



Ten tips

to deliver a

winning pitch

How nervous do YOU get when giving a presentation? If you're prepared you should be fine. *Simone William* highlights 10 tips that may help you.

1. PREPARATION

'During your presentation you have to prove to the customer that you can help them in the way they want to be helped. It's as simple as that. So, to prepare for a pitch, I'd say the best advice is to call them to find out the level of detail they want and how they would like it to be presented. There's no point in arriving with a complex PowerPoint presentation if what the client wants is an informal chat so they can get to know you. You must tailor a pitch to their needs and your first job is to work out the right way to prove to them that you can help them.'

2. AUDIENCE

'Every person I've met in business wants to do well in the area in which they're judged: the area where they'll get a promotion or a bonus. So when you're pitching, try to find out how the decision maker is judged. They'll definitely want to do well in that area and you must therefore tailor your pitch to their needs. In my experience people don't focus on this. They bang on about a product's benefits but neglect to think about the "AFTERS" – that is, customers don't care what you do; they only care about what they're left with AFTER you've done it.'

3. CERTAINTY

'Customers want certainty; they want to know you can help them and they want proof that you've done it before. So how can you achieve this? Is it with a case study, testimonials, facts and figures or maybe anecdotes? You're proving that you can help a customer, not explaining how you'd do it. Customers don't want to know everything about your company, they just want certainty. Once you've found the most persuasive argument, you'll find your delivery improves because you know you're saying what the customer wants to hear.'

4. MEETING THE BRIEF

'Again, ask the client. If you have a brief, I'd strongly advise asking them what they hope to

achieve from the project AFTER it's finished. You need to find out what success looks like to them. Then you can demonstrate that you're thinking about their long-term goals, not just your own. Asking questions is crucial. Evidence shows that sales people get steadily better for 18 months in a new role. You might expect them to level out after that but they get worse, because they stop asking questions and pinpointing what the customer wants.'

5. YOUR SELLING POINT

'Businesses get very excited about locating their Unique Selling Point and focusing on that, which is important. But it is also vital to show a customer that you can help them and be able to prove it. To do that, you need to know the things you do uniquely well. The best way to get this information is to ring up your five best clients and ask them what it is they think your business does uniquely well. Then you will know what it is like to be on the receiving end of your services and you can flag up any of those areas to new clients that might need them.'

6. PRESENTATION SKILLS

'Spend 10 per cent of your practice time on the first 10 seconds of your presentation; they'll have to be really engaging to grab a client's attention. It's good to interact with the audience so ask simple yes/no questions to get the ball rolling. You need to communicate your enthusiasm too. Maintain eye contact with the client and, if you're sitting, perch on your seat and lift your heels off the floor so you can't slouch. Use your hands as much as you like but have a default position, folded in your lap or with your fingers pressed together in an arch.'

7. MEMORABLE POINTS

'The reason it's so crucial to get audience engagement in the first 10 seconds is because memory has early bias. It's the reason you probably remember the name of the kid at the start of the school register – but no one else's.

The same holds true with presentation slides. People only remember what's at the top of the slide. That's why it's crucial to start with a statement proving how you can help your customer achieve their aims and not, as is so often the case, the date your business was founded! It's completely irrelevant to what they want to hear.'

8. PITCH LANGUAGE

'The language you use should always be clear and straightforward. Jargon is a common crime in presentations. For instance, you'll often hear acronyms or specific industry terms being used that mean nothing to anyone outside that industry. Companies also invent model or product names but neglect to explain what they mean. It's lazy and unhelpful. Clients get fed up with it and will ask you to explain yourself. Visual jargon is widespread too; overcomplicated charts that aren't explained and don't have any meaning to the audience should be avoided.'

9. THREE GOLDEN TIPS

'First: facts tell, stories sell. Stories are case studies using examples of relevant clients. Next: choose slide titles emphasising customer benefits eg "How we can save you money." Finally, avoid using: "In summary", as everyone will stop listening thinking they have already heard it. Conclude with, "So, in all these ways we are uniquely positioned to help you achieve your goals.'"

10. QUESTIONS

'Think about possible questions and prepare your answers. Questions are good; they show customers are engaging with your product. If there's an area you don't want to tackle, deal with it by saying, "If I was you, I'd be worried about X but let me tell you why this isn't an issue..." And if there's a question you can't answer, say so and ask the client how you can get back to them.'