

## Mastering the 30-Second Pitch

***To captivate prospective clients, distill the most pertinent information about your business or product into a quick and compelling message***

By Carmine Gallo

How you pitch the story behind your small-business's services, products, or companies means the difference between making a sale and being shown the door. And if you have competitors who get their point across in a more clear, concise, and compelling way -- even if they're hawking inferior products -- they could steal your prospects because you failed to capture attention right out of the gate.

So, how do you craft the perfect strategic pitch for your business and then guarantee prospective clients will sit still while you deliver it? Relax, we'll show you how to compose the pitch, and it will take no more than 30 seconds to say. The secret: choosing your words carefully and getting right to the point.

TRUMPING THE DEAL. Research proves that we make lasting judgments about individuals in as little as two seconds. The first two seconds have more to do with body language than content, but what you say follows close behind.

During my years as a business correspondent for CNN, I was stunned to discover how few business professionals could articulate a compelling story in 30 seconds. There is one man, however, who has it mastered. Love him or hate him, Donald Trump always nails the perfect pitch. Inquire about any one of his buildings, properties, or projects, and Trump will give a short but exciting statement about it.

For example, when asked to describe the success of *The Apprentice*, Trump once said, "It's *Survivor*, but it's the real survivor. It's in the jungle of New York. People can relate to New York, and that's really what they want. Last night, we were No. 1 in demographics. And that's the important rating, as you know, the 18 to 49 age group."

FIRST STEPS. Yes, Trump boasts self-indulgently about his show and his properties -- but he backs it with facts. He differentiates each and every project. He makes you want to hear more. He may have clinched the art of the deal, but he's also clinched the pitch.

Today, as a business presentation coach, I help clients find their own voice. After working with hundreds of executives on their presentation skills, I've discovered the easiest way to craft an exciting pitch: Simply ask the following four questions:

What is my service, product, company, or cause? What problem do I solve (or what demand do I meet)? How am I different? Why should you care?

Answering these queries will help you start strong while giving the rest of your presentation a direction. During a corporate workshop in Monterey, Calif., I helped a group of executives with a pitch for their company, Language Line Services. After about an hour of brainstorming, we came up with a powerful 30-second message -- but only after answering the four questions. Let's begin with the result:

**THE FOUR QUESTIONS.** "Language Line Services is the world's largest provider of phone interpretation services for companies who want to connect with their non-English-speaking customers. Every 23 seconds, someone who doesn't speak English enters the country. When that person calls a hospital, a bank, an insurance company, or 911, it's likely that a Language Line interpreter is on the other end. We help you talk to your customers, patients, or sales prospects in 150 languages!"

This takes less than 30 seconds to say and gives potential customers a reason to learn more about the company. Watch how simple it was to put this example together after answering the four questions:

*Question 1: What is my service, product, company, or cause?* "Language Line is the world's largest provider of phone interpretation services." If your company offers a service rather than a tangible product, say so.

*Question 2: What problem do I solve?* "Every 23 seconds, someone who doesn't speak English enters the country." Every service, product, company, or cause must offer a solution or satisfy an unmet demand. Otherwise, you might as well be making buggy whips in the automobile age.

*Question 3: How am I different?* "When you call a hospital, bank, insurance company, or 911, it's likely that a Language Line interpreter is on the other end." By not directly saying "We're number one in the industry," the pitch takes a softer approach but still lets the potential customer know the company is a leader in its field. Odds are, you're not the only one doing what you're doing. Be different.

*Question 4: Why should you care?* "We help you talk to your customers, patients, or sales prospects in 150 languages." Wow! Now I want to hear more. If you can't tell your audience members how your product or service will improve their financial well-being or their lives in general, they will dismiss you faster than moviegoers tuned out *Gigli*.

**SAVES MONEY.** It's that simple to craft a compelling pitch. Answer those four questions, and you'll stand out. Your listeners just want to know, in a clear and concise way, what you do, what problem you solve, how you're different, and why

they should care about you or your message.

Instead of taking your team on an expensive corporate retreat to craft a mission statement that will be forgotten by the time you return to the office, spend half an hour answering the previous four questions. Once you've arrived upon a strong 30-second pitch, send it to everyone in the company and include it on your Web site and in your marketing collateral. It will bring you far more success than you can imagine. Please feel free to share your successful pitches with me via e-mail. I'll gladly tell you what I think of the pitch you've crafted.