

# Present Like a Pro

Determine what you want the audience to learn and boil your content down to three main points

How many times do you get asked to present a topic to your customers, work peers, or others within your organization? It's probably not a daily occurrence, but I bet you do a fair amount of it during the course of a year. I've sat through a large number of presentations in my career and am well aware of the typical pitfalls—125 slide decks with 200 words per slide, presenters not familiar with the content who ramble from point to point, presenters given 25 minutes for the topic, but are still jabbering away 50 minutes later, and many, many more. This month, I want to discuss tips that will help you present like a pro every time it's requested of you.

I'm often asked by people who have to create and deliver a presentation if I would mind looking it over for them. After glancing through the material, I always ask the same question: "What do you want your audience to take away from this presentation?" This is a valuable question to ask yourself before doing any work on a presentation. Working out where you want the audience to be at the end of your presentation will make the rest of the preparation go much smoother.

Once you determine what you want your audience to learn, it's time to start figuring out what you want to tell them. Do yourself a favor, and don't start hammering out bullet points on PowerPoint slides just yet. Grab a piece of paper and pen and start writing down your thoughts. Jot down notes and also keep a list of other thoughts that pop in your head as you're working through the process, as this is a brainstorming activity as well. When that's complete, make every attempt to boil the content down to three main points. Why three you ask? Great question!

Our brains have evolved in a way to protect us from harm. We needed choices to stay out of harm's way, but too many choices could cause

paralysis, which is equally dangerous. As humans, we like to have options, but not too many options. Three seems to be the ideal number. The earth is the third rock from the sun, the Olympics award three medals per sport, there are only three primary colors (red, blue, yellow), and the Holy Trinity according to Christian Doctrine is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Marketers have long known that things grouped in threes have a higher likelihood of being remembered by the audience. That's why there were three Stooges instead of four. And how many little elves were featured in Rice Krispies commercials? That's right three ... Snap, Crackle, and Pop. Limiting your main points to three allows your audience a better opportunity to connect with your message and remember it. This also helps you maintain focus on your message, which positively impacts the overall communication.

The order you use to work through this process is important. Wait until you know the objective of the presentation and have the message boiled down to three key points before creating your PowerPoint presentation. This ensures your message drives the PowerPoint ... not the other way around.

The next time you're required to give a presentation, remember these three key items:

1. Plan your outcome—where do you want your audience to end up?
2. What do you need to say/present to get the audience there?
3. What are your three main points? Drive them home.

There is a lot of truth in the old saying "a goal without a plan is just a wish." If you have a goal of losing 20 pounds, you better have a plan as well. If not, you're just hoping to lose weight.

If you want to deliver a professional presentation, you better have a plan, concise messages, and drive those messages home. **PS**



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