



Stepping Up to Stand Out: How to Deliver Presentations That Win Projects

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BO2151 Public speaking is an all-too-common fear. How do you conquer that fear and drive your small business to success in an industry where proposal presentations are common? You learn to step up and stand out! Come and join our discussion to share the experiences that you and your peers face daily. Learn the 5 simple “don’ts” of giving any successful presentation. Learn to step out of the bullet-list box. Learn and share exciting new ideas that can use affordable technology to take your presentation from “one more meeting” to “an event you do not want to miss.” Walk into every presentation armed with the confidence that success is within your grasp and that you are fully prepared to clear this last hurdle. Whether that selection is made by 1 person or 100, this class is designed to help you research, prepare, and present and follow up. Also, learn what to do once the presentation is over and the decision is made. If your position involves even 1 presentation this year, you cannot miss this class.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this class, you will be able to:

- Confidently research, prepare, and give presentations to any number of people in any situation
- List 5 things to never do before, during, or after any presentation
- Use any presentation as a means to open continuing communication with potential clients and build relationships
- Explore new and exciting presentation methods that go well beyond the standard PowerPoint presentation given by competitors

About the Speaker

Curt Moreno is the owner and editor of Kung Fu Drafter, a blog that is CAD-centric and geek peripheral. He is an active freelance content creator for clients such as the Autodesk, HP and others. He is also a contributing editor to Cadalyst magazine as well as the AutoCAD Content Manager for AUGIWorld Magazine and a highly rated Autodesk University speaker. Curt currently lives in Houston where he is the CAD Coordinator for a Texas-based engineering firm, is a public speaker and trainer, and enjoys spending time with his dog and horses. Visit his blog at www.kungfudrafter.com, follow him on Twitter at @WKFD, or search for him on Google+.

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Introduction

This course is intended for the freelancer, the sole proprietor and employed CAD or design professional, who are responsible for creating and delivering presentations. Incorporating the following information, professionals in both large and small organizations will learn the techniques for developing presentations that get attention.

The goal of this session is to give you the skills to confidentially create the sort of presentations that stand out from your competition. Whether you are a professional working as part of a team to develop presentations for others to deliver or you are the person designated the presenter, everyone

The Importance of Great Presentation Skills

“There is no such thing as presentation talent, it is called Presentation Skills” ~ David Phillips

In the world of design professionals, the process of bringing new projects to your firm very often involves requests for proposals (RFP) that go out to multiple design firms. This methodology is designed to bring a variety of design solutions to the table as well as satisfy any selection requirements that an organization may have. To weather this process a firm must not only have a technically sound design that satisfies schedule, budget and innovation requirements, it must package and deliver the proposal in a manner that appeals to the selection committee. The difference between successfully achieving the balance between technical and marketing appeal means the difference between your firm winning the project or not.

What’s so hard about presenting?

As design professionals, we too often assume that our expertise in one arena translates directly as expertise in another arena. Being a brilliant civil engineer or gifted architect does not necessarily mean that you are a gifted presenter. It means that you have taken the time to learn the technical aspects of your field and the effort to practice them until you have reached a level that you can be considered an “expert” in your field. Therein lies the luckiest stroke of all, because great presenters are not born, they are created.

Perhaps you believe that you suffer from glossophobia, the fear of public speaking. Perhaps you do not necessarily “fear” the thought of speaking in public, but the idea causes anxiety because you believe that you are simply not good at it. Either way, these are the two most common reasons that people bow out of the opportunity to stand up and deliver the presentations that win jobs for the firm. These are the reasons that people willingly give up the opportunity to be the hero, the star. However, it does not have to be that way.

Just as the brilliant engineer or architect took the time to learn and practice to become experts, you can learn the skills to transform yourself from anxious to the level of “expert” in the field of presenting and public speaking. It all starts with the decision to stop viewing “public speaking” as a “gift” and regard it as one more technical tool in your arsenal of skills.

Who should step up to be a presenter?

