

DESIGNING A BUSINESS PRESENTATION

The Essential Considerations

Delivering a business presentation is an event that most people find utterly terrifying. A business presentation, however, is just another business skill, combining specific technical aspects with behavioural practise.

There are three distinct components to making an effective presentation:

- ◆ Designing a high-powered presentation
- ◆ Using PowerPoint properly to support your presentation
- ◆ Delivering the presentation effectively

This article, the first of three, will outline how to design a high-powered business presentation. It will identify a number of strategic considerations, in addition to highlighting some organizing and sequencing suggestions.

The Starting Point

When preparing a business presentation, what elements need to be considered?

The first questions that you need to address are:

- ◆ what is the *Purpose* of this business presentation
- ◆ what *Action* do you want people to take as a result of the presentation

Although these questions seems relatively straight-forward, most often they either are overlooked or it is assumed that “we all know the answers”.

In fact, accurately articulating the answers to these questions at the outset of designing your presentation is vital to constructing a business presentation that will be effective, as well as delivering meaningful results.

It's Only For Information

Generally, people answer the first question with “*It's Only For Information*”. In a business context, however, everyone is far too busy to attend a presentation just for information. A business presentation needs to provide value to the audience.

In the business environment, every presentation needs to be understood as an opportunity to:

- ◆ Educate
- ◆ Create alignment
- ◆ Develop commitment
- ◆ Secure resources



From this, we can conclude that the *Purpose* of the presentation is to persuade the audience to engage in supporting your initiative, with the desired *Action* being the allocating of human, financial and other resources to achieve its end.

Obviously, this is a fundamentally different and more intricate objective than the view that “*It’s Only For Information*”.

Internal Competition For Resources

Every organization experiences significant ongoing constraint on its available resources. Legitimate demands for more resources far exceed the organization’s ability to satisfy all those requests.

The organization ideally will allocate its finite resources in a manner which maximizes strategic priorities. Other business units or particular initiatives, therefore, effectively are your competition for these resources.

Given this backdrop, delivering a presentation is a focused opportunity to stand apart from the internal competition and promote your imperatives, while demonstrating how this will contribute to the organization’s success.

Strategic Positioning

The strength of a business presentation depends on the degree to which it is strategically positioned.

- ◆ Does it concisely link to the business priorities?
- ◆ Does it deliver on improved customer service, reduced costs, etc.?
- ◆ Does it collaboratively support other business units or initiatives?
- ◆ Does it reduce organizational pain and increase employee engagement?
- ◆ Does it address emerging dynamics and opportunities?

Remember, you’re looking for support and resources in a highly competitive environment. Your goal is to build the audience’s understanding about your activities, so that they enthusiastically will endorse your resource requirements.

The Audience

The audience is comprised of a variety of people with different roles and varying power. You need to be very thoughtful about:

- ◆ Who are the decision makers?
- ◆ Who are the influencers?
- ◆ Who are your potential allies?
- ◆ Who are those that might perceive you as competition or a threat?

The presentation needs to be crafted to appeal and connect sequentially with each of these groups. Their current level of understanding, as well as their educational and business needs, most often will be quite distinct. This unevenness requires your careful consideration.



Be Selective And Precise

Think of presentations you've attended. Has your attention ever strayed and, if so, at what point in the presentation? The sad truth is that we've all endured presentations which were too long and crammed with an overload of information.

Your goal is to connect with the audience, keep their attention, nurture their enthusiasm, and secure their commitment. Avoid sabotaging yourself – keep the presentation short, concise and focused.

You are the expert regarding your business. You are intimate with a vast array of information, substantially more than the audience wants to know or can absorb. Your presentation should deliver education, not just reams of information.

You will need to be selective and precise, by filtering and organizing only those important highlights which will be most meaningful to the audience.

What They Need To Know

It has been shown that your presentation time is limited and precious, therefore, be judicious. Determine what your audience already knows. You might choose to remind them of this, but you don't need to dedicate valuable time to details.

What are the gaps in their understanding and which is the most effective way of educating them to close those gaps? Articulate the most critical elements first.

Position your presentation to demonstrate a compelling argument that delivers on a blend of positive outcomes from strategic priorities to financial success to alignment with other operations. Highlight the benefits of supporting your initiative and the consequences of declining such support.

Sequencing

Your presentation should begin with a short description of what you are about to present. This eliminates the situation where your audience is side-tracked during the presentation, trying to figure out your intent. Then deliver your presentation. Conclude the presentation with a short summary of what you just presented.

Good News First

You want to get the audience on-side as quickly as possible. Start with good news. For example: "Our recent project was delivered on time and under cost. There were, however, a number of major obstacles that we needed to overcome. I would like to share those insights with you, as well as the lessons learned."

This is a more effective approach than beginning with a litany of problems that were encountered and only sharing the good news at the end of the presentation. As soon as the audience hears the good news, they will be relieved and encouraged, and likely will be more attentive throughout the entire presentation.



Timing

You will need to time out your presentation. Always aim for something less than the total time that has been allotted. The most accurate way to time out the presentation is by practising it and making the necessary adjustments.

Conclusion

By combining these design strategies with suggestions from the companion articles on how to use PowerPoint properly and how to deliver a presentation effectively, you will become much more confident and competent in delivering high-powered and effective business presentations.

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