

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION MASTERY

TIPS FROM THE COACH TO
SOME OF THE WORLD'S
BEST SPEAKERS—AND ME



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Kapows

Kapows are our attention-grabbers, the way we engage our audience.

As we've discussed, our virtual audience struggles to be engaged. There are numerous distractions, so you help participants focus by using Kapows.

Here's ten ways we can grab and hold an audience.

Kapows. For the beginning, middle, and end of your presentation.

When directing a show, I will always spend five times as long on the first five minutes of the play than any other part of the show. If we get the beginning right, then we build confidence in the audience, building anticipation that this is going to be a great evening.

We also raise the cast's confidence. If the audience is on the edge of the seats, then we're going to feel that engagement, and it will build our confidence, thus creating a virtuous circle of contentment, excitement, and all-round anticipation.

Why Kapows?

If you're over forty, you'll probably remember the old Batman series starring Adam West. They used the cartoon quality of original comics to inform the style of the series. Hence, we got loads of boffs, biffs, kabooms, and kapows. A presentation Kapow is way of kicking your presentation into action and grabbing your audience. But it can also be used anywhere within your presentation.

Kapows work singly or grouped together—a veritable orgy of Kapows. The key when adding a Kapow is to be in control of the bridge from the Kapow to your presentation. In other words, make the Kapow relevant to the presentation and the audience. And make that relevance clear.

Drum roll please.

The ten Kapows

INTERACTIVE.

Getting your audience to engage. Probably the most powerful of the virtual presentation Kapows. I've devoted a section to it in the chapter Making it Engaging.

STORY.

There is an argument that in virtual presentations, because you need to get to the point, stories take you off-track and so are to be avoided. If the story is relevant and succinct, then in virtual presenting, it is the gold dust, the veritable king of kapows. If in doubt, add a story. The best ones are those that are one step removed from the subject matter and act as analogies. Just keep it succinct but not so that it loses its emotional punch.

“But I hate stories.” A few years ago, I was running a workshop at a manufacturing company. I got to the bit about stories—and before I’d started, one of the group members piped up, “I just want you to know before we start that I don’t like stories.” I stopped for a moment and asked her why.

“I just don’t like stories,” she explained in a way that said, “You don’t need to ask me again.”

And I didn’t because someone in the group asked her, and another, until finally she said, “All right. The reason I don’t like stories is....” And she promptly told a story to explain why she didn’t like stories.

We are storytelling animals. It’s how we communicate. We can no more stop telling stories than stop breathing. If you are trying to explain an idea to someone, and they just don’t get it, you will stop and say something like, “All right, it’s a bit like...” and tell a story to explain.

The only place we don’t tell stories is in business. Yet, during twenty-five years of study and running workshops, I’ve learned the best way of selling your message is through stories. This really is the gold.

Even if you don’t try and tell a story, the audience will attempt to make sense of the facts and turn them into a pattern that forms a story. “In the third quarter, we saw a dip in revenues as we continued to see challenging market conditions resulting in overall revenues of ... However, this shortfall was reduced considerably during positive trading conditions in Q4.”

It initially looks like gibberish, but read it again, and you’ll see that somewhere within the corporate nonsense is a story. The audience will instinctively try to piece together a clear narrative. The danger is, if you don’t create a story with your data and facts, the audience might create its own, and once that happens, you’ve lost control in relaying the message of your presentation. Story is what we do.

So, what sort of story should you use in your virtual presentation?

Well, obviously a really good one. But beyond that glib suggestion, here are a few options.

The anecdote.

Something from your life or something that you’ve heard. The anecdotes need to be short—ideally less than a minute—but have enough content that we can see the world described in the story. Then just make sure that you bridge this story across to the point of your presentation.

The analogy.

This is where you tell a story as an analogy to explain something more complex. It’s a great way to humanize a presentation and help a nontechnical audience understand something technical.

The example.

This can be a case study or just an example. It could be business success or maybe a disaster. It's the proof—the reality of your presentation.

The challenger story.

Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson researched six thousand salespeople. The most successful by far were “challenger salespeople” who were prepared to challenge the customer. These challenges are insights and, in turn, mean they’re providing value.

To do this successfully, you will need to understand the audience of your client’s business and see their bigger problem. Next, they need to hear the evidence. Then, you emphasise the pain before sharing the “new way” out of that pain and the solution. At every stage of this process, you can use a story to bring life to your presentation.

Challenger story.

Understand their business. Story.

See bigger problem or opportunity for them. Story.

Rational drowning in numbers. The story behind the numbers.

Emotional pain. Story.

New way. Story.

Solution. Story.

I was working once with a couple of senior creatives from an advertising agency. They had a big pitch coming up to a migratory telecom. As the client loved “low-cost,” and this agency was almost certainly the most expensive, they were the outsiders.