Now that we have established that becoming a great presenter is a matter of skill development, it should be clear that anyone can be a great presenter. That means that anyone in your firm

can be the hero, the star. Provided, of course, that person follows the following tried and true presentation advice.

The Presentation Process

Whether or not a presentation is great or simply “adequate” is determined from the very beginning. This might seem obvious, but too many people are confused as to where the “beginning” of a presentation is. If you think that a presentation begins

So when does a presentation begin?

If a presentation does not begin when you step in front of the selection committee, when does it? The answer to that is simple: the presentation begins the moment that your firm decides to pursue a project. If that is a little too abstract then get ready because here come a list!

- Pick your team
- Gather Input
- Narrow input
- Cut ruthlessly
- Rehearse
- Sleep and deliver
- Dissect

Seven steps is that is all it takes to make your way from commitment to conquest of a new project. Some of these steps may seem obvious, while others may seem cryptic, but each is a necessary component of an overall sustainable presentation workflow. Below we will elaborate on each of these steps to assure that you have the necessary information to master the process!

Pick Your Team

A winning presentation is the product of a well-managed team of creative and design professionals. That team begins with by bringing together the correct people for your team. So what should a winning team look like? That is easy to answer: every project team will look different. The reason, of course, is that every firm will pursue different projects, in different markets. That being said, there are some skill sets that routinely find themselves as staples of winning presentation teams.

- Proposal Project Manager – This professional is the ringmaster of the process that is required to produce winning proposal presentations. Since an active firm can have any number of presentations in develop at any one time, it is essential have a manager who can allocate resources to insure every presentation is ready on time, every time
- Engineers or Architects – These professionals bring the technical design skills and licensed credentials necessary to imagine and oversee an adequate design solution to the challenge posed in the request for proposal

- CAD Drafters and Graphic Designers – These design professionals bring the software and design skills to the team. Not only do they produce a large portion of the content displayed in the presentation with programs like AutoCAD, Revit, Photoshop, among others but also the artistic eye to package the proposed design in an appealing color scheme and layout
- Copy / Technical Writers – Since a proposal presentation is a special mix of written, technical design, and speech it is an absolute must to have a member of the team that is a capable writer. This professional will translate sterile, design-oriented details into succinct wording for slides and interesting phrases for delivery by the presenter

Gather Input

When beginning the process of developing a presentation it is necessary to have decision makers involved from the very beginning. In fact, the more input that can be contributed on day one, the better. This is the time when the engineer or architect, project manager, team members or any other influence from vice presidents to sub consultants should be brought together to brainstorm as much as possible.

Bringing as many ideas to the table at the very beginning of the process assures that the presentation is born with the greatest number of possibilities. The development team will be able to make decisions that determine the direction of the design from the start. This will help to avoid backtracking that can be costly in man-hours, but even more costly in the overall available time before the due date!

Narrow the Input

The process of developing a winning presentation is largely about becoming increasingly fine-tuned at each milestone. With that in mind, as the presentation matures and reaches each milestone, the number of reviewers and people with input should be reduced. The process should move from an open free for all to a final stage where only the core team and one major stakeholder have input.

By hashing the big possibilities out early and increasingly narrowing the allowed input a presentation will come together efficiently with a single vision. This is how project winning presentations are brought together and deadlines are respected.

Cut Ruthlessly

Every aspect of a presentation's content must satisfy two very important requirements. First, the content must be thorough enough to completely convey the full scope and benefit of the proposed design. After all, if the selection committee does not understand how fully the proposed design will solve the design dilemma. Second, the content must be concise enough to provide a swiftly paced presentation that keeps the selection committee's attention. The key to keeping a presentation's content concise is to cut ruthlessly.

