Effective Oral Communication for Sales Presentations

Amanda Ruth, Allen Wysocki, Derek Farnsworth, and Jennifer L. Clark

Introduction

Effective oral communication skills can benefit people in various fields and positions, but it cannot be taught as easily as most personal skills. This article provides strategies and steps for achieving effective oral communication. It is important to keep in mind that practice is essential to acquiring these skills (University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1999).

Speaking effectively is extremely crucial for success in most positions in a formal working environment. It has been proven that employees (associates) spend more time speaking than writing, whether talking on the phone, conversing informally with colleagues, conducting meetings, or making sales presentations. Research also reveals that the higher an employee moves within an organization, the more important speaking skills become (Tebeaux and Wade 1997).

Clearly, effective oral communication is important in all aspects of one's career. This article focuses only on achieving communication skills relating to sales presentations, including preparing for the presentation, making the presentation, delivery “do’s and don’ts” of the presentation, and incorporating visual aids into the presentation.

Preparation

Preparation for the presentation is almost as important as the delivery of the presentation. In sales you must analyze the selling situation and the audience, determine the goal and objective of your presentation, choose and shape the content and the appropriate communication style, and organize the presentation. Each of these presentation preparation steps will be discussed in detail.

Analyzing the Selling Situation

When analyzing the selling situation you must determine why your presentation is essential (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). Knowing the situation will help determine the way you shape your content and choose your style. In this
analysis you need to ask yourself the following questions (Tebeaux and Wade 1997):

- What is the need for the presentation?
- What will happen to the organization after the presentation?
- How does the presentation fit into the organization's situation?
- In what surroundings will you make your presentation?
- How does your presentation relate to your audience's actions?
- How can you help the organization?

An example of analyzing the situation would be to conduct background research on the presentation audience to find out what they do, how you can benefit them, and why they asked for your presentation. Analyzing the selling situation can also facilitate answers to other steps in the communication process.

Analyzing the Audience

Analyzing the audience can be difficult. The audience will determine the success of your presentation (your presentation is successful if your audience responds the way you intended). Effective speaking is always dependent on the audience (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). Identifying how your audience will respond to your presentation depends on knowing the following information about your audience: their educational and cultural background, knowledge of the subject matter, position in the organization, and technical expertise. Knowing your audience's personal and professional profiles will help determine what you should say, what you should not say, and the "tone" you should use (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). For example, you need to investigate the personalities of your audience; this will help you determine whether your style should be relaxed and informal or professional and to the point. Questions that can be used in audience analysis include the following:

- How much does my audience know about me and my presentation?
- What does the audience expect from me?
- What is the audience's attitude toward me and my product or service?
- What are the ages and gender of the audience?
- What position does the audience occupy in the organization?
- What is the educational background of the audience?
- What are the political and religious views of the audience?
- What is the audience's personal information (outside-of-work interests)?

Determining the Goal and Objective

Determining the goal and objective of your presentation will help you design your presentation around a specific purpose. Whether you are trying to sell a product, a service, or an idea, you must keep in mind you are also selling your competence and your value to the organization (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). You must make your purpose evident and relate it to your audience's perspective. Make sure you state the main point in the beginning of the presentation so that your audience knows what the rest of the presentation will cover. State your objective in one simple sentence. For example, once you have determined your objectives, use the "T3" approach: tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and finally tell them what you told them. If you use this approach you will not digress and your main points will be emphasized.

Choosing and Shaping the Content

Choosing and shaping the content can be very complicated. You want to keep your sales presentation short, interesting, and relevant. Choosing meaningful information that will appeal to your audience and situation is very important. For example, including statistics, testimonials, cases, illustrations, history, and narratives in your presentation can help convey your message (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). Overall, make the content interesting, but make sure it pertains to the goal of your presentation.

Choosing the Appropriate Style

Choosing the appropriate presentation style will determine the effectiveness of your content (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). How you speak can make or break a sales presentation. Questions you need to ask yourself as the presenter include the following:

- What kind of tone do I want to use?
- What kind of image do I want to create?
- What level of language (based on audience analysis) do I use?
- How formal should I be?
- What approach does the audience expect from me?

The most effective style of oral communication is a conversational style because it suggests you are really
Effective Oral Communication for Sales Presentations

Talking to Your Audience. This type of communication includes concrete language, short sentences, and a warm and friendly tone (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). Do not read your presentation to the audience, this sounds impersonal and unnatural. Instead, rehearse what you are going to say because this is crucial for the success of your presentation (University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1999).

**Organizing Your Presentation**
Organizing your presentation involves ordering how you present your ideas. You must organize your presentation to comply with your audience’s needs and perspective (Tebeaux and Wade 1997). Usually a presentation starts with an introduction that embodies your main point and a preview of what is ahead, the main body of information that supports the main point stated in the introduction, and a conclusion that reiterates and reinforces your main point. Grab the audience’s attention in your introduction and leave the audience with a positive feeling about you and your product, idea, or service with your conclusion. MAKE AN IMPACT! The opening and closing of the presentation are extremely important, so make sure you spend extra time preparing these sections. Include an interesting story or quote that relates to your presentation; it will grab the audience’s attention and make your presentation memorable.

**Making the Presentation**
When you begin your presentation, greet your audience and create a comfortable atmosphere by starting with small talk that is unrelated to your presentation topic. After you feel prepared and comfortable, start your presentation. Stick to the plan for the presentation; tell the audience what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and at the end tell them what you have told them. Do not digress, keep to the time allowed, and when concluding ask if there are any questions (University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1999). Do not leave your audience with questions; clarify all uncertainties to the best of your ability. If you cannot answer a question immediately then let them know you will follow-up.

**Delivery “Do’s and Don’ts”**
Delivery entails a variety of “do’s and don’ts” (University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1999).

- Do keep appearance clean and professional
- Do speak clearly (judge the acoustics of the room)
- Do maintain eye contact (do not look at only one individual)

- Do be enthusiastic and confident (it will reflect in your presentation)
- Do keep an eye on audience’s body language (watch audience reactions)
- Don’t tell jokes
- Don’t talk to your visual aids
- Don’t rush or deliberately talk slow
- Don’t speak in monotones (vary speed, pitch, and tone)
- Don’t move around too much (i.e., pacing or nervous twitches)

Some important points to emphasize are your voice (how you say it is as important as what you say), your body language (your body movements express what your true attitude and thoughts), and your appearance (University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1999).

The success of a sales presentation relies heavily on your delivery style. All the preparation work can go smoothly, but if you do not deliver your presentation with confidence, enjoyment, assertiveness, and enthusiasm, then all the preparation is worthless.

**Visual Aids**
Visual aids, if used correctly, can enhance interest in a presentation (University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1999). Effective communication is both visual and verbal. According to Tebeaux and Wade (1997), visual aids can be used to show relationships among ideas so that the audience can understand and remember what you said.

Tebeaux and Wade (1997) also state that a presentation with effective visual aids is more persuasive, more professional, and more interesting than one that does not utilize visual aids. Effective visual aids should be kept simple, relate to your topic, fit the needs of the audience, and be clear and easy to understand. For example, a good visual aid would be an overhead transparency that shows a simple breakdown of numbers in pie chart form. Be careful; do not rely on overheads to communicate your messages, only to enhance your message.

**Conclusions**
In *Conversation as Communication*, Blair remarked that “communication is best achieved through simple planning and control.” By following the outlined steps and lots of practice, you can acquire effective oral communication skills for making sales presentations. Effective
Effective Oral Communication for Sales Presentations

communication is important for a successful career in business (Covey 1989; Doswell 1998).

References

