Communicating with a Winning Presentation

Use presentations to communicate information and ideas in a direct, effective way.
Learning Objectives

At the end of this module, you will be able to create a presentation as the means of communicating vision, progress, and plans for your small business.

About FDIC Supplier Diversity Effort

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) recognizes the important contributions made by small, veteran, and minority and women-owned businesses to our economy. For that reason, we strive to provide small businesses with opportunities to contract with the FDIC. In furtherance of this goal, the FDIC has initiated the FDIC Small Business Resource Effort to assist the small vendors that provide products, services, and solutions to the FDIC.

The objective of the Small Business Resource Effort is to provide information and the tools small vendors need to become better positioned to compete for contracts and subcontracts at the FDIC. To achieve this objective, the Small Business Resource Effort references outside resources critical for qualified vendors, leverages technology to provide education according to perceived needs, and offers connectivity through resourcing, accessibility, counseling, coaching, and guidance where applicable.

This product was developed by the FDIC Office of Minority and Woman Inclusion (OMWI). OMWI has responsibility for oversight of the Small Business Resource Effort.

Executive Summary

Many business leaders choose to use a presentation to communicate their vision, progress, and plans. The audience for such a presentation might be the business’ employees, its management staff, sales operation, current or prospective customers, or an industry group. Using presentations as a way to communicate can enhance your team’s knowledge and spirit, while providing them with information and ideas in a direct and consolidated manner. They can also help others understand your business model and plans. Preparing a presentation is generally not a simple task and may involve several speakers as well as support talent. The following module highlights ideas for creating a winning presentation.

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Public speaking and presentation skills are critical to the business executive. Even well written material will be ineffective if not presented in an enthusiastic and engaging manner. Your convincing pitch will not reach the ears of your potential clients if you mumble unenthusiastically. People are generally easily distracted if they are not engaged or interested in the presenter or what is being presented. Your audience will daydream through your discussion of the business’ goals if you do not maintain eye
contact or if you sound unintelligent. Your proposal may not capture the attention of a selection committee if they are struggling to understand you or your presentation material. No matter how interested you may be in your own speech, unless you can engage the same amount of interest from the audience, your speech will fail.

Public speaking skills do not always come naturally. Successful speakers are not created overnight, nor are they merely “talented.” Like any skilled or specialized professional, they learn through training and practice. Several methods can increase your effectiveness, whether you are presenting at a seminar, a training class, a motivational speech, or even a small meeting with colleagues.

Executive presentations are high-risk, high-reward activities, and you should look forward to them. Preparing such a presentation is generally not a simple task, and may involve several speakers as well as support talent. Here are a few ideas for creating and communicating with a winning presentation:

1. Be Interesting.
2. Know your audience.
3. Don't read, remember.
4. Train and rehearse to develop your presentation skills; good presenters are no accident.
5. Time your remarks and stay on time.
6. Don't be surprised if your equipment fails. Be prepared.
7. Use simple graphics and text that your audience can easily read.
8. Speak to your audience, not to your boards or screen.
9. Dress, look, and act the part.
10. Don't forget to ask for the job, but don't beg, brag, or mention the competition.
11. Make your closing memorable.

1. Be Interesting.

First and foremost, a presentation has to be interesting if it is to keep the attention of the audience. You will never read this requirement in a Request for Proposals (RFP), but it is an unspoken rule of every selection. A selection committee struggling to make a choice will choose the business with the most engaging presentation.

Bells and whistles multimedia won't make your presentation interesting. Your delivery, your message, and your people will. The client, or government agency, wants a project manager who has a track record, knows and understands the subject, is a strong communicator, and has some great ideas even before getting started.

- **Start early.** Preparing a presentation can be a major physical and emotional drain. Break the project down into tasks that can be done in a few minutes and can easily fit into the daily schedule. Starting early allows you to refine the presentation and solicit input from colleagues and business partners.
- **Get the support crew involved upfront.** Enlist your staff members to help you develop your presentation. Their expertise can ensure creation of a better product and reduce stress on the speaking team. Divide and assign sections of your presentation to those on your staff who are most familiar with the material. You can then combine the materials into one presentation and refine it as necessary.