After a presentation begins to flesh out with detail and graphics a sharp has to be applied to determine what can be removed. To a novice presentation developer a fully details, well fleshed

presentation may seem to not have anything that can be “cut”. It is the eye of an experience presentation developer that will cut away the fat, infusing the presentation with the brevity necessary to be informative and concise. Look to these common areas to begin your ruthless efficiency:

- Slide copy – Every sentence on every slide has to be as efficient as possible. Text on any given slide should be enough not to explain a concept, but to act as a mnemonic to bring the audience back to a mental point in the presentation
- PowerPoint bells and whistles – Nobody wants to see our text or image slide in or fly off the screen. Animation of slide elements should be avoided in all but the few situations where the animation brings poignant and specific value to the current point being delivered
- Number of slides – There are no rules of how long a slide deck for a presentation should be. However, every slide present in the deck must have a purpose that illustrates, expands on, or transitions one design feature to the next. Any slide that does not clearly fit one of these categories must be considered for removal

Ruthless cutting in every area becomes even more important when the design presentation nears, or exceeds the allotted time for the presentation. Since most presentation meetings have a defined period for the presenter to speak, cutting content is the only way to insure that a presentation can be delivered in the allotted time.

Rehearse Rehearse and Rehearse Again

While cutting is the only way to insure that presentation does not exceed the time allotted for the presentation, there is only one way determine how long it takes to present the design presentation. Rehearsal is a practice that satisfies multiple needs in the development process of a winning presentation:

- Rehearsal helps determine the necessary length of time to complete the entire slide deck and help determine pacing changes
- Rehearsal helps the presenter not only commit the presentation to memory but also practice their inflection and cadence to create mental and emotional high points to draw in the audience
- Rehearsal helps cement the design concepts into the presenter’s mind making the common “Q&A” period of a presentation meeting far more impressive and agile

Sleep and Deliver

A successful presenter will know the importance of personal preparation. Months and hundreds of man-hours may have already been invested in the development of the presentation, but it is the final hours that matter to the presenter.

Successful presenters always take the time to make certain they have minimized the possibility for things to go awry prior to the presentation. These are often overlooked, yet vital keys to the success of any winning presentation:

- Pack all the necessary presentation material and equipment the day before the presentation
- Get a good night's sleep before the presentation
- Leave plenty of travel time to insure there is no rushing to the meeting
- Have a good, light meal prior to presentation
- Arrive to the meeting location with time to quickly scan the room
- Drink a glass of water or sports drink before presenting to prevent dry mouth

These simple, but effective tips will help any presenter take their delivery up a notch. However, in order to be able to take advantage of them time must be scheduled in the development process. If your staff is working to the very last minute, leaving barely enough time to get to the meeting the delivery will be severely impaired.

Dissect

Developing and delivering a winning project is only part of the job. Even with all of the preparation and effort that it takes to get to the end of winning presentation, there is still more to do. This final step has nothing to do with having the selection committee select your team, but it has everything to do with being selected for the next project. That final, crucial step is to dissect your current presentation in a project postmortem.

A project postmortem is a process that can only be undertaken after all of the development, preparation and delivery work is done. As soon as the selection committee's decision is announced time should be set aside and the development team gathered for review.

Timeliness of the postmortem is all important and marketing schedules should be created with this process in mind. A postmortem is not something that would be "nice if we have time." Rather it should be a regular and expected component of the proposal process.

While the general concept of a project postmortem is to determine what has made this proposal successful or not, and so could encompass any number of issues, there are some common high points that should always be on the dissection list:

- What is the single largest contributing factor to the proposal being successful or not?
- What were the three main contributors to the proposal being completed on time?
- Which team members should be identified for extraordinary work?
- What were the standout turning points and stumbling blocks?
- What can be changed to make future presentation more successful and faster to develop

Bringing your development team together to have a frank and open discussion on these, as well as other matters, can be a great benefit. It is important that your team know that their input is valued and that they can make a difference. A thorough postmortem can turn even an abject failure of a proposal presentation into a successful process.

The List of Five

Now that we have determined what the process of developing a winning presentation can look like we should examine some of the most common challenges faced by presenters. The following list contains five of the most common issues faced by presenters, both old and new.

