



Perfect Pitch: How to Avoid Common Presentation Pitfalls

By *Finance New Mexico*

If you've ever had to pitch a business or product idea to an investor or potential partner, you know the presentation can make or break the deal.

Because the stakes can be high, serious entrepreneurs quickly learn what to avoid when giving a presentation, whether it's a 30-minute speech before a peer group or six-minute proposal to Demo Day investors.

Some of the presentation do's and don'ts are intuitive:

Think about what keeps you engaged when someone's talking and what makes your attention drift to your email in-box.



Every presentation should be a story with a logical beginning and end and a narrative thread that connects these dots. In the business world, it often starts with a problem that your product or service ultimately solved.

If your creation is interesting, the story of its genesis should be equally compelling. Once you've framed the tale and decided what to emphasize in the allotted time, determine how you'll sidestep the most common public presentation minefields.

Avoid jargon: Lingo or other coded language alienates people who don't speak it, and it even bores professionals who are fluent. Pretend you're explaining your product or service to an inquisitive 10-year-old and use words designed to draw her in rather than exclude her from the conversation.

Too much information: If you try to cram excess material into a talk, overwhelmed listeners will tune out further input while their brains sort out what's important from what's not — which is really your job. Identify three or four essential points and embellish them with colorful examples.

It's not all about you: Even if your company solved a critical problem with an invention you devised, your audience will be more receptive if — instead of boasting about what a genius you are — you approach the topic the way you approached the problem: as a mystery that needed to

be solved and something everyone should care about. Use “we” to involve the audience and bring listeners along on the journey through roadblocks and hurdles to the triumphant finale. Keep it personal rather than organizational.

Toss the script: If you read your presentation from a script, Teleprompter or PowerPoint screen, you create distance between yourself and listeners. Commit a short presentation or pitch to memory by keeping it simple and straightforward. Even if you’re able to memorize a longer talk, make sure it sounds unrehearsed. It’s OK to jot essential talking points on notecards to jog your memory and keep you on track, but spend most of your presentation making eye contact with the audience, not with cue cards.

Dial down the drama: Soaring oratory and flamboyant body language aren’t the only ways to express passion or occupy center stage. The true masters of public speaking radiate energy in subtle ways: a relaxed stance, joyful facial expressions and natural gestures of the hands and head. But speakers who wander, fidget and use distracting hand gestures — like excessive chopping of the air or finger pointing — puts listeners off. Take a conversational, relaxed approach to your message, and save the theatrics for the post-deal celebration.

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