VIRTUAL PRESENTATION MASTERY

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

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Preparing Your Content

Virtual presenting is harder than face-to-face. More things can go wrong, more stuff is outside your control. The more prepared you are, the better. So, in this chapter, we'll look at planning a virtual presentation.

Use PISA when planning.

PISA is one of the most important players in virtual presenting. Knowing your PISA will help ensure your purpose is really clear, and there will be an impact, because if it isn't and there isn't, particularly with an online audience, you will lose focus.

I see so many virtual presentations, which are essentially just information dumps.

I see a lot of this…

Client: "Can you do a sales presentation on your widget?"

Presenter: "Here's a load of info on the widget. Features, history, plans, developments, alternatives, uses, advantages…. some graphs, some data and more graphs and…."

Client reaction? "Zzzzzzzzzzz"

Exec: Can you update leadership on project Y?

Presenter: "Here's everything—and I mean everything we've done on project Y.... so you know how hard we've worked and how much stuff we've done. Then, if you're still breathing, I'm going to talk about all of it, and I mean all of it—months of stuff, as well as features, benefits, disadvantages, data…."

Exec reaction? "Aaaaarrrghhh!"

In face-to-face presentations, this is bad enough, but in virtual, the problem is far bigger. Why? Remember, your audience is already having a tough time focusing. Plus, you don't have the communication clues you get with face to face. There's little body language going on, so the presenter can't adjust the presentation if the audience is losing interest.

These presentations are just information dumps.

Purpose and impact help your audience see beyond the dump.

Get PISA right, and not only will you have the audience leaning in towards you—get it— you'll have laid the foundation for a great virtual presentation. It takes ten to twenty minutes to establish PISA and will save you and your audience a lot of pain later.

Understanding PISA.

PISA

Purpose

Impact

So what?

Audience

As you begin to plan a presentation, you need to know:

- P: What's the purpose of your virtual presentation?
- I: What's the impact you want to have on the audience? As in, "What do you want to do to them?"
- S: What's the "So what?" As in why do they care? Why should they listen to you? What's the value to the audience?
- A: Audience members. Who are they? What do they want? What do they not want? And what do they need?

First, we need to be clear on purpose.

Here's an example: "The purpose of the conference is to reassure partner organisations, inspire my sales team, and get everyone networking and building business opportunities. The impact I want to have is leaving my audience excited about the next speakers and also realising that today the audience members have a chance to grow their businesses and their income."

Important note: You don't necessarily share this with the audience. This is to give you focus and purpose.

Consider the impact you want to have on the audience.

Do you want them to be excited, scared, inspired, interested, intrigued? Then, make sure those words resonate through the rest of your presentation.

So, far so good. However, we can increase the energy and focus of this with the following two-part exercise.

Part One.
Give yourself one minute to write down the purpose and impact of your presentation. As in, "The purpose of the conference is to reassure partner organisations, inspire my sales team, and get everyone networking and building business opportunities.

The impact I want to have is to leave my audience excited about the next speakers and also realising that today the audience members have a chance to grow their businesses and their incomes."

Notice that there will often be a little merging of the purpose and impact. That's okay.

Part Two.
Now write down an exaggerated version of the purpose and impact.

"The purpose of the conference is to reassure partner organisations that we are passionate about working with their brilliant teams and to really inspire our amazing sales team. Then, do some great networking with you guys, so we can all grow our businesses and get loads of work.

The impact I want to have is leaving you all brilliantly engaged by the day, as well as inspired, motivated, and super excited about the future of our partnership."

How did you feel when writing the exaggerated version?

Try saying both versions aloud to a colleague, remembering not to read it. Put it in your own words. How did they respond?

This is important. Notice the language of the exaggerated version is simpler and less corporate. To the speaker, that can often feel a bit overblown, inauthentic, and salesy. The important thing is not how you feel but what it does for the most important people in the virtual space: your audience.

Which did they prefer? The normal or exaggerated? How did you deliver the exaggerated version as opposed to the normal version? What did they say about your energy levels?

When people share the exaggerated purpose and impact, their energy levels rise to reflect the more energetic words. This enhanced energy is really attractive to the audience. They will often give feedback that you were much more convincing and confident. Quite often, they prefer the words, too. They are more direct, spoken from the heart, and the words are less business-y.

Just writing down the purpose and impact and following through on that will make your virtual communication much clearer. But taking the time to enhance your thinking gives you the opportunity to create a much better connection. It takes five minutes to do this exercise and can make a huge difference to the quality of most presentations.

That bring us to "So what?"

Or why should we listen to you?

Or what's in it for me?

These are some of the questions an audience is asking as you present. And you need to know the answer to the question before you begin your presentation.

I was asked to speak at an executive networking event. The audience participants were a lovely bunch of people, and I was looking forward to the presentation. The chair got up to introduce the evening. He was holding a sheaf of paper, on which were scrawled a lot of notes.

"I've been asked to say a few words about myself," he said warily. "So, that's what I'm going to do."

