

Hot Tips for Meeting Handouts

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There are many occasions when a handout is essential. However, before any handout is distributed, it should be evaluated on whether the target audience would easily understand the information and find it helpful in making a decision. Another consideration is whether it “looks” professional. The following are some hot tips for impressing listeners with your hardcopy.

1. Divide the handout into sections to make it more readable. Make the section titles pertinent to the audience. For example, section one might be titled “Current Income Statement”; section 2, the “Balance Sheet”; and section 3, “Source and Application of Funds.”
2. If the material is for an outside client, it should be in a binder or folder with the company’s logo and the speaker’s business card inserted. The presenter’s biography should be included immediately after the title page. The biography should make the reader conclude the speaker is a subject matter expert. For example, if the speaker has been the audit partner on companies similar to the current company, it would be important to list them. Besides professional credentials, a biographical sketch should also reveal a few of the presenter’s interests. It will build a bridge to the listeners. For example, an audience concerned with an environmental cleanup issue would feel a common bond with a speaker who mentioned being an avid hiker and camper.
3. There should be a border around each page and plenty of white space. Borders frame the text and draw the eye inward. If possible, leave the left-hand page blank so that listeners can see both the printed text and their own personal notes when they review the material later.
4. Number each page at the bottom. Referring to a particular page number, versus page title, makes it easier for listeners to follow the explanation. Be aware that when a handout is distributed, people will review the information they find the most pertinent to them. Consequently, the speaker must constantly remind the audience of the page and the section. This will avoid sidebar conversations.
5. Use no more than three typefaces on a handout. More than that will be distracting to the eye.
6. Be clear and succinct. Less is more. Define all terms since people may have varying knowledge levels. Eliminate jargon. People need to understand the text quickly so that they can listen to the verbal explanation. Use bullet points or simple graphics whenever possible. If there is a reason to go into much detail, be sure to advise listeners. When putting together the information for the handout, focus on the needs of the listeners and the business goal. The information found in the handout should make people conclude that the speaker has addressed their needs, and the suggested recommendations make sense.
7. Proof read the information several times. It represents not only the speaker, but the organization long after speaker walks out the door. Spell check alone can miss many errors. A good way to proof materials is to read the information sentence by sentence, starting with the last page. Reading each sentence separately will help catch errors in tense or number that the eye might have originally overlooked.
8. If appropriate, include notes and references at the end. Anytime you quote a statistic; people appreciate knowing the source. They also appreciate a listing of additional information on a topic.

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9. Finally, but most importantly, if there is no reason to pass out a handout ahead of time, wait until the end. It will eliminate people fumbling through papers.

Handouts aid listeners in comprehending ideas and in moving forward with decisions. To make sure your next handout reflects well on you, use the items listed above as a checklist. People will perceive you in a positive light and conclude your materials are of a high quality.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.