- Slow Down
- Eye Contact
- Talk To, Not At
- Tell a Story
- Thank Them

These five simple tips can help any amateur step on stage, ready to deliver a winning presentation. They can also help sharpen the skills and remind the seasoned presentation professional of the small things we sometimes lose sight of.

Slow Down

A presentation is not a race, even if you are constrained by time limits. The pacing of a presentation is everything when it comes to making a meaningful connection with the selection committee. Too often inexperienced presenters will be intimidated by time limitations and speak far too quickly. This is a sure way to take even the most well developed presentation from possible success to likely failure.

Pro Tip - Keeping a reasonable speaking pace is not difficult. Regular breathing will help to slow your rate of speech and help you remain calm. Additionally, proper enunciation and recognizing punctuation will also help you to speak evenly and at an even pace.

Eye Contact

A presentation is largely about what most people would refer to as "first impressions" and that means a presentation is about trust and confidence. One of the surest way to instill trust when meeting a new person is to maintain eye contact. This may be the single most useful practice any presenter or other professional can employ.

Pro Tip - A beginner may assume that eye contact with a group of people is not possible. However, when it comes to groups, the key is the appearance of eye contact. Simply shift your gaze to different areas of the group, always picking a new person to connect with.

Talk "to", Not "at"

Since we have already established that winning presentations creating trust, everything about the presenter's actions should go towards building that trust. The tone of voice used when delivering a presentation is as important, if not more so, than the content of the presentation itself. All people prefer to be part of a conversation rather than the recipient of a monologue of details. Such a tone can seem too automated, insincere and even condescending. All of which will quickly erode the trust of the selection committee.

***Pro Tip** - Maintaining a conversational is a sure way to get past this hurdle. Over rehearsing of a word-by-word script can work against the sought after conversational tone. Instead rehearse to commit milestones to memory. This will insure the sense of spontaneity and genuine conversation.*

Tell a Story

Successful presentations are successful for two reasons. First, the proposed design must satisfy all of the design requirements of the challenge. Second, the presenter creates meaningful high points in the minds of the selection committee members, making it easy for them to mentally return to the presentation content. One means of achieving this is to relate the presentation as story. Like a successful story, a presentation should have a beginning, middle and end. People love great stories. We read them. We watch them. We spend billions of dollars per year on great stories!

***Pro Tip** - The story that your presentation tells should have all the earmarks of a great tale. There should be a villain (the design challenge), a victim (the public or private stakeholders) and a hero (your firm). Your story should also clearly show the distress of the victim and how the hero dispatches the villain.*

Thank Them for Their Time

The final entry on the list of common issues faced by presenters should not be an issue at all because it is one of common courtesy. Following the completion of the presentation there is often a period of interactive questioning. This opportunity provides the perfect opportunity to show not only the preparedness of your firm, but also how pleasant you will be to work with. When asked questions, smile and be attentive. Pause briefly before answering to convey thoughtfulness and make eye contact in your answer. Before taking your leave, be sure to thank the committee for taking time from their schedule to hear your presentation.

***Pro Tip** - Even if there is no period of interaction following your presentation, graciousness is still a must. Prior to leaving the stage take a moment to thank the audience for sharing their limited time with you. As a final note, let them know that you are looking forward to working with them on the project. This subtle gesture can convey a sense of certainty and confidence.*

Relationship Building

Any presentation, regardless of timing or scope, is an opportunity to communicate with a potential client and to build a relationship. Capitalizing on that opportunity is a must and that process can be successful even if the presentation itself is not.

Preparation for any presentation should involve due diligence that sheds light not only on the project at hand but also the values of the selection committee or organization. This information should provide topics of conversation that are of interest to all parties. Common interests and courtesy are basic foundations of all polite discourse and will serve you well in seeming

congenial and easy to work with in the eyes of most people. Using these simple social mechanism to your advantage is not only intelligent, it is a must.

