



Positive Pitching – Today's Elevator Speeches

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Elevator speeches and sales pitches have been at the cornerstone of successful sales for centuries, even before elevators were invented in fact! They both use the power of conversation and storytelling to entice a prospective customer to connect and buy from you.

It seems, however, that these old school tactics are getting lost in the new school ways of communicating; so in this Blue Paper we review what makes these classics work and how social media today can enhance these tactics to help you to seal the deal.



Elevator what?

Ok, if you’ve never heard it before the term ‘elevator speech’ is rather misleading – after all they’re not speeches and are not usually delivered in an elevator! What the term refers to though is the ability to introduce yourself, your product or service and what you do for your clients or customers - in the time it would take you to travel up several floors in a lift.

Elevator speeches for you and your brand

We all need an engaging introduction, or an elevator speech, so that we don’t babble incoherently when someone asks a simple question like, “So, what you do?”

To start, the first tip we’d like to share with you comes from Chris Hogan’s ‘Creating a Great Elevator Speech’¹ where he says: “The crucial point about an elevator speech is that you don’t actually answer the question: “What do you do?” instead you answer the question: “What do you do for your customers?” Chris gives a great example of international speaker and business coach Roger Harrop who could say that he is a non-executive director, coach, mentor and keynote speaker to businesses around the world. But how is that special or memorable? What he actually says is: “I improve the profitable growth of businesses.” Now isn’t that something most business owners are going to want to hear more about?”

Elevator speeches are meant to succinctly and accurately describe the very essence of a brand or company, and its services or products, in order to encourage someone to ask more questions that ultimately lead into a sale (or opportunity to buy as we like to think of it.) On the individual level, elevator

¹ Chris Hogan: *Creating a Great Elevator Speech*, 6 June 2010. Web 31 July 2012 <http://www.businessspeeches.co.uk/creating-great-elevator-speech.html>

speeches do the same thing but in regards to describing the specific role a professional plays at a company and how they - and their brand - help someone else to achieve their business objectives or resolve a problem.

As a result, prepared and practiced elevator speeches (that avoid being clichéd or over-rehearsed) should stimulate interest and open the door to relationships, while ensuring all employees consistently and accurately describe the brand which they represent.

The elevator speech of yesteryear vs. elevator speeches 2.0

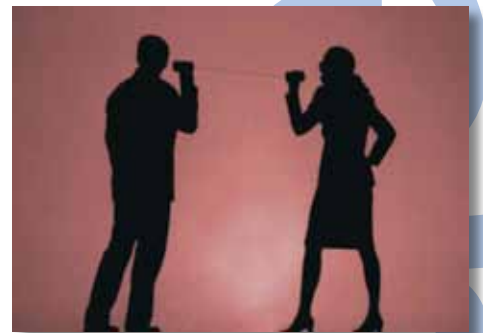
In the past, elevator speeches were usually reserved for networking events, seminars, conferences, and ... well, when travelling in a lift. These days, though, they're used in many more contexts. From LinkedIn profiles to 140-character tweets on Twitter, not only do businesses and professionals have a limited time to accurately explain what they do and what value they are to potential clients, customers and partners, they're now competing for attention in ways that they simply weren't before.

Furthermore, the very culture of marketing has shifted - no longer are prospective clients and customers sold on messaging that is product- or even brand-centric. They now require messaging that speaks directly to them. Messaging that is relatable, relevant to their specific needs and credible.

"The trouble with the typical elevator speech is that it's focused on the *speaker*, not the listener," says sales consultant and author, Mike McLaughlin.²

McLaughlin explains in an article he wrote for MarketingProfs.com that those who coach others on preparing elevator speeches suggest that a great outcome from an elevator speech is when the listener says something like, "Wow, that sounds interesting. Tell me more."³

"Once someone asks to hear more, the speaker is then supposed to feel free to launch into the next part of the canned commercial," says McLaughlin. "The speaker proceeds to describe services and benefits, and suggests a 'next step,' *regardless* of what the listener needs."⁴



² McLaughlin, Mike. "The Trouble With Elevator Speeches : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 1 Aug. 2006. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2006/1962/the-trouble-with-elevator-speeches>>.

³ McLaughlin, Mike. "The Trouble With Elevator Speeches : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 1 Aug. 2006. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2006/1962/the-trouble-with-elevator-speeches>>.

⁴ McLaughlin, Mike. "The Trouble With Elevator Speeches : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 1 Aug. 2006. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2006/1962/the-trouble-with-elevator-speeches>>.

And, according to McLaughlin, that's precisely the problem.

Marketing messages should be tailored to the needs and interests of the target audience, and so too should an elevator speech.

