

Some Tips for Making Effective Presentations*

"There are so many little details that make the difference between a mediocre presentation creation and an effective presentation creation and delivery." states Martin Schaffel, president and CEO of Audio Visual Innovations, Inc. "And they really do go hand in hand. How you create the presentation will have a direct bearing on how you deliver it."

Here are some presentation tips.

What's in it for them?

This cuts to the heart of effective presenting; knowing your audience. "The key question to answer, in your mind and in your audience's mind, is 'So what?'" says Sam Malik, Toshiba's national sales and marketing manager. "If, as you're presenting, you can answer that question for each piece of information that you're providing -- succinctly and in a way that's meaningful to the audience -- it makes all the difference in the world."

"Consider the needs of your audience first, prepare to meet those needs in a dynamic way, and your presentation is bound to succeed," recommends Todd Savitt, director of corporate communications for Proxima Corp., which sponsors a Web site (www.presentersuniversity.com) that offers many tips on creating and making presentations.

Build a series of points sequentially.

"If you have five points on a bullet chart and you put them all up at the same time, they're going to read all five when you're talking about the first one. Use the slides to build your series of points," advises Martin Schaffel.

Be brief.

"Someone once said 18 minutes is the ideal length for a speech -- long enough to give them substance, but short enough not to bore them," says Mario Cuomo, the former three-term governor of New York who knows a thing or two about speech making.

"And consider starting with a big-picture perspective," says Proxima's Savitt. "It's safe to assume that members of your audience are pressed for time, and could use an up-front summary of what's to come."



Questions? E-mail meetings@siam.org



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Get your money's worth on your presentations software.

"Power Point, Persuasion, Harvard Graphics -- they're all tremendous tools, but only if you learn how to use them fully," says Clint Hoffman, marketing manager for the Display Products Group of Sony Electronics, Inc.

Choose your colors carefully.

If you put blue text on a red background (or vice versa), your audience will probably see, to quote the Jimmy Hendrix song, purple haze. Make sure the color you use on your text has "pop" -- that is, that it jumps off the background color. For instance, red or blue text on a white background works nicely.

Don't overload the slide.

Break up the information you're sharing with your audience into digestible chunks. Putting too much information on a slide is a dead giveaway that you don't know what you're doing.

USE A BIG ENOUGH FONT.

Having to squint is annoying. Don't you agree?

Slow down.

"My rule of thumb is, if you're in front of a group and you think you're speaking at the right speed, you're probably speaking way too fast," says Schaffel. "Only if it seems slow to you is it at the right speed for them. Especially if you're building points in a presentation and the last point you made is crucial to the point you're about to make, then you really need to know that they're with you."

Above all, keep trying.

Giving a good speech or making a good presentation doesn't come naturally to anybody. "Even the greatest speakers were once rank amateurs," says Cuomo.

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