

S.P.A.R.K. Powerful Presentations Put Money in the Bank

By David Saxby

When you create a presentation to market your company or services and you want to zap through the communication clutter that bombards your customer to reach them with your message, think customer service. Put yourself into your customers' minds, hearts and shoes.

As a former president and creative director of a mid-size marketing and advertising agency, I have delivered more marketing campaign pitches, over the past 25 years than I would care to remember. As a speaker, trainer and consultant for 15 years, I have worked with entrepreneurs, executives and sales staff of companies to create more effective presentations for private and public companies.

Here's the S.P.A.R.K. formula that will help you prepare your next presentation and win with YOUR customers.

S) Start with a Strategy

The best strategy comes from understanding your customers' pain. Express your message in a way that tells your customers that you understand their needs and how you are going to make the pain go away. Too many presenters and advertisers try to sell features, rather than benefits. People don't buy features they buy the benefits that those features provide them.

Take those features and turn them into strategic advantages using the F.A.B. Formula: Features, Advantages, Benefits.

Case Study: In the late 1980's banks were trading customers like a 12-year old trades baseball cards. Customers were losing confidence due to high interest rates. We heard that there was a new national bank being formed in Western Canada (a merger between two western regional banks).

Our approach to the campaign was to show the Bank executives, in a visual way, how, specifically, we were going to attract customers to their Bank with each component of our campaign. We needed to present our core message and media plan in a visible way. We decided to use "Smarties®" candies as the visual. As we presented the campaign we added different colored "Smarties®" to a large bowl. "We are going to attract seniors by..." and added the blue "Smarties." We then addressed the young professionals and added the green ones and so on until the bowl was full of multi-colored Smarties®. Our campaign tagline was: "Our Real Interest is You!."

P) Perceptions and Presentation Style - The Naked Truth We had the opportunity to work with one of the largest, most successful theatres in western Canada. They had been doing reasonably well until the last few seasons when subscriptions had begun dropping off. The clientele that had been regular subscribers had begun having families and no longer had the time or financial support to be able to afford to maintain their subscriptions. Secondly theatre had been getting some negative publicity regarding too much nudity and profanity in the performances. We were asked to put together a campaign to increase subscriptions. We decided to address the media issue in our first campaign head on. Our campaign featured scantily clad actors in silhouette changing from street clothes to theatre costume and was titled "the Naked Truth." The client was a little reluctant, at first, to go forward with the campaign.

A) Add Visuals The Smarties® visual that we used for the bank presentation, I'm certain, had a significant impact on our client. It stood out from all the other presentations. The visual sense is powerful. Over 80% of the information that we learn is through the visual sense. A study by 3-M conducted at the University of Minnesota stated that people who use visual aids were 43% more effective than those who didn't. And a study conducted at Portland State University states that perceptions play a major factor in persuading audiences. The study indicates that when there is not much difference between competitive products, the use of visual aids, such as multimedia, increases the credibility factor of the presenter and the product/service. The study also indicated that 71% of the audience felt that the perception of the presenter who used multimedia was more effective than the presenter who didn't. Credibility is critical when you are looking to build trust with your customers. Visuals can serve to build that credibility.

R) Recognize a Win-Win Over a 10-year period we worked with what is now Canada's second largest cable company. The majority of our work was relating to shareholder communication and presentations to the government regulating body - the CRTC (Canadian Radio and Television Commission). In the later years of working with the company we developed full media campaigns aimed at subscribers. For years the cable companies had been promoting the features of cable, which was the variety of channels, clear signal, etc. The CRTC, out of concern that the specialty TV channels would go broke if they remained independent, had just decreed that the cable companies would have to incorporate the previously independent specialty channels, in with their regular cable services. They would be allowed to increase the cost to the subscribers to compensate for the additional channels but this posed a serious challenge since just a short while prior to that the cable companies had increased costs and added new channels. This time they had no choice. The media jumped all over this situation saying that there was already too much TV and now even more was being forced on the subscribers without an option. We opted to address the additional channels, as a customer in a restaurant would do when offered a buffet. Our campaign was focused on the concept that just because there was more TV didn't mean that you had to watch everything. Like going to a restaurant that had a buffet just because they had more food didn't mean you had to eat it all you simply had more choices. We made it easy for our client, the cable company, to manage subscribers' reactions and easy for the subscribers to opt out if they wished with a negative option campaign. The strategy was simple and, to the best of our knowledge, the approach had not been tried before in the industry. The competing cable company tried the same approach a few months later and failed miserably.

K) Keeping the Customers' Interest in Mind – Make it Simple

Our business received a cold call from one of our major telecommunications companies asking if we were currently using their long-distance services. No, we weren't and had the person making the call done their homework they would have discovered that. We had dropped them years ago for a much lower priced provider and a flat rate for all of North America and had explained that to the caller. He proceeded to tell me that they were competitive if we were willing to make our long distance calls between 5am and 7am and after 8pm at night and any time during the day on the weekend when their rate was half a cent lower.... I explained that their system was too complicated and that as a business it made no sense to work on a variable rate schedule and worry about what time of day we were going to call – The competitor offered one rate all the time anywhere in North America and that was so much simpler that it won our business. He got frustrated; I could hear it in his voice but he tried again "Sir how much do you presently spend monthly on long distance?"...I said "it varies from \$30 to \$1,000, and more depending on the clients we are working with." He proceeded to explain that if I

went on their plan and called at the times when the rates were the cheapest, eventually we would save a lot of money. I explained the concept of simplicity once again - One rate all the time anywhere in North America...At this point he basically "lost it"...He explained that as a business based in Alberta we should support the local company and that if I didn't it was taking jobs away from Albertans.