

A person in a suit stands behind a table, holding papers. In the foreground, several hands are visible, gesturing and pointing at documents on the table. The scene is lit with a warm, orange glow.

THE QUEST FOR CREATIVE INSPIRATION

BY BOB KODZIS

“WE WENT IN THERE
WITH SOME GREAT IDEAS.
THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS
THE CLIENT DIDN'T
BUY ANY OF THEM.”

– AN ANONYMOUS CREATIVE DIRECTOR

PERFECT PITCHING

So you have a brilliant idea that will change the world. Now your only challenge is to get someone to buy it. Big challenge. In fact, it may be bigger than the challenge you faced when trying to generate the original idea.

In its simplest form, pitching is the process of convincing other people to support a creative idea. As simple as it sounds, it is one of the more complex parts of the creative process.

One thing is for sure: without great pitches, nothing happens. Nobody buys. Nobody sells. No action is taken. Without the pitch, all of our ideas amount to little more than creative daydreams.

On the other hand, the right pitch, at the right time can change the world. Ask Bill Gates, Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi. It's much more than hocking advertising. Pitching is a skill that can help the creative community to move mountains.

That is why this column is dedicated to the art and the science of a great pitch.

Be warned: Pitching is not an exercise for the thin-skinned or the weak of heart. Many a creative soul has been shattered upon the sharp rocks of criticism and rejection during the pitching process. 'Creative pitchers' have the

unenviable challenge of tossing out streams of fresh ideas while risking the prospect of striking out every time.

While it seems like a no win situation, consider this: In most cases, a pitch is like kissing. Done well, it's very passionate, exciting and satisfying. Done poorly, it can end the relationship badly.

Metaphors aside, it's important to remember, when all is said and done"

A PITCH IS ABOUT SELLING

As un-sexy as that may sound, a pitch is a sales process. The best possible result is that the audience buys the product or the idea presented. So let's talk about the essence of selling.

In my former life, I was the corporate marketing director for a Florida company with annual revenues exceeding \$800 million. In this capacity I orchestrated dozens of pitches and was audience to dozens more. Throughout this experience, and the amazing years since, I have learned that there are only three things that sell anything:

1. Proof is the solid evidence that the idea you are presenting will work. Nothing makes a client feel more secure about a creative opportunity than tangible proof that the concept will work. It's the strongest tool in your arsenal. Unfortunately, in the realm of original thought, we often wander off the proven path and into uncharted territory. This often leads us to rely more heavily on the other two selling tools.

2. Logic could be considered 'proof before the fact'. In a sales process, a solid line of logic leaves the prospect thinking, 'This makes sense', and, 'I understand why they are recommending this course of action.'

Logic requires a more educational approach to the pitch. It demands that we explain our rationale and demonstrate the connection between our research and our recommendations.

3. Emotion moves their hearts and touches their values. It's a powerful tool that can inspire a prospect to take immediate action.

The problem is that emotion is the 'one night stand' of pitching tools. Without some solid proof or logic to back it up, when the passions cool, the client is left empty handed; unable to justify why she/he chose to buy in the first place.

The best pitches include some measure of all three of these approaches. The magic of a great pitch is in the mix. I've distilled the lessons I've learned in the following simple rules of engagement:

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Perfect Pitching: The rules of engagement

It all begins with the IDEA

If the idea has no legs, the pitch will have no legs. No amount of fancy footwork can compensate for a weak idea. Even if you manage to fool the client, it's unlikely that you will be able to fool the entire market. Before you formulate your pitch, take a moment and make sure your ideas are solid!

Believe!

Never sell anything that you don't truly believe. If you don't buy it, neither will they. It may sound idealistic, but it's true. People can sense when we are insincere. Be true to you, and to your clients. You'll never go wrong.

Know your audience

If you don't know where your clients are coming from, you shouldn't presume to tell them where they need to go. Do your homework.

If you don't have their attention, you don't have them.

Getting their attention does not guarantee that they will buy your ideas, but failing to get their attention will guarantee that they won't buy. Get their attention!

Help them to see how their world will be different when they implement this idea.

Show them, in living color, how your solutions will enhance their world. Give them the opportunity to 'try on' your ideas and see what they look like in the mirror of their imagination.

NEVER go in with only one idea

A great creative mind once said 'The most dangerous thing is the world is an idea, when it's the only one you've got.' Some of the best pitches I've ever seen began with crushing rejections of one idea or another. These pitches would have ended in defeat,



had these terrific creative teams brought only one idea to the table.

You are not selling the idea as much as you are selling yourself, your team and your way of thinking. Many creative professionals make the mistake of assuming that the only thing that is at risk during the pitch process is the death of an idea. In fact, you could be risking the death of your entire relationship with your customer. Make every idea an illustration of the way your team works and thinks. It's OK if they reject your ideas, as long as they don't reject you in the process.

Confidence is critical... cockiness is fatal.

There is a fine line between confidence and cockiness. Present your ideas with authority and back up your strategies with the facts. Avoid reputation building by telling stories of your past conquests. Instead use your time showing them what you can do and how you do it

Arm them to resell the ideas

Very often while clients are listening to our creative pitches, they are trying to envision how they will resell the ideas to their boss, their board and their customers. Make it easy for them. Arm them with the tools, the spin and the justification needed to resell your ideas.

A picture is worth a million words

Nothing helps clients to wrap their brains around your great ideas like a good visual. Drawings and photos are wonderful tools, but this concept goes way beyond pictures. It can include models, prototypes, storyboards and theatrics in any manner of communication that goes beyond the written and spoken word. Help them to see what you mean.



Interactivity is the key!

People support what they help to build. Engage your audience. Give them an active role in the pitch. Otherwise, you're just another talking head trying to sell something.

Simplicity is genius

Simple is better: fewer words, fewer syllables, lower complexity. It's the key to universal understanding. This may require you to kill your buzzwords and wipe out few acronyms.

A solid closing will seal the deal

After an excellent pitch, a fellow marketing director once commented, 'I'd have bought those ideas, but nobody asked me to.' Never forget that you are there to sell. If you fail to close the deal, you fail. Ask them to buy, or ask them to tell you how you need to change the concepts so that they will want to buy.

If you oversell, you'll go to hell

OK, so maybe you won't go to hell, but you won't hold on to many clients for long. Fight the urge to oversell. It may feel good in the short run but it will kill your client relationship in the long run. Under-promise, over-perform.

All of these pieces of advice take time, preparation and practice, but they are well worth the effort. I recommend that you use this list and the three principles of selling as a checklist to fine-tune your pitch before presentation time. It could mean the difference between victory and 'No Sale'.

I'll be back in your next issue of CREATE Magazine, continuing the quest for creative inspiration and creative excellence throughout Florida. Until then, keep the search alive and keep creating!