To give context to this story, essentially when you visit the UK for any length of time, you will need a migratory Sim. This is a temporary phone number. And this is what the migratory telecom sold.

The agency understood the business. The telcom’s numbers were dropping. The agency believed the business needed to switch public perception of its offering as being “cheap.” Cheap advertising and marketing and business instincts kept lowering price. It was leading them slowly down a vortex to oblivion.

The agency solution was to move the telcom’s brand and advertising upmarket. I said, “We need a story.”

And within literally a minute, they had their story:

“When I was a kid, I remember being shown round London by my uncle. And I got desperate for a pee. And we were outside this incredibly posh and expensive Landmark hotel. And my uncle said, “Go in there and have a pee.” And I said, “I can’t. It’s too posh.” And he said, “Act as if you’re staying at the hotel, and you’ll be okay.” So, I went in, very nervous, asked someone where the toilets were, and I had my pee.”

Now came the bridge...

“And that’s what we want to do to your brand. We want to take you into the Landmark. We want you to start behaving like those big brands—like O2 or Virgin or Vodafone. And start behaving as though you’re staying at the hotel. And go and have a pee at the Landmark.”

The upshot was they won the pitch at the second attempt, after the client rewrote the brief as a result of hearing the pitch in the first round.

The guys said they knew they’d won when they entered the room because the marketing director said, “You know, at boardroom, we talk about the need to have a pee at the Landmark hotel.”

This is the power of the challenger story.

Structuring a story.

The Three-Act Structure is another very simple storytelling construct that’s been around for as long as people have been telling stories. It works particularly well for shorter, online presentations as it’s simple to apply and takes the audience on a clear journey.

The Three-Act

Act 1

Situation. You outline the story.

Act 2

Complication. The obstacle or problem that needed solving.

Act 3

Resolution. What it will take for a happy ending.

Here’s an example from Steve Jobs.

Three-part structure

My story is about love and loss.

First: Woz and I started at Apple.

Next: I got fired.

Finally: I decided to start over.

Main point: Don’t settle.

– *Steve Jobs*

What needs to be in a story.

This is a bit of a cheesy acronym, but bear with me. It has the five fundamentals that are a constant in every good story.

S.T.O.R.Y

Simple. If the story's not simple then we won't understand it. Simple.

Touching. It must have emotion. Emotion sells, and facts tell.

Obstacle. It must have something that has to be overcome. Without an obstacle, it doesn't go on a journey, and like a three-year-old's story, becomes just a series of events.

Real. The audience must believe in the world you created.

You. The more the audience can relate to the story the better.

You can see those five fundamentals writ large in that Steve Jobs story.

Surprise, or The Bucket of Water moment.

SURPRISE.

I was having a drink one night with Mark Holdsworth, the inspiring head teacher of my kid's primary school. He shared a story I believe is core to good teaching and presenting.

Remembering when he was in school, he said one lesson in particular stood out:

“Our teacher came into class one day with a bucket of water and said, ‘Right children, today we’re going to learn about displacement.’ He then chucked this huge bucket of water over the floor. The children were screaming with laughter, pandemonium—water everywhere. But you know what, I’ve never forgotten that class; it’s honestly one of the reasons why I got into physics and math. And now, I challenge the teachers at our school to come in every week with a Bucket of Water idea. They have to do one thing during the week that really surprises the children, that grabs them. I don’t care if it goes wrong, they’ve got to try.”

If you want to keep your virtual audience listening, to make your online presentation be heard above the noise of a million others and be remembered, then you need to find your Bucket of Water moment. If your audience can already guess at the beginning of your presentation what it's going to look like thirty minutes later, chances are you've already lost them.

Try any of these surprises:

- Something big and interactive.
- Use your platform's interactive tools—in a surprising way.
- Every few minutes, change your distance from the lens.
- Add another speaker to the call.
- A surprising visual.

THE THEATRICAL KAPOW.

As your confidence grows, look at the option of adding a theatrical Kapow to your virtual

presentation. This Kapow works particularly well for webinars. Rather than present facing the camera, turn your presentation into a magazine show. Get someone to interview you or interview them. It's not that hard, and it takes the pressure off you. Plus, it will almost certainly be more interesting for the audience.

If you have a penchant for amateur dramatics or humour. How about adding a short sketch? You can either do it remotely or do it together in front of a single camera. Or you could do a one-person skit to make a point. You will be remembered for evermore and stand out from the crowd as innovative, brave, and creative.

HAVE-THEM-IMAGINE KAPOW.

I'll give you a quick example of this incredibly powerful Kapow. First, we'll do a fun version. Then we'll look at how you apply this to a business presentation.

