

5.3: Making Your Presentation Work

Learning Objectives

- Learn how to deliver your message in a powerful and effective way.

When deciding on the structure of your presentation, there are a number of things to consider. Will you present to a group or to an individual? Where will you be giving your presentation? What tools will you use? Sometimes these options are under your control, but often in business-to-business (B2B) sales, you will have to adapt your presentation to your prospect's needs. In either situation, you can maximize your presentation if you know what to avoid, what to prepare for, and how to make your solution come to life with the tools you have.

The Right Size

A good salesperson can read group dynamics as skillfully as she can read an individual prospect's verbal and nonverbal cues and is comfortable in one-on-one and in group presentation situations. This is critical because as a salesperson sometimes you have control over the kind of presentation you will deliver (group versus individual), but in many situations, the size of the audience to which you will present is determined by the needs and structure of your prospect's organization. In many organizations large purchasing decisions are the responsibility of purchasing committees or of a combination of individual and group decision makers. You might find that you begin with several individual presentations to decision makers in an organization and then are asked to give a follow-up group presentation to a purchasing committee.

Presenting to Individuals

In one-on-one presentations, of course, you only have one person's needs, preferences, and background to research and adapt to, so customization is usually an easy task. You can closely observe your prospect's nonverbal communication and listen to her stated needs and concerns and respond accordingly. Does he look worried when you tell him that your company's integrated marketing plan usually takes four months to develop? You can explain that for preferred prospects you are sometimes able to turn around a faster solution. Does he seem distracted when you begin discussing product features? You can back off and begin asking more questions.

Later in this chapter you will learn about more social styles. You will be in a better position to deliver value during your sales presentation if you know something about your buyer's personality before going into the meeting: Is your prospect conversational and people oriented, or is he task oriented and businesslike? Does your prospect care about details and thorough descriptions, or does he prefer to see the "big picture"? Is he competitive? How does he feel about change? Understanding these things about your prospect will help you to favorably position your product and plan your presentation so that you can put emphasis on the things that matter most to the individual. If you know your prospect is highly competitive, for instance, he will probably be interested in learning about the features that set your product apart from others on the market and the ways in which your product can give him or his company a competitive edge.

In adapting to an individual buyer, it's also important to consider his motivation. What are his responsibilities in the organization? What pressures does he face? Is he on a strict budget? Is he concerned with his status in the company? If you have two buyers who purchase the same product, chances are they'll be doing it for different reasons: one person might buy a car from you because he sees it as a status symbol, while another person might buy the same car because it gets good gas mileage and is well built and reliable. Keep in mind that delivering value isn't *only* about meeting a prospect's needs; it's also about showing him that you understand his specific motivations and concerns. The best salespeople present themselves as advisors their customers can trust. Is a prospect worried about proving herself in a new role in her company? Show him how your product can help him perform her role better, or demonstrate how people in similar positions at other companies have used your product with success.

Presenting to Groups

If customization is that straightforward with an individual buyer, why would you ever choose to sell to a group? Besides the fact that sometimes the nature of the sale demands it, selling to groups is also more efficient than selling to individuals. If you're selling accounting software to a number of departments in an organization, rather than meeting individually with a decision maker from each department, you can save time by giving your sales presentation to a number of decision makers at once. Group presentations can also help you identify the decision makers in an organization if you aren't yet sure who they are. By keeping an eye on group

dynamics during the presentation you can usually observe the “pecking order” among members and identify the individuals in the group whose opinions hold the most leverage.

Additionally, group presentations can be a way to win greater support for your sale. If you know one or two people in an organization who are excited about your product, you can allow their enthusiasm to influence others in a group setting. Recall Selena Lo of Ruckus Wireless, who finds the “fox” within each of her target organizations and leverages his support of her product to sway the group buying decision.

If you know what is at stake for each member of the group, you will be able to facilitate the discussion during your presentation much more effectively. This is why it’s important to gather information about everyone who will attend your sales meeting. Again, think of Lo’s method, where she reads each group member’s bio and googles their names before going into a group meeting. Find out the individual’s needs within the organization. What is her status? How does she perceive the urgency of the problem you want to solve? Does she have any ego involvement in the product or service? Barton A. Weitz, Stephen Byron Castleberry, and John F. Tanner, *Selling: Building Partnerships*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 264. (For instance, an accountant in the organization might feel threatened by new accounting software if it replaces part of her current role.) This will help you understand the most important concerns you will need to address in the presentation, and if certain parts of your presentation apply more directly to certain members of the group, you can direct those parts specifically at those individuals.