***Pro Tip** – It is easy to be gracious and go on to build a relationship if your presentation is so good that your firm is selected. It is, however, to achieve the same result when your presentation and proposal were not selected requires more effort. Making contact with the selection committee members and not only thanking them for the opportunity to make your presentation and offer to assist them with their project should the need arise. Combined with periodic contact will keep your firms name in front prospective clients.*

Innovators Innovate

Let's face it, PowerPoint presentations are dull. There was a time when bringing a PowerPoint slide deck to a meeting made your firm a standout, but that time has passed. Today everyone turns to PowerPoint, on the PC, as the de facto presentation software package. Those who work with Macs turn to the very similar package Keynote. In either case, the world has become a place of seemingly generic presentations. This is completely counter-intuitive in a process that requires a standout presentation. Instead of just reaching for a tried and true (and boring) tool, like PowerPoint, realize that every presentation is a chance to innovate.

Please be clear that discussion on “presentation innovation” is not in reference to the content of the presentation. While the importance of content should go without saying, the innovation we are focused on is in the delivery of the presentation content. The intent is to raise the impact of your presentation method beyond boring slide after boring slide.

This might seem like a difficult thing to do since the business presentation world is dominated by PowerPoint and, to a lesser degree, Keynote. Do not let this brand dominance deter you! As design professionals you exist in a world that affords many avenues for innovation in presentation methods. Below are a few ideas that can be used individually, or in concert, to deliver presentation content in a manner that will stand out in the minds of the audience.

Animation and Video Additions

The first concept that we suggest to bring life and memorable moments to your presentation is one that is already increasingly becoming the norm. Both animation and video are powerful tools that can bring vague and advanced concepts to life through moving images. Much like a comparison between the comparison of the written and spoken word, an animated slide can deliver an impact that is far greater than a still image alone. Modern presentation audiences are products of a multimedia world and, as such, they expect visual components to illustrate the integral concepts of your presentation.

Fortunately, recent advances in both computer hardware and software have brought the possibility of custom animations for any presentation within the grasp of any size firm. Applications such as Autodesk 3ds Max, Autodesk InfraWorks and Adobe Premiere, among others, bring what was once in the realm of only the most powerful corporate and media giants to the hands of anyone with the designer to master these tools.

***Example** – In a situation where a presentation is being delivered concerning the construction of a new office building, it is certainly possible to convey the design concept with still images. Simple text and still images, such as photographs and renderings, will do the job. However, an animation illustrating the construction process from raw parcel to finished building would have a far greater impact on the audience. Not because it somehow includes more information (although it can), but rather because moving images are more entertaining and captivating.*

3D Printing

A newer technology taking root in the design community is 3D printing. With each passing year, the cost of 3D printing, or rapid “prototyping”, hardware falls lower and lower. Meanwhile the quality of the object produced rises and rises. Today companies like MakerBot, Cubify and FlashForge all offer affordable models capable of adding great value to your presentation. All at price that is fairly affordable, especially when the cost is applied against multiple projects.

But what does a 3D printed object have to contribute to a presentation? Two words: tactile interaction.

While most firms make a presentation that involves overcrowded slides with a few images and maybe an animation or two, a presentation with 3D printed objects adds new dimensions. Introducing 3D objects offers the audience to handle a representation of the design in their hands. Whether the presentation deals with mechanical designs for objects, like gears, or civil designs, like drainage revitalization, giving the audience a chance to interact with the design will cement the presentation in their brains in a way that a slide alone cannot.

***Example** – The delivery of a presentation of a design proposal for a drainage channel revitalization could be greatly enhanced through the application of 3D printing. Where other firms have presentation that are purely two dimensional, even in the case of animations, a 3D printed model can bring the concept into the real world with tangible objects. Interaction does not need to be limited to a “print” of the design. Different states of the project site can be printed, first depicting the existing conditions and later switching out segments to depict the proposed design. Allowing the audience to physically handle the design can contribute a great deal in making the design “real” while others remain concepts.*

Website After-bites

A common dilemma faced by many presenters is the limits of allotted time and proposal length. These constraints often force development teams to only briefly mention, or completely exclude, some projects and design details. Being forced to leave out references, past projects or design details can lead to difficult decisions. Worse yet, it can lead to leaving out details that could turn a winning presentation into a losing presentation.

