SELLING YOUR IDEAS:

TEN TIPS TO SHARPEN YOUR PRESENTATION SKILLS

H ere's something to think about before your next client presentation: Your ideas are only as good as how well they're understood. And how well they're understood is only as good as how well you present them.

Not to put any more pressure on you (coming up with original ideas is enough), but ideas are the core of your business. Moreover, even great ones seldom sell themselves. And the less visual an idea is the more skill that's required to get it accepted.

Of course, presentation skills can't be mastered in an instant, nor reduced to a few quick tips. But it is possible to summarize what successful account execs, sales reps, studio principals and freelances say are the ten key presentation factors.

1 **Be prepared.** Review the client's input and objectives. Then organize your comments in the way that best addresses them. Practice what you're going to say. Anticipate what questions, comments and objections the client may have. Dress conservatively, you want the client to focus on your ideas, not you. Show up five minutes *early*, otherwise call.

2 **Be confident.** If you weren't highly regarded by the client, you wouldn't have been asked to make the presentation in the first place. Moreover, the ideas you show don't have to be perfect; chances are they'll be modified anyway. And, although what you present may not be the world's absolute best creative effort, *it is most surely the best this client can get for his or her budget.*

3 **Be in charge.** Try to place yourself in a "power position" (in a conference room it's the head of the table). Take and keep the initiative—begin and close the presentation on your schedule. This is *your* show, so *you* should set the agenda and keep it on track. The more you do so, the more professional your work will appear, and the easier it will be for your ideas to be accepted.

4 **Be compromising.** Being confident and in charge doesn't mean arrogance. Consider ahead of time what's crucially important (central) to your ideas, and what could be modified or dropped without affecting their impact. Respond to questions and concerns in a straight-forward way, don't be evasive. Defend strongly what's crucial, but don't do battle over the insignificant—client satisfaction usually requires at least some changes or compromises.

5 **Be articulate.** Always use an outline of what you're going say—either in your head, or written down (better to have a "crib sheet" than to bumble). Be particularly careful not to use jargon when describing or defending your ideas. Phrases like "edge tension," "the grid," or "copy integrity" are meaningless and usually have a negative effect.

6 **Be enthusiastic.** Clients expect you to be as excited about their company/product as they are. And how can you expect them to be enthusiastic about *your* ideas, if you aren't? Don't be phony, but don't be laid back. Be enthusiastic about how your ideas will solve a problem, or create an opportunity.

7 **Be focused.** A strong direction and one or two ways to implement it are what most clients want to see. Too many ideas, concepts and alternatives serve only to confuse them. And confusion makes decisions and approvals much harder to obtain. Besides, you can't be equally enthusiastic about several ideas.

8 **Be businesslike.** No matter how proud you may be of them, don't concentrate on the uniqueness (creativity) of your ideas. Mention creative/execution/production issues only in the context of explaining feasibility (e.g., keeping within budget). Instead, concentrate on explaining how your ideas fulfill the client's *business* objectives. In any presentation of ideas, what you like isn't important. Remember, it isn't creative unless the *client* likes it.

9 **Be attentive to details.** Whether the product is ™ or ® is probably insignificant to you. Same with the content of a "concept" FPO picture you drop into a layout. But some clients focus on such details. So take nothing for granted. Explain *everything* that's different than it will appear in the final printed result. And don't forget client idiosyncrasies either (e.g., client hates the color magenta; client doesn't like sentences that begin with "and").

10 **Be concise.** The presentation should be long enough to be significant; short enough for impact. For most ideas and concepts that's about 30 minutes. This should give you enough time to set the stage (review client objectives)… romance the process (describe your procedures)… dramatically unveil your thoughts or work (show and tell time)… answer questions and accept input and changes (provide the "I'm listening to you." comfort level that every client needs).

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