

8 Ways to Maximize Your Presentation

By Susan Schilke; February 27, 2018

You have been asked to be a speaker at an industry event. Or you need to address your entire company about strategy and what's next. Or you have a meeting with your team and want to communicate a critical piece of information and change their behavior. How do you make this opportunity most effective? Here are strategies for making the most of any time you need to be seen, heard and remembered:

1. **Open and close strong.** No matter how long the presentation, your two best opportunities to impress your audience with concepts they will take with them are the beginning and end of your talk. So always:
 - Memorize your opening and conclusion
 - Start with a story or illustration of your key point – from word one. Do your welcome/intro later. Layer the story with a few rich details to create visuals and feelings in the audience.
 - Circle back to your opening for the closing to close the loop.
 - Take advantage of the chance to regain full attention by announcing your last point. “In conclusion...” “To wrap up...” “Finally, I want to leave you with...”
2. **Get the audience involved early.** Most people want to contribute and are more engaged when given the opportunity shortly after the beginning of a presentation. For small groups, ask a question or solicit an example and use their input. In larger groups, give them a question to consider and discuss at their table or with a partner seated next to them.
3. **Bookend your presentation.** After your strong opening and before your memorable close, preview the presentation with the classic pattern – outline of key points to begin your presentation; key points explained in the middle; and a summary of key points at the end. In other words, tell them what you're going to tell them (outline); tell them; then tell them what you told them (summary).
4. **The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!** Have one overarching idea or concept that you can share in a simple statement (and diagram on a cocktail napkin). Everything else supports this statement.
5. **Minimize your deck; maximize your handout.** Keep your visuals to images and key words and distribute a handout with more information from your presentation and/or resources and reading recommendations. People will value your words more during the speech and appreciate the opportunity to revisit or go further with a robust handout (or follow-up email). Don't distribute until after the presentation but promise one early.
6. **Add video clips, music and visuals** – keep these short and punchy for best impact.
7. **Design your presentation to shrink or expand.** For more formal speaking engagements with time allocations for speakers, make sure you stay within your time, AND be ready with more if time allows. So strategically select the material you will skim or omit if there is a time crunch, and have an activity or additional content ready just in case.
8. **Prepare and practice.** Anytime you're getting up in front of a group to deliver an important message, take the time to craft your offering and fine-tune your delivery. The amount of time invested should be directly related to how much you want to be remembered and change behavior.

Anytime you're in front of a group it's a unique opportunity to have impact. Follow these tips to make the most of it!