There was an appreciative laugh from the audience. They liked this guy. He took out a sheaf of notes. Then he started. I would say he was about seventy-five years old. He started his story at the age of twenty-one. After ten minutes, as he recounted a few career highlights, he had reached the age of twenty-four. Worryingly, we could see he was still on page one of his speech. A healthy smile of anticipation in the audience had turned to sullen indifference.

Fortunately, the leader of this group leaned forward and called up to our chair. "Leslie, I'm afraid I'm going to have to stop you there. You've gone a little over time."

Leslie looked baffled and a little embarrassed. "I said it wouldn't work… talking about myself."

He got a laugh. Then with a smile, he turned to the leader. "But you insisted." Huge laugh. He looked out over the audience. "You lot were thinking: Give us something useful. And I wasn't. So, I'm going to give you something—which might hopefully be of use…"

The audience shifted awkwardly. We were thinking: "Is he really going to keep talking?"

"Three things I've learned," continued Leslie, "One, as Churchill said: "Never, never, never, give up. Two: Keep moving because if you don't, you'll get left behind. And three: Never, never, never go on and on about yourself or your business, as I now realise I've just done. They—your audience and your customers—aren't interested. Talk about them."

He'd finally given the audience the "So what?" and, in return, received a huge round of applause.

So how do we find the answer to the audience's "so what" question?

I'll start with an example of what I mean by finding the "So what?" and then suggest you perform a simple exercise that if you repeat in a real (virtual or face-to-face) presentation, will be the biggest game-changer to the quality of your communication.

I was working with a senior analyst for a finance company. She was recommending some telecom stock. She said the "So what?" was simple. If her front office invested in the stock, then they would make money. I told her I still wasn't grabbed. She then said that it was undervalued because investors presumed that this previously government-owned stock was still swathed in red tape. In fact, she said, she had personally visited the company and knew that this was not the case. The new owners had cut back red tape, and the company was performing ahead of expectations. She continued, "What's more, most analysts don't know this."

I finished her sentence. "So, if people get in now, then your company will make a lot of money?"

She smiled.

"Yes."

She now had her 'So what?"

Finding the "So what?" exercise.

To complete this exercise, you'll need a colleague or friend to play the role of the audience.

First, explain to them the purpose of your presentation and the impact you want to have on your audience. This will give them context. The exaggerated one usually works best for this exercise; as I say, it will already have an element of "So what?"

Next try and present your "So what?" to your "audience." His or her job is to put themselves into your prospective audience's shoes and keep pushing back until they feel really grabbed. It's at that moment that you know you have your "So what?"

The why?

If you're still struggling with finding the "So what?" then follow Simon Sinek's advice and find the "Why?" The "Why" of "Why your audience needs to listen to your presentation." Get the "Why" right and the rest will follow.

To help with this, get your role-playing audience member to keep asking "why." Like this:

You: The purpose of this presentation is to explain why we should invest in X stock.

Audience: Why?

You: Because we will make money.

Audience: Why should that matter?

You: Because we are going through a tough time, and we need this.

Audience: Why now?

You: Because this is opportunity will go soon.

Audience: Why?

You: Because others will invest, and we will be left behind.

Here you've finally found your "So what?": "If you invest in X stock now, you will make more money. If you wait, you will lose the opportunity because other investors will grab it up." If you can't find the answer to "so what?" then in all honesty you haven't got a presentation.

Finally, the audience.

The audience members are the most important people in the virtual room. "More important than me?" you ask. In their eyes, "Yes."

Put yourself in their shoes. The virtual audience is a hive of wants, needs, fears, excitement, boredom, hopes, and desires.

And here's the big question for you. Do you, as a presenter, want to engage with any of that? Or are you simply hoping to just get through it—to block out this wall of noise and get to the end? Because if that's your intention then you've already lost.

If you haven't even worked out what they want or what they don't want, or what they need, then how hard is it going to be for you to make it relevant?

Most of my clients talk about wanting to be more engaging. However, many of them start off seeing this part of the workshop as the least important when it's actually the most important.

An audience exercise.

So, if you want to engage, do this little exercise. It'll take you and your colleagues five minutes and will make a huge difference to your presentation.

What do the audience members want from your presentation?

What do they want in the content of the presentation?

What do they not want in the content?

What do they want in the style—in the way the presentation is delivered?

What do they not want in the style of the presentation?

Step 1. Put yourself in the shoes of your audience. Imagine you are about to watch *your* presentation.

Step 2. If you are in the audience, what do you want and *not want* from the presentation, both in the content and in the style (the way it's delivered)?

Step 3. Now, having thought about what the audience wants, you are ready to move to audience needs. What do they need from you? And what they need can be very different from what they want. For instance, they want a service that is as cheap as possible, but what they need is a service that works every time.

Other questions you might ask:

Did you identify key members of the audience?

Have you anticipated audience reaction?

Is the information geared towards the audience's level of language?

How long should the presentation be? Very few people have ever complained that a presentation was too short. If in doubt, shorter is almost always better.

Presenting to senior leaders.

