



3 TOP SALES PRESENTATION MYTHS...BUSTED

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Sometimes being a sales professional is a little like playing golf. Everyone you know has a tip, words of wisdom or a war story they feel compelled to impart to help you get just that little bit better at the job in hand.

Sometimes this advice is incredibly helpful, putting you firmly on the path to sales enlightenment and a reputation for smashing targets (or, perhaps just improving your putting average). Yet I wager most of the

time, these insider tricks and tips just end up confusing you more than ever.

Presentation myths fall into the same category – anyone who has ever stood in front of an audience feels qualified to share their insight and wisdom...yet few of these ideas stand closer scrutiny. In an attempt to debunk those tips that have gained almost mythical status, I've chosen three that are nothing more than, um, bunkum:



1. POWERPOINT IS EVIL

I both love and loathe PowerPoint. Let me explain. When used correctly and appropriately, PowerPoint is a truly brilliant visual tool...and when used badly, it's truly excruciating.

Sadly, the bad considerably outweighs the good - if you're ever lost for things to read on the web, take a moment to Google 'Death by PowerPoint'. There are just shy of 10 million articles, blogs and assorted comment dedicated to a piece of software and its alleged failings. The vast majority will put forward a compelling case for PowerPoint to be banned for the crime of dumbing down business presentations.

Nonsense.

PowerPoint's biggest failing is that it is simply too easy to use. Microsoft have provided sales people, junior and senior, all over the World a tool that can help deliver powerful visual presentations (that's the good news). The bad news is that only a tiny percentage of these people have a clue about how to go about creating such a presentation.

Blaming PowerPoint's ease of use for poor communication within B2B sales is like blaming Microsoft's Word program for bad proposals or Outlook for poor e-mail content. The blame sits squarely with the person sat in front of the PC and their inability to fully grasp the skills required to deliver a powerful visual presentation.

Nonetheless, tech startups have been quick to jump on the bandwagon, forming an orderly queue to develop the next 'PowerPoint killer'. In light of the myth that PowerPoint isn't up to the job, sales people have grabbed solutions like Prezi, Haiku Deck and the like in an attempt to shortcut the process. Sadly I bring bad news – if your PowerPoint presentation is failing you, transferring it to a different technology is unlikely to make any difference.

PowerPoint isn't evil. In the right hands and when used appropriately, it's fantastic. The problem isn't the software, it's the users who use it with little regard for their audience, message or objective

2. THE 10/20/30 RULE

Now this rule has some real provenance as it comes courtesy of Guy Kawasaki, a very clever Venture Capitalist. As a rule, VCs are like the rest of us – they have little time for presentations that meander and don't get to the point. This prompted Guy to create his 10/20/30 model:

RULE 1

No more than 10 slides in a very particular order. Now there are some elements of the structure that work well – I like opening with the issue you are looking to address. Nothing particularly revolutionary about this but it makes for a pleasant change to the "this is how big we are, this is a picture of our head office" introduction slide that befalls most awful presentations.

RULE 2

speak for no more than 20 minutes. Again, great advice for a pitch where you have been allocated a full 60 minutes but irrelevant (and potentially damaging) for other types of presentation format.

RULE 3

font size of 30. Spot on...but it doesn't go far enough. Making your text large enough to read is a great place to start but all you've done is increase the size of too much text. This doesn't get around the bigger issue of presenters forgetting the importance of visualisation as part of their presentation experience.

The problem with this and other myths is that they are often about a very specific presentation environment and are taken out of context and applied to ALL presentations. So we now have an account management engagement being delivered in the same frantic style as if someone was pitching for multimillion dollar investment.

Not clever.

3. YOU MUST MAINTAIN COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE AUDIENCE

This is a very 'old school' approach to sales presentations. There seems to be an unspoken measure of your worth as a presenter – if you're any good, you're expected to have your audience firmly under your spell and not interjecting with questions or comments along the way. Any sense of interaction with your audience is dismissed as a failure to maintain complete control, rather than an opportunity to engage on the topics that are most important to them.

What a waste of everyone's time.

I implore sales professionals to embrace the opportunity to interact with your audience as much as possible. Their interaction is a sign that they're listening to you, wanting to engage and contribute.

Ask any experienced sales person and they will tell you that the best prospect meetings

are the ones where you had a conversation. So why do organisations equip their sales teams with presentations that are specifically designed to stop audiences engaging in this way? The result is that not only do sales people miss out, so do their prospects in the audience...and that's unforgivable.

So to sum up, the key thing to take away from all of this is not that the myths themselves are bad – many of the ideas behind them stack up and are designed to help us all develop better presentations. The issue is that the ideas have mutated and been twisted to fit situations they were never designed for (most notably sales engagements).

My recommendation? Think for yourself. Think for your audience. In short, make your presentation worthwhile and memorable for the right reasons.