- **Put time to practice on the preparation and development schedule.** Practice may not make your presentation perfect, but it can greatly improve it. When trying to inspire the team or convince an audience, you don’t want to stumble your way through the presentation. A poor performance sends two negative messages: (1) the audience is not especially important to you, and (2) presentations are not very important. Practice in front of your business partners or other team members and ask for feedback.

2. **Know Your Audience.**

Your presentation doesn't have to be interesting to the whole world, just to that handful of people that make-up your selection committee or audience. Every member of the audience will have a unique set of expectations for your presentation. Be sure to know the level of education and the knowledge of your audience members to help you prepare a presentation that fits their needs:

- **Customize the presentation for your audience.** The easy route is to work up the presentation and assume that it will fit any of the groups you’re likely to be talking with. The trouble with this approach is that your presentation might fit well with Group A and not at all with Group B. It’s worth the time and investment to customize portions of the presentation while also maintaining consistency in standardized content or boilerplate. Unless your audience consists of all subject matter professionals (which almost never happens), don't use jargon. And, if an audience has a "hot topic," you will want to know about it before you get to Q&A. If you know or can ask who will attend your presentation, do so. Research each audience member’s name you receive. Having this information will greatly help you tailor your presentation.

- **If appropriate, make your presentation personal and fun.** If this presentation is to your associates, such as an all-hands meeting or a project team booster session, weave in some personal stories about the event, organization, project, or key players. On the other hand, if the presentation is to a selection committee, differentiate your business from the competition by highlighting the personal or client service differentiators in your business. Overall, acknowledge the seriousness of the discussion and incorporate personal and fun attributes, if appropriate.
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- **Have an “attention grabber” in your presentation.** Open the conversation with an interesting tale of success or woe—something that suits the spirit of the meeting and connects to the presentation theme and the audience. Be careful about opening with a joke, especially if you’re inclined to forget the punch line (as one CEO did before a significant industry audience). Try to use an attention grabber that reinforces your value proposition, and remember to highlight the key differentiators throughout the presentation.

3. **Don't Read, Remember.**

One of the most prevalent and damaging habits presenters make is to simply read the slides to the audience. It is more important to communicate key points than simply read every word of the written presentation. Winning presentations work best with spoken remarks that augment and discuss, rather than mimic what is written or on the screen. To create a memorable presentation:

- **Shape the presentation to convey the theme and core messages you want to communicate.** Organize your presentation into four to five segments, with clear transitions to make it easy for listeners to follow. To be convincing in your role, remain "in-character," that is, "be yourself" throughout the presentation. You don't have to memorize every word of the presentation, so select the words, phrases, and gestures you normally would use in regular conversation.

- **Reinforce your main points with material that will hold your audience’s interest.** Refer to a recent news report or other points, but be careful with your choice of examples. If a key team member met a critical challenge successfully, tell the audience the story and acknowledge that person if present in the audience.

- **Make eye contact.** If you are a new presenter, pick three positions in the audience (not individuals) and repeatedly make eye contact with your marked positions in the audience. As you gain more experience, you will feel more comfortable looking audience members directly in the eye without losing your train of thought. Try not to look at the same few people each time. The three-point scan works whether you are looking at positions or audience members.

4. **Train and Rehearse to Develop Your Presentation Skills.**

While presentation skills are acquired rather than natural, it takes training. Training to develop presentation skills has a huge payoff. As an employee, you will be developing the most marketable skills in your industry. As an owner, you will be ensuring the prosperity of your business.

In addition to learning your lines as individuals, rehearse your presentation as a group. The vast majority of businesses never rehearse as a group before a presentation, and, as a result, their presentations are not effective. The delivery of a well rehearsed team gives a selection committee a feeling of confidence.
and well-being toward you, your company, and your team members. An unrehearsed delivery makes the audience nervous, impatient, bored, or disinterested. To train and rehearse:

- **Film and study the presentation.** By starting early, you will have time to study the presentation and even film a dry run of all presenters. If you want to perfect the presentation, filming the presentation for further study will provide for mental practice before the actual live presentation. The video camera is the ideal tool for effective rehearsal, and it will help you overcome presentation jitters. If you have never videotaped rehearsals before, you may be as nervous as at an actual presentation. Many business presenters report that videotaping their rehearsals actually helps to confront and eliminate presentation jitters. Videotaping your dry run will also allow you to make adjustments if your presentation is too long or too short.

