

PERFECT YOUR BUSINESS PRESENTATION



Wow — and win — new clients with presentations that pair personality with passion.

By Matt Alderton

Dianna Booher has made dozens of proposals during the life of her 27-year-old business. As CEO of Booher Consultants, a Grapevine, Texas-based communications-training firm, she's delivered them sitting down, one-on-one, with clients at their desks. She's delivered them standing up to small committees of decision-makers in formal conference rooms. She's even delivered them leaning on podiums to crowds of spectators at overflowing conventions. No matter where, what or to whom she's presenting, though, Booher says that the key to pulling off a proposal is clear, confident communication.

"Your success as a business owner really depends on your ability to communicate well in a formal or informal sales presentation, on the phone or in person," says Booher, author of *The Voice of Authority: Ten Communication Strategies Every Leader Needs to Know* and *From Contact to Contract: 496 Proven Sales Tips to Generate More Leads, Close More Deals, Exceed Your Goals, and Make More Money*.

A proposal is more than *what* you're proposing, Booher adds. Equally important is *how* you propose it. "You, the presenter, are the message," she says. "As the speaker, you are delivering a message, calling for action, interacting with the audience, adding anecdotes to deliver the emotional punch, and reading your audience's reaction to know how and when to change the pace."

In other words, your business relies not only on your ability to sell your products or services, but also on your ability to sell yourself. The presenters who leave the boardroom with new business aren't the ones who sell; they're the ones who connect.

Practice, Preparation Make Perfect

Booher didn't learn the art of business presentation in the classroom — she took just one college speech class — but rather while building her business.

"My real expertise was a result of personal development," she says. "Practice, practice, practice."

Donna Maria Coles Johnson agrees. As owner of Charlotte, N.C.-based Indie Business Media, which publishes information on and provides coaching for family businesses, she makes several business pitches every month in order to secure clients and sponsors. The practice, she says, has given her the polish that's needed to impress prospects.

Where polish fails, however, preparation always succeeds. Coles Johnson recommends asking exactly what your potential client needs before writing your proposal. That means finding out well in advance of your meeting what they need, when they need it and how much they're willing to pay for it, as well as how your client prefers to be presented to — by phone, in writing or in person.

"Before you get to the point where you're making a presentation, develop a good relationship with somebody who's going to be in

the room," Coles Johnson suggests. "Then you feel like you have a little bit of an ally who already knows you're really nice, if nothing else."

If you show that ally, and everyone else in the room, that you know something about their company — that you know who they are, what they do and what their values are — then your proposal will at least find open ears. And that, according to Booher, is half the battle.

Technology: More Foe Than Friend

The other half of the battle, according to Coles Johnson, is connecting with your listeners. "If you can walk into the room and portray a certain level of excitement and energy, that really pumps people up," she says. "They see that if you can transfer that kind of energy to their project, then they can really trust you to deliver on what you promise."

It's trust, not technology that makes presentations go smoothly, according to Dr. Alan Weiss, author of *How to Write a Proposal That's Accepted Every Time*. People get obsessed with their PowerPoint slides, he says, and forget that the real goal of their presentation is to build a business relationship.

"[People] let technology overwhelm them," he points out. "They focus on features and benefits and not outcomes and value."

Booher echoes Weiss. "Technology can sabotage rather than support what you have to say," she says, adding that visuals are important, but only as support, not structure.

Discuss, Don't Deliver

Rather than slides, successful presenters depend on relationships built through conversation, according to Weiss. "Pitches and elevator speeches are useless," he says. "The best kind of presentation is really a discussion."

In other words, if you want your proposal to succeed, you should focus not on presenting but on interacting and being a partner rather than a vendor.

"The most successful presentations are dialogues in which the client does most of the talking to tell you what he or she wants to know," Booher says. To seal your deal, she suggests delivering more anecdotes than data, more explanation than presentation and more passion than formality. Above all else, make sure your proposal is about your client, not you.

"What a sales presentation is *not*," Booher says, "is a chance to dump a 'Here's all about me' download in the prospect's face."

Identify Next Steps

The final component to a successful presentation is the sign-off, according to Weiss. Once you've discussed the client's needs and how you can meet them, it's time to discuss terms, conditions and next steps, right then and there. "You have to have a definitive next step," he says. "Never let a prospect say, 'I'll get back to you.'"

The next step, Booher adds, might not be a sale yet. It might be another meeting, a demonstration, a site visit or a trial. What's important is that there is a next step, no matter what it is and that you're confident enough to take it.

"Remember," Coles Johnson says, "if you don't try, it won't happen."