

A+ Technical Presentations

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What makes a technical speaker successful? It is a question many people would like answered. To achieve rock star status in this arena isn't easy, but there are four simple steps that will increase the odds. All of the steps are important. None of the steps can be overlooked.

Step 1: Prepare

The mistake that many technical presenters make is to talk about the things that are of interest to them, not necessarily their audience. If you want to score, you must take the time upfront to understand the issues of your listeners. Just like a good detective looks for evidence of any DNA in order to solve a crime, you should also think in terms of uncovering the DNA make-up of your audience so that you can win them over. Thus, before you prepare your content, you need to discover the **demographics**, **needs** and **attitude** of your audience.

- **Demographics**—Who will be listening to you? What are their titles and functions? How many people will you be addressing? Is there an audience within an audience? Does everyone have the same perspective on the situation?
- **Needs**—What are the issues, needs, or challenges they want solved through technology?
- **Attitude**—How do they feel about you, your organization or your technology? Is it positive? Have they had any bad experiences? If they are an existing customer, have they felt previous technical solutions have hit the mark?

To get the answers to these questions, ask the account executive or your own contact. Look at the customer's website. Read their annual report. Listen to analyst reports. Talk to your team. Never go into a meeting, with only a vague idea of what your

listener's interests are. The time you take upfront will pay off tenfold.

Step Two: Plan

Once you understand where your listener's interests lay, you can plan out the appropriate content. It should be audience specific, rather than generic. If your listeners' needs vary, you will have to adjust and simplify points so that each person understands what you have said. The simpler you make your content, the more others will comprehend and be able to re-explain what you have said.

It is always a good idea to use examples and analogies to simplify content. When a speaker uses an analogy, it gives those less savvy listeners a frame of reference. Steve Jobs, the CEO and Co-Founder of Apple Computers, is well known as the visual Zen master. He creates a picture for his audience of how Apple's technology will enrich their lives. While you might not be Steve Jobs, you do have personal stories that can effectively illustrate a point, as well as allow listeners to see another facet of your personality.

Step Three: Polish

As you review your content, make sure that all needs have been addressed. Make sure your content is arranged strategically. Is it logical and well supported? Listeners will not connect the dots. Have you gone into too much detail? Does one idea lead to the next? Do you have strong transitional statements?

In any presentation, there are points that may be fairly technical or even down right boring. Think about questions you might ask to get audience involvement. Create an interesting visual aid or determine where you might want to white board a concept. Any visual aids should clarify points for your listeners. They should not be your speaker notes. Listeners expect you to be conversational; they do not want to see slide after slide. Bullet point lists do not make an idea come alive. If you really want a slide to have impact, make it a visual representation. Finally, don't overlook using a prop. Something as simple as a broken tennis racket, a Swiss Army Knife or an egg timer can speak volumes.

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Step Four: Practice

Technical presenters, by nature, are often quiet and introverted. They typically do not relish making high stakes presentations. Comfort and confidence come but only after practice. It is a good idea before every presentation to practice out loud five or six times -and with your slides. The first couple of times, the speaker only hears whether the explanation sounds correct. It is after saying something out loud three or four more times that a speaker gets comfortable with the content.

Good practice audiences might be your team or your manager. It might even be your dog. If your dog seems alert and interested, invariably your listeners will also. A third option is to practice out loud in front of their bathroom mirror. Also, try to get feedback on how you sound. Are you boring or are you passionate. If you want your audience to do something as a result of your presentation, you have to demonstrate that you believe in what you say by looking them in the eye and by sounding convicted. The more passionate you are, the more the listeners will trust and believe you.

Being a successful technical presenter should not be a hit and miss thing. By preparing, planning, polishing and practicing your presentation, you insure that your next presentation will be a smash hit.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.