- **Put the project team (project manager, etc.) in front of the client as soon as possible.** Clients like to see the president and CEO of a business show up at a presentation to do a brief pledge of support from the home office and introduce the project manager. Any executive of the business can do this, but clients prefer the "Big Boss." When it's done properly, this intro takes about 30 seconds after which the project team takes over. Having your project team or project manager deliver part of the presentation allows the client to imagine how it will be to work with that person. Make sure they are trained and experienced presenters or you could lose the deal.

- **Take only the key members of the team.** You don’t need to bring a small army of sub-consultants and team members to a presentation when they don't have speaking parts. This type of group can only be distracting to the presentation, and sends wrong messages. As a rule, all participating attendees should be critical members of the presentation.

- **Your team should support, enhance, and reinforce your agenda.** Every movement or noise in the background, however slight, is a distraction from the center-stage presentation. Your team should be motionless and quiet except for an occasional gentle nod of agreement with the presenter's most important points. If the presenter requires input from another team member, they should call them by name and directly ask them to cover a certain point of interest. They should only answer what they are asked in a concise manner. When not speaking, team members should sit or stand still, looking directly at the speaker.

5. **Time Your Remarks and Stay on Time.**

A common mistake is to design the presentation to fit the allotted time and then cram other items into the program without making space. The only way to finish on time is to talk fast and eliminate all pauses or time for questions and answers, leaving a breathless, fruitless presentation. A better idea is to shorten the presentation and leave plenty of room for pauses and questions and answers. Some key points:
> Stay on time. Whether you are making a presentation to your business’ executives, employees, sales operation, current or prospective customers or an industry group, never run out of time. A well-orchestrated presentation, timed appropriately, gives the audience a chance to digest the material, ensures key points are made in the presentation, and provides adequate and valuable time for follow up questions and answers.

> Come to the point (the client and the client's project) quickly. By the time your business gets to the oral presentations phase of a selection process, all "qualifications" questions have been answered. An oral presentation that includes a restatement of qualifications and past experience, unless specifically requested by the client, is a waste of the client's time. The sooner a presenter moves the discussion from "us" to the project, your proposed solution, and the client, the more likely it is to succeed.

6. Don't be surprised if your equipment fails. Be prepared.

If you need to use electronic equipment in your presentations, be prepared for equipment failure. Ask if the client is set up to show electronic presentations. Even if the client has the capabilities, they may have different software versions or restrictions on use of their business systems or network. Another common issue is power supply failures. A checklist can help you ensure that you bring along the equipment that you need: Computer with presentation loaded, computer power cord, a jump drive with the presentation on it, and you may consider bringing a portable electronic overhead projector. You will be more familiar with your own equipment, thus minimizing equipment failure.

Select reliable presentation equipment that gets the job done, but be prepared to present the material completely on your own just in case. You may want to bring hard copies, just in case. However, there are conflicting theories regarding hard copies. Some companies give them out and some are adamant about not giving them out because their information is proprietary. It’s also easy for additional copies to be made from hard copies and for that information to unethically be given to your competitors. If you are presenting to the federal government, you will likely be required to provide hard copies. If you are awarded the government contract, your full or partial proposal and presentation may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

7. Use simple graphics and text that your audience can easily read.

Use presentation software, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, to develop your presentation. Avoid making common mistakes, such as filling slides with so much text that no one will ever read it. A better practice is to use simple graphics that are appropriate to your topic and use bullet points that your audience can easily read. Additional talking points can be added to the presentation footer or notes section to coincide with the presentation. A general rule of thumb is one idea per slide and nine words maximum per sentence. The more complicated the subject matter, the more words may be necessary. However, a healthy mix of text and graphics to illustrate the point is highly advised. Be careful when using clip art. It
may make your presentation look amateurish or the audience may not take you seriously. Your speaker comments should coincide precisely with the appearance of the presentation slide so that you keep your audience’s attention.