With this in mind, McLaughlin offers a few ideas on how to develop and deliver an elevator speech that helps move a client conversation in a positive direction⁵:

1. Forget the hype

Introductions that begin with slogans or hooks are more often annoying than not. Instead, answer the question directly, and succinctly, by telling the person who you are and describing the types of clients you serve and what you do for them. Keep your response to less than 30 seconds. Be prepared to follow up with brief, additional details. Don't feel compelled to put that information in the initial introduction. Wait until you're asked. In short, keep your elevator pitch simple, direct and factual. Think 'menu' rather than full list of ingredients!

2. Be memorable for what you don't say

Instead of blowing your own trumpet, encourage clients to talk about the issues as quickly as possible. Remember, most clients don't really care about your business. They care about their own problems. Direct the conversation to a genuine discussion of the client's issues and you'll get a welcome reception. Resist the urge to tell the client something. Use the time to listen, observe and comment as needed. The more you can learn about clients' problems, the easier it will be to help them. So, get the client engaged in a dialogue, and be as memorable for what you don't say as what you do say - remember 'two ears and a mouth' - aim to listen twice as much as you speak.

3. Answer with questions

A well-timed, insightful question will have a far bigger impact on a client than any elevator speech. You can counterbalance the impact of even a dreadful opening spiel with a single, relevant question. If you succeed in turning your introduction into an opportunity for the client to talk, questions will be your best tool for gaining immediate credibility. You should keep the conversation flowing by asking



⁵ McLaughlin, Mike. "The Trouble With Elevator Speeches : MarketingProfs Article." MarketingProfs: Marketing Resources for Marketing Professionals. 1 Aug. 2006. Web. 15 Apr. 2011. <<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2006/1962/the-trouble-with-elevator-speeches>>.

diagnostic and clarifying questions. Don't hesitate to let the client know how you've faced, and overcome, similar challenges. Resist the urge to ask run-of-the-mill questions like, "what keeps you up at night?" Such throwaway questions signal a lack of interest in the client's real concerns, as most executives have heard them all before.

4. Remember that substance is the ground floor

Build immediate credibility with your substance, not your style. Listen, ask questions, and help the client to articulate their issues. You can do that even on a brief trip in the metaphorical elevator.

Creating the perfect elevator speech

McLaughlin's points create a nice framework for how the elevator speech should be implemented: In the context of a two-way conversation. Just as important as the delivery, however, is what is said. Whether preparing an elevator speech as an individual or as a brand or as both, there are additional factors that should be considered in order to create a speech that is as effective as possible.

For a start, take what you already know about current customers and clients - what have you done for them, what are they satisfied with and what motivated them to buy your product or service to begin with? If you don't know, ask them and while you're at it ask them how they describe your business or your work to others. If the world of social media has taught us anything, it's that our customers can often talk about us better than we can.

Take this information to your team and compare it with how your business currently talks about its products and services. Consider how it supports mission statements, brand positions and internal company culture. The perfect elevator speech will marry together all of these aspects.

Next, develop key messages with this information in mind. Consider different audiences and scenarios in which elevator speeches will be used and who will be giving them. This type of role playing will not only ensure that most of the bases for conversation are covered, but it'll help employees and colleagues to talk about your brand consistently.

A few additional tips for putting your speech together:

- **Be authentic and genuine:** Speak from the heart.
- **Be relevant:** Speak to me as an individual. How does your work affect others? Why should I care?
- **Be descriptive:** Don't just talk about what you do, talk about how you



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do it differently. Remember to talk about benefits not features – that is what -or how your service can work for them.

- **Be concise:** Keep it short and sweet. Two to three sentences, 50 words to 140 characters is ideal. Not only will you capture attention and entice others to ask you more, your elevator speech will be applicable immediately to the social media space. While this sounds intimidating, bear in mind that the first part of the pitch is meant to get others to ask more, to start a fully-fledged conversation about how you can help them.

Remember that most listeners, whether consciously or not, are likely to be asking themselves: “What’s in it for me?” If they can answer this question positively they’re far more likely to want to take the conversation further. If not they’re unlikely to give you their full attention.

Then it’s all about practice. Test the messaging out on each other first, then bring it to networking events and see what happens. The elevator speech is not static or linear - it needs to grow and change as you or your company and the industry in which you work grows and changes. Revisit and revamp regularly.

Tips for re-using your elevator speech

Once you’ve landed on a speech that works, you can revise it to suit different media. That way your messaging is consistent and you get the most out of it by using it efficiently:

- **Email signature** - Especially useful for the sales and customer service teams, an email signature is a great way to provide value and context to introductory emails.
- **Twitter bio** - Let followers know who you are and what you’re all about.
- **Boiler plate language** - Ditch tired and wordy boilerplate statements for elevator speeches that encourage reporters and readers to visit your company’s website or social media channels for the bigger picture.
- **Business cards** - People often use business cards to make notes on to help remember things about that person. What better way to help everyone who has your business card to remember you than by referring to your elevator speech?
- **LinkedIn or Facebook profile** - Take advantage of the exposure these channels offer and put an elevator speech in your profile. People viewing your profile will read this first thing and it will ‘set the tone’ for who you are and what you bring to the party.