Keep in mind that people act differently in group settings than they do when you are interacting with them alone, so finding out about individual members’ personalities is less important in group presentations. Instead, adjust your presentation to the dynamics in the room. Watch the group for nonverbal cues; when one member is talking, observe how others react to see whether or not they support what she’s saying. Barton A. Weitz, Stephen Byron Castleberry, and John F. Tanner, *Selling: Building Partnerships*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 265. If the energy in the room feels low, or if you get the sense that the group is getting restless, consider moving on to the next part of your presentation or changing tactics.

Sometimes you won’t know who or how many people you will be presenting to beforehand, so you won’t be able to research the individuals. However, it’s always a good idea to ask when you call to schedule your meeting. You may be able to find out information that your contact at the organization wouldn’t otherwise volunteer.

The Right Place

You also might not know *where* your presentation will happen. If you know you’ll be presenting to your prospect at his office or in a conference room at his company, you won’t have control over the environment. What happens if your prospect has reserved a meeting room and when you arrive there are no empty walls on which you can project the PowerPoint presentation you brought along? When you know you’ll be presenting in an unfamiliar environment, make sure to have a contingency plan in place. If slides or other multimedia equipment are central to your presentation, talk to someone at the company to make sure you’ll be able to use the equipment. And if this fails, be ready to rely on your handouts, product samples, or the good old whiteboard to carry the presentation through.

Of course, in other situations, you will have control over the environment. In real estate, for instance, the presentation takes place inside the product. In retail, the presentation generally happens at your store. And there are other selling situations in which the prospect will come to your office or a conference room at your company or where you will meet at a “neutral” location like a rented meeting space. Here are a few guidelines to follow, depending on the environment in which you’ll be presenting.

Your Place of Business

When the prospect comes to you, treat her like you would treat a guest in your home. Make sure you set up any presentation materials well in advance and have refreshments set out in the conference room or your office. Think about ways you can add personal touches—for instance, a sign with the prospect’s name on it (“[Your company name] welcomes [prospect’s company name]”), or, for a group presentation, information packets at each person’s seat with his or her name on the front. Small, thoughtful details can make an important difference.

Your Prospect’s Place of Business

When you deliver your presentation at your prospect’s location, you won’t have the luxury of extensive setup time, and you may find that you have to adapt to the space and resources on hand. However, there are a few things you can do to make a good impression and ensure that things go as smoothly as possible:

- Arrive early and set up any technology you plan to use so that you can minimize the chance of something going wrong.

- When it's possible, call ahead to find out about the space in which you will be presenting and the materials that will be available to you.
- Let your prospect know how long you will need to set up—particularly if you are using multimedia equipment.
- When you arrive, the first person you interact with will probably be the receptionist. Introduce yourself and let her know that the customer is expecting you.
- In addition to your presentation items, consider bringing food, coffee, or small giveaway items.

Webinars and Video Conferences

So how do you give a sales presentation if your prospect lives across the country, but you have a limited budget for travel? Unless there is a good chance that a prospect will become a key customer, it usually isn't practical for a salesperson to travel long distances to make one presentation. However, thanks to technology, it's common for salespeople to address this problem using Webinars, video conferences, and online meetings. These technologies are allowing companies to reach more prospects in less time and to reach prospects internationally and across long distances.

Even though video conferencing feels different from in-person communications, you should essentially treat your online meetings the way you would treat any sales call. Keep in mind that nonverbal communication has a strong influence on interactions—and, especially with good technology, your customer can see you clearly. Pay attention to your body language and facial expressions, and avoid personal gestures (like playing with your hair or scratching an itch). Dress professionally, plan your agenda carefully, and make sure to prepare and get your materials set up ahead of time. If you are conferencing from a location other than your office, arrive early to make sure the technology is set up to run smoothly for your presentation.

It is also important to resist the temptation to multitask during your video conference. Close down any other applications you might have open on your computer, clear off your desk, and make sure you will not be interrupted until the call is over. Mute any cell phones and close the door to the room in which you are presenting. Give your customer your full attention. While this level of focus is a given on your end, unfortunately, you can't always be certain that your prospect will give a video conference meeting *his* full attention by minimizing distractions. For this reason, it is especially important to have a clear agenda that you follow closely. Keep your presentation brief, and be aware that you will have to work harder to hold your prospect's attention. Live interaction from your audience is critical to make sure your participants are engaged.