Make sure your logo is on every slide to enforce brand recognition with your audience. It is also wise to include terms such as “Proprietary and Confidential” and use the copyright symbol “©” to protect your presentation material and data.

8. **Speak to your audience, not to your boards or screen.**

“Never turn your back on your audience.” Clients like a "face-to-face" delivery, so project your voice toward your audience and never toward your board. Rehearse your delivery: keep your shoulders squared to the client and when you want to point to something on the board, use your "near hand" with the palm facing the audience. You can, of course, occasionally turn your head to look at the board or glance at the material, but turn your shoulders only slightly. Maintaining your posture and eye contact enables your audience to gain confidence in you, your company, and your proposed solution.

9. **Dress, look, and act the part.**

When presenting, know the culture of your audience and try to dress and behave like they do. This type of presentation is not the place for avant-garde dress or unusual personal behavior. You don’t want to be remembered for what you wore (or didn’t wear), but for what you said. If you are unsure of the client’s culture, dress conservatively. Wearing a business suit subconsciously helps you command respect and you generally stand up taller.

During presentations, involuntary increases in pulse and heart rate can cause shaky knees, quivering voices, and other undesired responses. We feel out of control and helpless. In exasperation we do what humans often do in this situation; we utter the universal words, "I'm nervous." However, don’t call attention to it in your presentation. It doesn’t change the situation and it doesn’t make the audience take it any easier on you or pay less attention for that matter. It’s very likely that you are hyper aware of your nervousness, but the audience may not be aware at all. Remember, we are all nervous in these situations. Also be careful of saying “uh” or “ummm” too much. If you need to take a few seconds to collect your thoughts, it’s fine to have a few seconds of silence rather than filling it with words that show how nervous you really are and may appear that you are unprepared.

10. **Don’t forget to ask for the job, but don’t beg, brag, or mention the competition.**

You don’t need to inflate your position or brag because the presentation will speak for itself. Be sure to let others do your testimonials; let a prestigious award or praise from a happy client do the bragging.
Remember you are at the presentation because you were invited or are supposed to be there. Reminding the audience of the obvious facts to inflate your position or brag will not be an advantage.

Remember that begging is not the language of winners. Most businesses actually remember to ask for the job, and you should, but many go too far and slip into begging. It is one thing to say that you have the personnel immediately available for assignment, quite another to say that there will be layoffs if you don't get the job. Both phrases may be true, but the client will see the former as opportunity and the latter as sign of trouble.

Don't beg, don't brag, and don't mention the competition. Even if asked a direct question by an audience member, try to steer around talking about other companies or products. Your criticism of another business or another product will hurt you and your praise may just help them win. Instead, make sure to differentiate your business from the competition by highlighting the personal or client service differentiators in your organization.

11. Make your closing memorable.

Close your presentation with a summary that will stick in the minds of the audience. Remind them why you are there, and the key points you have made. After you are done speaking, prepare for audience questions, answers, and comments. Most audiences, such as selection committees and members of the press, will probe for additional information. If you are addressing your team, you may have to encourage them to ask questions. If they hold back, prepare some questions you know they will want to ask to start the discussion. Your team members will likely ask follow-up questions. Be prepared for the unexpected question. If you don't know the answer, tell them you will get back with them, and then do it immediately.

Key Takeaways from This Module

- A presentation can be one of your best tools for conveying important messages and inspiring your workforce to move forward to achieve your vision and grow your business.
- Planning is probably the most important (and overlooked) step in creating a successful presentation of any kind. Planning helps you decide on the content and the order in which the information will be presented.
- Prepare, rehearse, and get coaching on your presentation skills.
- Videotaping your dry run will help you fine-tune your presentation, determine what areas you need to develop further, and indicate how much time your presentation takes.
- Determine the purpose of the presentation, assess and research your audience, and gather appropriate information.
- Know everything about the topic so you are ready for questions after the presentation.
- Sketch out the slides on paper and make sure the slides emphasize the main points to be made in the presentation.
- Follow the 11 points in this document to help you create a memorable and successful presentation.

**Sources and Citations**

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