

WOW

How
To

Audiences With Financial Presentations

If you want audiences to hear what you have to say, showing a bunch of graphs and balance sheets simply won't cut it. Numbers, like pictures, need to create a compelling story that draws the listener in and helps them understand what those numbers mean to them.

Are you asking them to invest? Are you trying to strengthen analyst perceptions? Are you explaining why your company is poised for growth? Are you offering to help them grow their money?

By learning to whittle your words into a few key ideas that you deliver with conviction and passion, you will have a much greater chance of keeping someone's attention and helping them realize why they should care about what you have to say. If you can't make them care, they won't feel anything. And if they don't feel anything, it will be very difficult to convince them that you are capable of solving their problems.

If you think back on some of the presentations you've sat - or should I risk saying, slept - through, do you remember the numbers the speaker spouted? For example, do you remember how many people are fighting obesity in America? Probably not. But, you probably remember that obesity is increasing. And you might remember that more than half of American adults are considered overweight.

Do you remember that over the summer the average hourly wage increased 6 cents, or 0.4 percent, to \$16.13? Not likely. But you might recall that employers added more jobs to U.S. payrolls than expected.

When used correctly, numbers can really drive a point home. But numbers can also be confusing, irrelevant and left up to interpretation if they don't provide perspective. Think about a doctor who is trying to educate his or her audience about the warning signs of heart disease. She may explain that according to the American Heart Association, 1.2 million people are expected to have heart attacks this year and that 494,000 of those people will die.

While those statistics sound impressive, the information would be far more relevant if the doctor had rounded off the numbers and then told the audience how those statistics affect them. For example, if she said: "Over one million people are expected to have heart attacks this year. Nearly half of those people will die. We could be talking about your mother, father, spouse or loved one, which is why it is so important for you to recognize the warning signs of heart disease so the people you love can be with you for a long time."

As a presenter, your job is to help your listener make sense of information. By keeping the following eight easy tips in mind

Eight Easy Tips for Delivering Financial Information

when preparing your presentation, you will increase your chances of wowing your audience and of keeping them hanging on your every word.

KEEP IT SIMPLE: Don't confuse your audience. The more points you try to cover, the more you will dilute your message. Highlight the three or four most important issues and support those issues with examples, stories and anecdotes.

GET TO THE POINT: You need to hook your listener immediately. If you can't articulate what's in it for them and why they should care in the first few seconds, you will lose them. For example, if you are talking about technology, do they really care about all of the fields and features? Or would they rather know how those fields and features can save them time and money?

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: Learn about the members of your audience before you arrive so you understand what they care about, how they perceive your company or product, what positive or negative attitudes they have and what hurdles they face. Investors buy confidence and credibility. By addressing critical issues and vulnerabilities, you create rapport with your listener.

TELL YOUR STORY: Investors and analysts are impressed by people who have great credentials, a good track record and who appear to have vision. They are looking for companies (individuals) who they believe can tackle challenges and solve problems. Remember, they buy people, not companies. While investors are concerned with profit and loss statements, financial presentations must show and tell the story. Listeners want to know if there is a market for your ideas, if you can meet current challenges, how you'll make money, and if you have the resources, knowledge and ability to overcome obstacles.

SHOW AND TELL: Just because this is a serious subject doesn't mean it has to be boring. Use charts, models, graphs and visual images to bring your story to life, but remember - no one came to see a slide show. They are looking at you. If you use PowerPoint, don't overload your slides with profit and loss statements. No

one can read it. Slides should drive a point home. Save the details for the handouts. Pie charts and color graphs are more effective. The fewer slides you use, the more impact you will have because the audience will be listening to you instead of trying to make sense of your slides.

PROVIDE DIRECTION AND VISION: Articulate the problem your company is trying to solve and explain how they will make money by solving that problem. Talk about the future. Talk about your challenges. If you know where the potholes are, then address them instead of hoping they won't pop up.

MOCK Q & A: Conduct your own mock question and answer session in advance. By thinking through potential questions and writing out your answers, you will be more prepared and less likely to be surprised by questions. Your answers should always reinforce your message. By practicing answers out loud, you are less likely to make mistakes and more likely to sound polished, confident and assured.

DON'T WING IT: It doesn't matter how good you think you are, executives who "wing it" are setting themselves up to fail. The better you prepare, the easier it will be to stay focused, give meaning to

your words and handle interruptions or questions. Again, this means you need to rehearse out loud.

Like any effective business communication, financial presentations should be interactive. That doesn't mean you have to let others do the talking, but it does mean you need to encourage them to think.

Pose thoughtful questions. Put a face on those numbers by turning them into audience examples or human interest stories to give the presentation substance and meaning.

Finally, whether what you have to say makes them feel good, bad, happy, sad, angry or frustrated, just look for ways to make them feel something - otherwise they might not remember anything.

Karen Friedman is a professional speaker who brings 20 years of TV experience to media and communications training.

Her company, Karen Friedman Enterprises, Inc. prepares people to take advantage of media interviews and public appearances.

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