Once upon a time, I had meetings with theatre producers in which my aim was not to offend. I would almost creep into their offices, mentally kneel and smile hopefully. If I was nice, I reasoned, then they would like me, and then they would be more likely to buy my work.

Of course, this worked brilliantly. As a result of this tactic, they went, "Oh, he's a nice guy, a bit wimpy, and has no opinions and very little confidence. He's the chap I want to work with."

Um, no that didn't happen. EVER.

It took a friend to reveal what was really going on. First, she asked me to pretend to be a confident producer. She simply pitched to me as me at three levels of confidence.

Level one. She pitched a script to me where she was *less* confident than me. Where she deliberately lowered her status.

Level two. She matched my confidence levels.

Level three. She pretended to be more confident than me.

Which one did I prefer? Which one would you prefer? Of course, it's a no-brainer. I much preferred it when she matched my confidence levels.

Think about it. When you get someone in to do some work around your house, do you like the over-bearing builder? No? Because they irritate, lack respect, and don't appear to be listening.

Do you like the cringing builder who just wants the work and is a bit pathetic? No. Why? Because he comes across as needy, dithery, doesn't get to the point, is uncertain, lacking confidence.

And the one who is as confident as you but also respects you?

So, next time you present to the board, match the confidence levels of its members. You respect them, but you present as their equal. Respect their position and roles. They do not want you to be less than them. They want you to inspire them to have confidence in you.

More about presenting to senior leaders.

Ask people for help. Most people love to help. Before you present, get an ally on the board to support your presentation. For instance, if it includes some finance, then why not ask the senior finance person who's going to be at the presentation to see if she wouldn't mind checking your numbers? Once you've asked her to help, not only will that improve your presentation, but you will have someone senior who is personally invested in it. Finally, in

asking for help, you're actively networking and raising your profile.

Remember to be succinct. If your senior audience has given you thirty minutes to present, then plan for twenty. Things can go wrong in virtual land. Previous meetings can run over, tech can crash which means less time for your presentation. Be clear on your purpose and get to the point. Your audience is time-poor and wants to spend as little time in front of a screen as possible. You have twenty minutes to pitch your idea? Then maybe pitch it in ten minutes and leave the rest to Q&A, which is where most pitches are won anyway.

Keep it simple. Unless your audience is enthralled by the minutiae, then keep it simple. Keep the details in your back pocket—perhaps as an appendix. By simplifying, you will land the main points of your presentation. If they want the details, they can ask.

Making the invites.

Now that you know what you're going to say, you need folks to say it to. It's time to create the invitation.

The rules on invites are not that much different than they would be with a live party or event.

Follow these basics:

Offer the details: when, where, why. Most of these can be answered simply by filling in the invite template.

Tell them how long the presentation will be.

- Only invite people who'd benefit from being there.
- Make sure everyone is using the same version of your platform. For instance, if you're using the advanced version of Zoom, and your audience hasn't got the latest update, then it simply won't work as well.
- Give them contact details for the day of the presentation, should they get lost trying to sign in.
- Give them hope. "You will have a good time, honest." Make attending sound worth their while.

Additional tips to help you prepare.

Consider sending your deck before the presentation so if all else fails, you can have a phone conference and present your deck via your mobile. However, be aware that this will kill any surprises, and people probably will do no more than scan through it.

A number of my clients do this before a big pitch. When they present, they do so without slides, which means the client can see them properly instead of just an omnipresent deck, while flicking through the PowerPoint at their leisure.

Join your meeting early. If you have a technician, verify that all links and presentations are working. If appropriate, share a "Welcome" slide that says your meeting will be starting shortly. Consider providing a quick review of housekeeping items. If the audience members must leave their cameras off, have each speaker identify him or herself when speaking, and add a photo/video of the speakers.

Prepare everything beforehand. Load all the exercises and presentations into your computer beforehand and put them in the right order. You will have more than enough on your hands, so don't sort things out on the fly. Provide a clear outline of everything you are going to cover and what the session objectives are.

For those really important presentations. Do a dummy run before the presentation. For example, if you're presenting to the CEO's team at three in the afternoon, do a quick run of the first five minutes with your IT help person at nine that morning. Should there be any issues, you can sort them out before the main presentation.

Be a strong leader. If you're taking part in a team presentation, make sure you have someone leading the call, and make sure they are clear that strong dynamic leadership is what you're looking for.

Use music. I'll listen to some music before pretty much every presentation to get me in the mood. Usually fun and high energy. And what's more, it's usually on when the first guests arrive. Really makes a difference for me and my audience.

HERMAN'S ACTION PLAN

- To avoid information dump always remember PISA. Purpose. What's the purpose of your presentation? Impact. What's the impact you want to have on the audience? So What? What's in it for us? Audience. Who are they, and what do they want and not want from your presentation?
- Try the exaggeration exercise. Once you've written out the purpose and impact of your presentation, then write out an exaggerated version. If you aim for the exaggerated, then you will definitely hit the normal version. You'll find this exercise gives a useful alternative.
- Make sure the invite is brief and inviting.