With today’s technology there is no real reason that any constraints on time or length should force a presenter to keep great details from the audience. By simply adding web addresses or QR codes to the body of the proposal an audience to online resources for greater details and

additional references. Additionally online resources can also contain multimedia assets that would otherwise be unavailable to the audience following the presentation end.

Beyond a single “simple” page, a presenting firm could build a client-specific asset portal leading to reusable content regarding past projects similar to the one proposed. This methodology would create a library of reusable content for inclusion in later presentation deliveries.

***Example** – Project history is important aspect of any design presentation since they show not only design capability, but lend authority via past success. Including a link or QR code in the text of a proposal can help circumvent content limitations. More than that, it gives the audience an opportunity to revisit not only the additional reference content but also the actual presentation content.*

Live Drawing

A well delivered presentation is more than a few minutes strung together with slides and laser pointers. A well delivered presentation is a well-managed spectacle of sorts. It is part informative display and part carnival attraction. And like any spectacle it must have a unique draw, a quality that reaches into crowds and captures the people’s attention to hold it rapt. That is the key to transforming a routine, boring meeting into a one of a kind event.

One possible avenue to making the bridge from average to amazing is to do away with PowerPoint completely. Instead bring a live aspect to your presentation that no other vendor can match. By replacing the standard slide deck with an artist who can illustrate the presentation on the fly. Today’s affordable tablet technology from companies like Wacom make this approach not just feasible but also affordable.

***Example** – Instead of the traditional approach of one slide after another, imagine a civil engineer delivering the portion of his presentation that explains the funding cycle for government subsidized capital improvements. In place of a single slide depicting a flowchart, a live artist can begin to quickly illustrate a growing scene featuring the multiple phases of the process. This illustration would be quick, succinct and somewhat humorous. These three qualities, in combination with this original presentation style, can only serve to further cement your firm’s name in the audience’s mind.*

Smartboards

Preparation is the earmark of all good presentations and there is almost nothing that can speak more to preparation than arriving with your own display. The very spectacle of arriving to a presentation with a 70” smartboard, prepared to present an interactive experience is enough to shake the confidence of any competitor who might catch sight of you in the hall. It also speaks of a certain level of expertise that can be expected from a presentation.

Advances in large-screen displays and small, powerful computers bring technology like the Sharp’s Interactive Whiteboard displays into the capable hands of firms of all sizes. Units similar

to this one are self-contained display units with touch capabilities and the capacity to capture input for later review. Beyond a unique and interactive experience, the presence of your own display equipment eliminates the all too common problems involved with connecting your company's laptop to the projector or other display unit provided by the venue. That alone makes the purchase of a smartboard worth the price of admission.

***Example** – Having an interactive smartboard onsite at a presentation offers both the opportunity and capability to transform a presentation into an interactive mark-up session. Take comments from the audience and immediately integrate them into the slide deck. Show possible alternatives and make notes for all to see, live and on the spot! This sort of flexibility displays a great deal of preparedness and adaptability. Furthermore it shows an air of confidence that can truly set your firm aside from the contenders.*

Conclusion

As we have seen, a presentation that captivates audiences and wins projects has to be more than a simple collection of boring slides. In a world of eager competition, a presenter has to come to the podium ready to take chances and risks to rise above the clamor of common competition.

Beginning first with a solid foundation of research, teamwork and preparation any presentation has the potential for greatness. Then channeling that potential with solid delivery techniques, a presenter has the opportunity to captivate and draw in an audience. However, to further the potential of any presentation, innovative delivery techniques must be used to cement the presentation's content in the minds of the audience. The impact that a presentation has on the audience provides the first avenues to building long-lasting relationships, even if the current presentation does not win the job.

Challenge yourself and your team to take your next presentation opportunity to examine your efforts. Then improve the process to develop a better presentation. Arm your presentation team with innovative delivery and practice delivery technique. Above all, challenge yourself and your team to stand out and win the project!