, gather the courage to stop and to say something like this: "I'm sorry, I missed the mark here. I can stop right now or we can go back and try to salvage this. Can you tell me what's the one question you need answered today?" Read Mark's Forbes article on stopping a presentation that's going badly here.

If you're not sure what presentation style to use, hit each style in order of attention span. Start with Closers (bottom line) who have the shortest attention spans. Next address Data Scientists (data), then Directors (A to Z), and then deliver a warm and fuzzy ending for the Storytellers who have the longest attention spans. This technique is used in Presidential speeches where audiences are big and stylistically varied.

Summary: Have a crystal-clear objective and make sure it's relevant to what your audience needs and wants to know. Experiment with assertion evidence design so every slide supports your objective. Use less text on your slides, use high imagery language, and make sure every image you use makes a "holy mackerel" point. Use more concrete words and eliminate abstract words. Make a clear argument before you assemble your slides. Communicate to the personalities in your audience, and if you're not sure which of the four presentation styles they prefer, ask them: "What is the one question I can answer for you today?" Look for verbal indicators of preferred presentation style.

Tip: FlowingData.com explores how statisticians, designers, data scientists, and others use analysis, visualization, and exploration to understand data. Replace PowerPoint with Prezi.com to create a free form abstract presentation and Emaze.com to dress slides up for beautiful, highly graphical presentations.