Case in point: A brand's perspective⁶

Imagine most people know your organisation best as just for being 'Bill Gates' other company'. That's exactly the issue faced by the American company Corbis. For a long time they struggled to get beyond this narrowly focused reputation before they contacted ElevatorSpeech.com for help in how to clearly describe its evolving business to current and potential customers.

Just FYI should you not have heard of them - online⁷ Corbis describes themselves as "a creative resource for advertising, marketing and media professionals, providing a comprehensive selection of stock photography, illustration, footage, fonts, creative merchandise and entertainment licensing and rights representation services."

As a result, Corbis managers were so caught up in their extensive list of products and services that they were clearly missing great opportunities to tell compelling stories – the hallmark of a really good elevator speech. The consultants interviewed the CEO and 12 other Corbis executives on camera to uncover the stories, analogies and anecdotes that transformed Corbis' elevator speech from a "leading provider of blah, blah, blah" to something much more interesting:

"If you saw an advertising hoarding on your way into work today, the chances are it's one of our 70 million pictures. If you watched a TV ad, the chances are you saw our work. If you flipped through Time magazine, our images illustrate their stories. And if you browsed the shelves of a bookstore, you probably saw our pictures."



The consultants at ElevatorSpeeches.com didn't stop there; they compiled a grouping of elevator speeches that could be used in pieces, together or in conjunction with other facts and stories depending on the context of the conversation and the audience it's aimed at: "Ad agencies, magazines, book publishers and corporate marketers use our images every day. For ESPN, Time, Hasbro, Saatchi & Saatchi, Wieden & Kennedy, Sony and NBC, we are a one-stop shop for finding and buying pictures online. In fact, our website is the world's single largest electronic photo gallery.

Like Nordstrom (a US clothing retailer), we've built our business

⁶ "Case Studies." Elevator Speech. Web. 01 May 2011. <<http://www.elevatorspeech.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=caseStudies>>.

⁷ Corbis Website <<http://corporate.corbis.com/uk/>>

around customer service. You see, creative professionals typically need permission to use photos, art, music or video in their campaigns. So we have 450 experts who work around the clock to help them find the stuff they want and secure the rights to use it. We did this for an entire campaign for Mount Blanc pens. In fact, we're the biggest Rights clearing house in the world.

We also arrange for specific, original photos to be shot by some of the world's best photographers. For example, we found the right photographer for Ogilvy & Mather advertising agency to shoot the "New Face of IBM" campaign.

Our crown jewel is the 17-million-photo Bettmann archive that includes some of the world's best and most famous pictures – such as Rosa Parks, the Wright Brothers, Marilyn Monroe and Pulitzer Prize photos from thousands of photographers. It's like walking through American history.

Corbis has 1,100 employees in 22 offices across the world. Finding and using our images is big business. In fact, the category is worth around \$1 billion a year in revenue – and Corbis and Getty are the Pepsi and Coke of our industry."

Now all Corbis executives have a common starting point - the first two paragraphs - for their elevator speech. It's filled with interesting stories, clear anecdotes, strategic analogies and benefits to customers. Plus, it has the flexibility to tailor the conversation to specific audiences. As Corbis' chief financial officer said: "When talking to investors, I'd start with the first two paragraphs and immediately go to the last paragraph. I love the comparison to Pepsi and Coke."

The sales pitch, perfected

After the elevator speech is delivered, and if it's delivered well, prospective clients and customers will hopefully ask more questions and begin to connect the dots between what you do and how they can benefit. The next natural step is often to seal the deal with a sales pitch.

Sales pitches are also used on their own to launch relationships and to nurture leads. The purpose of a sales pitch is to convert curiosity into action, prospects into customers. Traditionally, pitches start with an elevator speech and head right into a monologue with no chance for the listener to keep up. Usually long, often aggressive, sometimes loud, these pitches talk about why a person



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needs a brand or product and why a person should choose one over another. As social media transforms the relationship between the consumer, the brand, the product and each other, thankfully the sales pitch has changed drastically, too. The sales funnel, specifically, has altered.

