

How to Keep the Multitasking Listener Attentive

By Judith Filek—President
Impact Communications, Inc.

Business people have short attention spans. They are used to multi-tasking and they are often pre-occupied with things in their personal and business lives. Some researchers believe that the average attention span of an adult, versus a preschooler is seven seconds. In any presentation, you have to make people pay attention to you. You can't bore someone into listening to you. Here are some suggestions from the pros.

Stories

Everyone loves a good story. It is how information has been passed down since Biblical times. Personal stories are the best since they are engaging, and they also let the listener learn more about who you are. Personal stories, however, must have a business point. To tell a story about an experience you had sitting next to someone on a plane wastes people's time unless it shores up a point you are trying to make related to this customer or this topic. Thus, the link you make between the personal story and your business point is crucial.

Examples

Customers are interested in whether your product or service is a good fit for their business. When you give them examples of how your company has helped others like them in the industry, you create trust. It makes them comfortable. Strong statements or facts backed up with examples really make your listeners take notice.

Analogies

Often, listeners feel overwhelmed with technical information. If they don't understand the explanation or if they feel you have gone into too much detail, they quickly lose interest. Analogies are very helpful for people who do not have technical backgrounds. They shortcut the time it takes them to get the value of your recommendation. Analogies help people to make decisions.

References and Quotations

Who doesn't like being quoted? If you can quote someone from the company or something that has been said about the company or one of its executives from the newspaper, listeners are impressed. You capture their attention by what you know about them. It makes them feel you are focused on trying to understand them better, and you are doing your homework to keep abreast of what is in the news about them.

Humor

Humor always grabs attention. However, in business presentations most speakers forget the impact that humor has. They feel it is too risky or that the particular audience would not appreciate a lighter approach. The reality is just the opposite. Most listeners attend multiple meetings throughout their day and adore when the speaker uses humor. It makes the person look real and relaxed. It makes the listeners feel this is someone that doesn't get flustered by things and can handle the tough times with some semblance of levity. In addition, humor makes the speaker's points stand out as if they were highlighted in yellow marker. A word of caution, since most people are not "Jimmy Fallon" or "Stephen Colbert," we do not recommend joke telling. Invariably, you risk offending someone.

Visuals

Visual aids are a great way to gain and hold attention. Yet, most visual aids are anything but memorable. Often, they are overloaded with too much information. Visuals that are memorable are primarily pictorial. The old adage of a picture being worth a thousand words is true. The cleaner and crisper the visual, the more impactful it is. A slide of a scene or a person in action followed by an example of how this might be relevant to the listener audience sparks interest.

Continued on page 2

Facts, Statistics

People are impressed with statistics and strong facts. However, if you overwhelm them with too many facts and too many statistics, there can be a negative reaction. A few strong facts about market trends, etc. force people to take note and actually help in the decision making process.

The pros know you can't bore people into listening to you or buying from you. You have to gain and hold people's attention with an assortment of approaches. The pros use stories, examples, analogies, references, quotes, visuals, facts and statistics throughout their presentation to insure that people remember key ideas. Information alone does not win people over. If you focus on how to get people to remember what you have said after they walk out the door, your presentation will have the impact you desire.

***Question:** We're interested in your reaction to this article. [Click here](#) – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their presentation and telephone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.