

## When it is Better to Get, Than to Give (Jan 08)

By Jim Endicott

Forget everything you've ever learned about presenting. I suppose that's a pretty rash statement but there must be a reason most presenters are still seeking the holy grail of presentation excellence. And the fact we're all still looking must mean we're not finding it in the cacophony (I've always wanted to use that word) of resources available to presenters today.

The latest software programs offer "dazzling" multimedia presentations in minutes. (Perhaps the lure for some of being dazzling for the first time in their lives is just too much to resist) PowerPoint add-in utilities pledge to "energize" our presentations with more charts, transitions and animation effects while the electronic projector folks offer more "impact" to our tired presentations. Humm? What if we were all just a remote pointing device away from magnificence?

It certainly begs the question, if presenters today have considerably better access to presentation resources than 10-years ago, why do we still find ourselves sitting through so many marginal presentations? Amazingly, even when the stakes are at their highest and business professionals strive to seize this most personal and strategic of moments, their presentations too often seem badly messaged, marginally designed and weekly delivered. So, what's wrong with this picture?

Much like the diet supplements advertise on television, the truth often lies in the fine print – "weight loss results require regular exercise and a dietary program." Oh really?

Good presentations, the kind that really get you thinking, require more than bright projectors and lightening fast laptops. They take something that software and microchips can't offer... insight into what makes human beings decide, engage, consider, remember and then take action.

What if communicating an important and mind-engaging business message didn't have much to do with "giving" a presentation at all? Maybe all this time we should have been much more concerned with our audience's actually "getting" what we have to say. Consider the distinction.

The process of "giving" a presentation is about software, pie charts, lumens, remote pointing devices and of course, PowerPoint. The "getting" equation is much more concerned with how we can get through to busy and distracted prospects? How can a high analytical presenter adapt their message for a Type A, detail-averse prospect? And maybe the most important question... how can we stand out from the crowd and be remembered a week or month from now?

As Hugh Mackworth, Managing Partner of Smart Forest, a Portland area venture capital firm told me, it's not unusual for companies seeking a critical infusion of business funding to deliver a 30-minute presentation to the Smart Forest team only to leave them wondering... "and what do you do again?"

Unfortunately, we can't buy messaging smarts with a Visa, audience insight with a MasterCard or launch a common sense wizard from within PowerPoint. There is hope, however, for the business professional today and it starts with a healthy understanding of our real role as presenter and our avoidance of the business presenter's #1 pothole in the area of influence and persuasion.

**Business presenters place their own interest over their audience's desire to know.**

Picture this scenario. You've asked several companies to present to you and your executive team. Company A files into your conference room and within a few minutes the presentation begins following an all too predictable pattern.

The presenter starts with an overview of their mission statement followed by the company's history, a rote parade of customer logos and then a presumptuous and rather prolonged product/service explanation. Forty-five minutes and two cups of coffee later (and without taking a breath or asking a question) the presentation ends because it appears the presenter simply ran out of slides. Company A high-fives each in the parking lot because they believe they just gave a killer presentation, but little did they know, they failed miserably to connect at a personal level with the specific issues that keep you and your company's executives awake at night.

Contrast that approach with Company B whose presenters from the start seem more intent on making eye contact with you than with their images on the wall behind them. They open with a personal story of someone in your industry who had given up all hope of resolving a similar issue and the adverse impact it had on their business. After a brief positioning statement that clearly stakes out their core competency for everyone in the room, the presentation moves into an interactive dialog with those around the boardroom table with the goal of gaining consensus on the nature of the issues that brought them there that day to present.

Now in the context of validated (and prioritized) customer needs, the presenter does not attempt to "give" their usual "one-size-fits-all" presentation but rather offers up only relevant solutions that specifically address real needs. (Could there be a higher calling for hyperlinking?) At the conclusion of the presentation, the presenter goes to a brief summary slide that restates important differentiation statements and then closes with a return to their opening story and how they brought their expertise to bear to solve the challenge and forge a relationship of trust.

In the end analysis, prospects or partners have no desire to be dazzled. For many business presenters today, they have forgotten how to tell their story in a way that puts their audience's issues smack in the middle of their reason for being there and that fact is not lost on their audience.

Maybe we do still have a lot to learn about the art of presenting.

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