Traditionally, most sales funnels had four specific stages:

1. **Attention** – attracting prospects by building awareness
2. **Interest** – educating prospects by demonstrating the benefits of a product or service
3. **Desire** – fostering prospects' desire for the product or service promoted
4. **Action** – prospects become customers or clients by purchase or relationship

However now with social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others added to the mix, things change a little bit⁸:

- In the 'attention' stage, search engine optimisation and search marketing, as well as popular social networks help clients gain awareness of a brand or professional and spread its reputation through word of mouth.
- In the 'interest' stage, brands and existing customers build trust by providing information and help. This often occurs on Facebook walls, review sites and Twitter feeds- conversations that demonstrate existing company-client dialogues are more visible than ever before.
- From user review sites to interactive customer communities and forums, in the 'desire' stage testimonials build and spread organically and help demonstrate how a brand can satisfy the needs of a customer or client.
- The 'action' stage is converting online users into buyers, demonstrating that a brand or professional has used its marketing channels successfully.
- But there's more - when social media is involved in the sales funnel, an additional stage is added: advocacy. When customers engage actively and spread the word, they become brand ambassadors who



⁸ "Infographic: Feeding the Funnel with Facebook (Social Studies Blog)." Social Studies Blog. Web. 10 Apr. 2011. <<http://blog.getsatisfaction.com/2011/04/13/social-media-sales-funnel/?view=socialstudies>>.

continue the sales cycle automatically.

Knowing how the old-school sales funnel has turned into a new school cyclone, here's how to develop a pitch that works in evolving environment:

1. Don't make it sound like a sales pitch

Some sales people believe that they need to be pushy and aggressive in order for a sales pitch to be effective. That's just silly. Great selling involves being low key. It involves developing the ability to lead people with questions rather than push them with facts. Truly successful people in business understand that what really matters is getting their clients talking about what they need, then matching a product or service to those needs. It's about giving the customer the information they need to make an informed choice.

2. Focus on the benefits

Your product may be the most nutritionally sound one on the market. It may have all the vitamins that you need for a week. It may come in three flavours and easily dissolve in milk. But what the customer really cares about is whether it will help her to fit into her swimming costume; or whether it will help him to control his diabetes; or even whether it will help him to avoid having a heart attack in his 50's like his brother did. They want to know how your product will benefit them personally (remember what we said earlier that the listener is likely to be thinking 'What's in it for me?') not a load of facts and figures about your product! Remember to mention benefits not features. The new sales pitch is information rich. The information doesn't have to be facts, although it can be. The information is solutions and solutions are emotional. Pitch to the heart of your client's needs.

3. Keep it short

Brevity is more persuasive than lengthiness, so avoid an information dump. (Notice a theme here?) Even if your service has 30 benefits, share only the top three that you feel the person you are talking to will find value in. Just like that elevator speech, keeping it short can also maximise the opportunity for sharing in the social space however, while the elevator speech is limited to a few sentences, the pitch is more like a few paragraphs. Take a look at '[How to Structure a Winning Sales Presentation](#)'⁹ by communications expert Gary Hankins.



⁹ Gary Hankins, 3-step formula for making winning sales presentations and closing more business [How to Structure a Winning Sales Presentation](#)

In just 2 minutes 24 seconds he discusses a 3-step formula which advises that you should focus on the issues highlighted by the other person, offer tailored solutions by advising the benefits your service could deliver for them.

4. Emphasise content over style

You are a professional; let your expertise take centre stage. Being too slick and polished could appear insincere and could arouse suspicion or cynicism. Convey your key points clearly and with confidence, and don't worry if your delivery doesn't have the smooth baritone of your local used car dealer (in fact, rejoice that it doesn't). Be yourself.

5. Tailor your delivery to each and every prospect

Every prospect has a different situation, as well as unique motivations and buying patterns. They take a different length of time to make decisions: some want to buy quickly and instinctively with apparently little by way of research, while others take their time, research the product or service thoroughly and only make their decision when they feel comfortable that they know 'all' the facts.

6. Pitch to the right person

Not only should you target your pitch, you should make sure you're giving it to the right person. In the business-to-business arena especially, who you pitch to matters - they should have decision-making power and they should work directly in the areas that you and your business can help them with. What's more, if the pitch doesn't occur in person, make sure it's permission-based - i.e. don't send a pitch to someone cold without their permission.

7. Keep it conversational

Conversations are memorable - lectures are not. What's more, conversational pitches tell your prospects that it's about them, not about you.

8. Follow up

Whether the pitch is made in person or over the phone, be sure to follow up. Even the best sales pitches don't always work the first time around - follow up to help prospects follow through. Even the most successful sales person will get rejected occasionally so it's important to establish whether the 'No' you have just received is: "No not ever", or "No, not now". If it's "No, not now" get permission to keep in touch and keep your word - follow up when you say you will.



All together now

As pieces of the same pie, elevator speeches and sales pitches work together to entice prospective clients and customers to want more, to build a relationship and to enter a sales cycle that will take your personal brand or business to new heights. Take a look at your old school methods today to see how they can be polished with new school ways.



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