“Imagine you’re lying on one of your favourite beaches, and it’s your idea of a perfect day. You see the waves breaking in the distance. You can feel a gentle breeze through the leaves of the trees. And then one of your favourite people, with a big smile on her face, comes up to you with one of your favourite drinks and places that drink on a little table next to you.”

Now, you went somewhere pretty special. That special place was unique to you. If I gave Steven Spielberg five hundred thousand dollars and told him to make a movie of what was going on in your head, it wouldn’t be as impactful as the movie provided by your imagination.

To give you a concrete example of how well this works, here’s one from one my favourite clients, Red Whale. They do presentations to more than half the UK’s general practitioners on the latest medicine, so they can make better diagnoses and offer better treatments to millions of patients. People like you and me. This stuff matters. They use the imagine technique four or five times during every full-day presentation.

The best exponent is their co-founder, Dr. Lucy Jenkins. Here’s a typical imagine.

“So, imagine it’s 5:55 on a Friday afternoon. You’re in your surgery. Somehow, you’ve managed to get all your appointments done, and you’re looking forward to getting home by seven for that glass of wine.

Then your receptionist says, “It’s Mrs Jones.” There is still one more appointment. How did you forget? So, in comes Mrs. Jones. She’s seventy-five, one of your regulars. Then ten minutes into the appointment, she says, “I’ve found this Y on my X.”

What do you do next?”

At that moment, every GP in the conference room is gripped. In their imagination, they’ve all gone into their different surgeries. They’ve all got their own version of a Mrs. Jones. They’re all wondering what they do next, and they’re praying Lucy has the answer.

THE ART-OF-ANTICIPATION KAPOW.

Here's an example of a sentence without anticipation: "I went up the stairs and opened the door and went into the room."

Now, let's create a sense of anticipation. "As I went up the stairs, I could hear a baby crying. I pushed open the big, heavy door, and as I entered the room, I could see my wife and our firstborn."

The benefit of creating anticipation is the audience wants to know what comes next. Without it, the desire to hear more is severely diminished.

Used judiciously, this Kapow can transform your virtual presentations, pulling the audience with you.

Here are some examples:

"After the break, we will talk about how you can grab your audience using our ten Kapows..."

"It turns out that our original diagnosis for growing the business was wrong... This is how we see it now..."

DRAMA.

"Drama is action, sir, action and not confounded philosophy." - "Six Characters in Search of an Author," Luigi Pirandello

The dramatic Kapow is an event, a moment, a memorable fact, an insight that lands, that changes the mood of an audience. It should be done with force and be memorable.

"We are in the midst of the most difficult trading conditions we've ever known. Yet, I believe here lies our greatest opportunity."

Other examples of dramatic reveals or introductions:

"Here's our big number."

"Here's our strategy, and it will transform our business."

"Only nineteen percent of women achieve senior manager positions in the top one hundred companies, and the number who go on to c-level is just thirteen percent, and those numbers are falling..." (Thank you Sheryl Sandberg.)

VIDEO.

The video Kapow is easy to do, and it works. Simply starting a virtual conference with a well-made video can really grab an audience. But if you have to start with a video, be original in your choice or your demands of the video production company.

One word of advice: Unless you have very good reason, keep it short. An absolute maximum would be two minutes, ideally less.

HUMOUR. (UPDATE page number. See Adding Humour chapter on page xx)

PROPS.

I love using props in a virtual presentation. It somehow humanises everything.

Here's an example. You're in the middle of a presentation. You have a dramatic slide. You want to emphasise the message that, as a business you've reached the top of the hard-to-climb mountain, but the way down is going to be treacherous. You could share this with a slide of a mountain.

Or...

You could share this as a drawing of a scary-looking mountain, a stickman at the top, and then an arrow up and arrow down. You use the drawing to illustrate what you mean. Which do you think will be remembered? Which will have an impact?

In my workshops, to illustrate the concept of enhanced delivery, I use my black-and-white camera to act out being a staid, old-fashioned history presenter talking to a camera forty years ago and then contrast with a more modern TV presenter—all energy and passion. As part of the act, I always use a prop—usually the first thing I find on my desk. Some days, it's a teaspoon or my octopus mug. Either way, it helps bring this section to life and even, on occasion, gets a laugh.

Honestly, props are one of the simplest ways to build transparency and help land your presentation.

HERMAN'S ACTION PLAN

- The Kapow is a great way to grab your audience. See if you can add them right now to your presentation.
- Be careful not to confuse your audience. Make the bridge from the Kapow to the point you are making clearly signposted.
- Look through your presentation. Wherever you see a section that looks a little dry, or where you think your participants might fall asleep, use a Kapow.
- Practice your Kapows so they are succinct.
- Make sure the Kapow is relevant and links in with the overall presentation. A random funny story is not going to cut it.