Besides a greater likelihood of distraction, there are a few other extra considerations to keep in mind in a video conference situation. When the presentation is over, close the meeting with a clear call to action in which you include a wrap-up and well-defined next steps that you and your prospects should take.

PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint slides provide an easy way to organize your presentation and add helpful visuals. For many salespeople, PowerPoint is one of their go-to presentation tools. It can be an especially helpful tool for salespeople who are starting out and want the security of a clear framework from which to present. An added benefit is that it doesn't take much technological know-how to put together a clean-looking PowerPoint demonstration.

On the other hand, not all presentation situations lend themselves to PowerPoint (e.g., conference rooms with no wall space on which to project or presentations given in the field), so if you plan to use this tool, make sure that you will be presenting in a space where you can make it work. Additionally, be aware of—and avoid—a number of common mistakes salespeople make when using PowerPoint that can ruin a presentation. To maximize PowerPoint as a tool to successfully sell your story, use the tips in Figure 5.3.5.

If you want to...	Then use...
explain trends	line graphs
describe a series of steps	a diagram
compare capabilities	a table
show product/service comparisons	a pie chart or bar graph
explain how your Web site works	the Web site

Figure 5.3.5: Guidelines for PowerPoint Visuals

The following dos and don'ts can also be helpful as you are creating a PowerPoint presentation.

- *Don't* turn down the lights. It takes the focus away from you, and it can put people to sleep.

- *Don't* go overboard with technological gimmicks. Fancy fades and clever add-ons will only distract from you and from the content of your presentation.
- *Don't* hide behind your computer screen when using PowerPoint; make sure you face your audience and make eye contact. This can be a temptation when the computer is set up on a podium close to eye level.
- *Don't* fill your slides with words. Use bullet points, separate each point with white space, and cut out *any* unnecessary words you can.
- *Don't* bore your audience with visual sameness. Slide after slide of bulleted lists gets monotonous; visuals and charts have a stronger impact.
- *Do* make your slides easy to read. Avoid small fonts, visual clutter, and dark text against dark backgrounds.
- *Do* replace descriptive headlines with headlines that sell. No one cares about a headline that describes what's already on the page. For example, rather than writing "Our Statistics" at the top of the page, write "See Significant Savings in the First Year."
- *Do* use the 10/20/30 rule: Make sure you limit your slides to 10 or fewer. Focus on the things you want people to remember, rather than overwhelming them with information. Give yourself 20 minutes to go through your 10 slides. Any more than this and you will reach the limit of your audience's attention span. Finally, use only 30-point or larger font size so that your audience can clearly read what you've written.

Samples and Demonstrations

There is almost no better way to make your story come to life for your customer than letting him experience it for himself. Think of television courtroom dramas: when the lawyer is making her final statement to the jury and she wants to pull out all the stops, what does she do? She doesn't just give the jury the facts or tell them the version of the story she wants them to believe—she brings the story to life; she puts the gun in the defendant's hand; she brings out the pictures of the stab wounds. Think about this when you plan your sales presentation. During the presentation, you can bring your story to life by offering product samples for your prospects to try or by running demonstrations that let them see for themselves what your product can do. When winemakers sell their products to large distributors, they don't just bring in descriptions of their wines for the buyers to read; they offer tastings so buyers can experience the product. When caterers want to sell their services to someone who is planning a wedding, they bring in samples from their menus, so the customer can say, "Wow this pasta really is delicious!"

Besides bringing your story to life, there are a number of other good reasons to use demonstrations:

- **To educate your prospect.** If you are selling a complex product, such as a highly involved software program, the best way to help your customer understand how it works is to show her.
- **To involve your prospect.** Let him find the results for himself. Just as car shoppers get to take the wheel in a test drive—and this often makes the difference between a decision to buy or not to buy—customers who use your products for themselves are more likely to make a personal connection with it. A salesperson selling insulated windows, for instance, might place a piece of glass in front of a heat lamp and ask her customer to put out his hand and feel the heat. Then the salesperson might substitute the sheet of glass for a window sample. "Now put out your hand," she will tell the customer. "Can you feel how this window is going to keep the elements out and save you money on your energy bills?"
- **To prove the performance of your product.** Of course, you can tell your prospect "our air purifiers are quieter than the leading model, and they take up less space in your home." But if you *bring* your air purifier to the presentation and set it next to the leading model, and if you ask your prospect to turn both machines on, he can see for himself that your product is smaller, and he can hear for himself that it makes less noise.

