



Four Ways to Create Effective Content for Presentations

by Alan Ovson

The content you deliver in your presentations is not based on your needs. You have to meet your audience's needs! Since the content of any successful presentation depends on your audience, the real questions to ask are:

- What information does my audience need?
- What is the best way for them to learn my information?
- How will I get them to retain my information so that it sticks in their heads and they can recall it easily?

If you want to be effective and persuasive, you need to know how people think and learn. Anyone can hand out information! The real skill of effective public speakers is to get people to resonate with, remember, act on, and use the information that you communicate.

Below are four central ideas on how to make your content heard, understood, and acted upon:

1. Research Your Audience

The best way to plan for content that will truly resonate with your audience is to do your homework. Understanding what the audience is like, what their needs are, who they are, and what their goals are makes it much easier for you to develop content that is directly targeted. Without a target to shoot for, a presenter is shooting in the dark.

The best thing a presenter can do is to develop an understanding of an audience member's point of view. At Ovson Communications, we refer to this as a Mental Model. This model is based on what the audience thinks about you and the subject. In order to develop a relevant Mental Model, you need to put yourself in the place of a typical audience member.

What would your expectations be if you were in the audience? If you have a Mental Model of the audience, you can make coherent decisions about what content to include and how to present it.

2. Know How People Process Information

The brain is an extraordinary organ. It processes over 40,000,000 bits of information per hour. That's too much to remember! So, in order to make sure people get, retain, and act on your



information, you need to use the most effective ways of helping them hear and remember what you do and say. Here are three valuable learning characteristics to make your content work:

a. **Keep Each Section Short:**

People have short attention spans. Research has shown that the prime listening time is no more than 20 minutes. After that, audiences get fidgety and lose interest.

b. **People Remember Only Four Things at a Time:**

The old way of thinking was that people remember 7 things at a time plus or minus 3. But, the latest research proves that's not true. When asked to recall information with 7 or more items, the majority could remember only 4. With 4 - 6 items in a category, people remember 80%. With more items, the percentage goes down significantly.

c. **Put Information in Categories of Four or Less:**

People can remember more than 4 - 6 items if the items are put in small chunks. One example is telephone numbers. 4159746322 is difficult to remember. 415-974-6322 is easy to remember. The content rule for speakers is: No more than 4 categories, with no more than 4 items per category.

3. Make Your Information Stick

To get information to stick, it has to be used or repeated. Memory is stored in the brain as patterns. Repetition reinforces the patterns. If you want others to remember something, repeat the information often. Also, give the information not just in words, but also visually. People remember visuals far better than words.

Another way to get information to stick is to have people do an exercise. The old saying is right on: "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Information sticks best when your audience does something. Ideas also stick when people make mistakes and have an opportunity to correct them.

4. Put Your Information in Story Form

People process information best in story form, and the best way to get and keep peoples' attention is to tell stories. Not only do stories create interest, but they also show cause and effect. A story starts with a problem and ends with a solution and allows people to make the "cause and effect" leap. Using stories that relate to your content allows your audience to recognize the link between the story and what you are saying.

One simple way to tell a story is with an example. Instead of giving facts, give an example. The audience will process the information more deeply and remember it longer when you back up your fact with a lively example.



Conclusion: Know Thy Audience!

Content is content, and almost everyone has a fair amount of it. Getting the content from you to your listeners - and having them remember it - is a totally different event. The best advice to developing content that is heard, remembered and acted upon is to know your audience and understand how they process information.

Ovson Communications offers courses and coaching on [Public Speaking and Presentations](#), including the course Building Content, Gaining Commitment which is specifically designed to help you choose and structure effective content for your presentations.

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