Give Them the Numbers: Cost-Benefit Analysis and ROI

When you present your solution to the customer, especially in B2B sales, closing the sale usually depends on whether the cost of your solution is offset by the value it delivers. Gerald L. Manning and Barry L. Reece, *Selling Today: Creating Customer Value*, 9th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 256. If you can quantify your solution using cost-benefit analysis and ROI (return on investment) analysis, you can help your customer determine whether a project or purchase is worth funding.

A **cost-benefit analysis** asks the question "Will this purchase save more money in the long run than it costs?" David H. Miles, *The 30 Second Encyclopedia of Learning and Performance* (New York: AMACOM, 2003), 139–40. Imagine you are selling an energy-efficient commercial dishwasher to a pizza kitchen. The dishwasher costs \$3,000, but average cost savings per year are \$800 in energy bills and \$200 in water usage: a total of \$1,000. Energy Star, "Commercial Dishwashers for Consumers," U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy, www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=comm_dishwashers.pr_comm_dishwashers (accessed May 16, 2010). Your dishwashers are guaranteed to last a long time; in

fact, you offer a five-year warranty on any purchase. At a savings rate of \$1,000 each year, your customer will have saved \$5,000 in energy and water expenses by the time his warranty expires. Based on this information, you present this cost-benefit analysis to your prospect:

$$\text{\$3,000} = \text{cost (initial investment)} \quad \text{cost savings} - \text{initial investment} = \text{benefit} \quad \text{\$5,000} - \text{\$3,000} = \text{\$2,000}$$

In this case, the cost savings is \$1,000 per year times five years for a total of \$5,000, minus the initial investment of \$3,000, means that there is a benefit of \$2,000.

In other words, the dishwasher has a three-to-two cost-benefit ratio over five years (\$3,000 in cost to \$2,000 in benefit). You can tell him, “This purchase will save you money in the long run. After you make back what you spent on the dishwasher in cost savings, you will continue to save \$1,000 each year.” Similarly, you can show your customer a **return on investment (ROI) analysis**. ROI shows the customer the return (profit or cost savings) compared to the investment he will make. In the case of the dishwasher, the ROI would be calculated by dividing the benefit (in this case \$2,000) by the cost of the product or initial investment (in this case \$3,000), then multiplying the result by 100, which would yield a 66 percent ROI after five years.

$$\text{\$2000 (savings over five years)} \div \text{\$3,000 (initial investment)} \times 100 = 66\% \text{ ROI}$$

You can maximize ROI by cutting costs, increasing profits, or accelerating the rate at which profits are made. Some businesses have a minimum ROI that must be met before a purchase can be approved. While you might be able to learn this information in your pre-approach, it is more likely that you will have to discuss minimum ROI with your customer during the sales presentation. You might present your solution and find out more about your customer’s specific needs (including budget constraints and minimum ROI) during the first sales presentation and then write up a proposal in response to your findings, which you deliver during a second presentation.

Key Takeaways

- Presenting to individuals requires a different set of skills and techniques than presenting to groups, so make sure you have a clear strategy for your presentation that takes the size of your audience into account.
- When presenting to an individual, keep your prospect’s personality in mind and adapt your approach accordingly. Take his position and responsibilities in the company into account in the way you present your solution.
- Selling to groups can be a more efficient presentation method, and sometimes it is required in your customer organization. When conducting a group presentation, take group dynamics into account, keeping in mind that people act differently in group situations than they do in one-on-one interactions.
- When you are delivering your presentation at your place of business, treat the customer as you would treat a guest in your home. Set up refreshments and supplies well ahead of time so that you are well prepared when the prospect arrives.
- When you are presenting at your prospect’s place of business, try to find out about the presentation venue beforehand—but be prepared to adapt if your prospect doesn’t have the equipment or setup you were expecting. Arrive early so that you have time to set up.
- If your presentation is given as a Webinar or video conference, treat the presentation as you would treat an in-person interaction. Dress professionally and set up ahead of time. Make sure to minimize distractions.
- When delivering a PowerPoint presentation, keep your slides brief, uncluttered, and easy to read. Don’t let the technology overshadow you, the presenter.
- There is almost no better way to bring your product to life than by using samples or demonstrations to get your prospect involved.
- Your customer will expect you to bring a **cost-benefit analysis** or **ROI analysis** as a way to quantify your solution.

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