

## Know your audience

There is a saying that the effective presentation is the relevant presentation. And it is equally true that the effective presenter is the one who provides relevance to their audience. In both instances we note that relevance is the biggest determinant when we come to judge the effectiveness of any presentation. But what is relevance if it is so important? Well, for starters it is incredibly simple for something that is so important. To be relevant, in the minds of our audience, our presentation has to associate its title, subject matter, content and findings with the immediate cares and interests of the audience. I did say that it was simple.

But for something that is so simple it is often overlooked. If we think of the presentation from the mindset of the audience; the value that the audience extracts from their participation has to outweigh the costs that they incur in their attendance -- time, travel and reputation costs. None of these costs can be overlooked -- particularly that of time which surely has the largest value. If the audience judges that their time is better spent doing something else or listening to someone else then we have hardly been effective. Knowing the costs incurred in participation, therefore, our task is to make the presentation as relevant and topical as it can possibly be -- looking to outweigh the costs of audience participation with our added value. That is the immediate hurdle.

Knowing our audience better is the first step in achieving relevance and getting to an effective presentation. And like most marketing activities there are some useful techniques to help us know our audience or market better. These techniques give us the means to segment our audience, to profile their likely drivers and gauge their responsiveness to our presentation. There are several methods that we adopt to help us get started:

- We can **refer to former participants** at an event. First of all we should speak to colleagues and acquaintances about the event in which we plan to speak. We can easily establish who attended the event the previous year and their rationale for being there. They could also clarify what benefit they expected to derive from their presence and the success of the outcome.
- We can **refer to the event organizers**. The organizers will give us access to a participant list -- perhaps last year's list and a summary of delegates for the planned event. The listing will provide details on the participants by name, job title, organization and industry sector at the bare minimum. It might go further with geographic base details for instance. With these records we can establish a picture of the "typical" participant and gain some insight into their likely requirements. You should note here that for many organizations the event organizer is likely to be an internal team member and, very often, is either the Executive Assistant of the VP or Director -- discretion is needed!

- We can always **contact other speakers**. Organizers will put us in touch with other speakers for earlier events in addition to the planned event. If there is any difficulty with earlier events, note that where the previous year's event was publicized on the web there will inevitably be a string of contact details still available. Other speakers will give us further insight into audience characteristics, their likes and dislikes. They can also tell us what worked and what did not in their presentations -- how effective were they?

Knowing how our audience is selected for an event can also be telling, not least because their selection impacts how we know and understand them and how we prepare material that is relevant. Typically our audience can be selected in one of 3 ways:

1. **Self-selection** -- where the audience has actively chosen to participate in a conference, discussion forum or association meeting. This audience will give us the most information about their likely needs. But they are also likely to be the most demanding.
2. **Selected** -- where the audience has been co-opted to attend a meeting in-house or off-site. In all likelihood this will be an organization briefing, a sales conference or some kind of distributor event. This audience is likely to be the most homogeneous and there will be plenty of information about them. If not demanding, they will certainly demand relevance to keep their attention.
3. **Passing traffic** -- where the audience attends an event spontaneously or without any prior arrangement. We come across these passing traffic audiences at trade shows, exhibitions and expositions where the organizers offer seminar opportunities that are available to all show attendees. If we plan to give such a seminar we will have little prior knowledge of who will join us on the stand or in the seminar room -- but analyzing the previous year's list of attendees is essential.

By analyzing audience data we can establish the framework for strong and relevant presentation content. We should now have a good idea of the particular interests of our audience, their requisite needs, their dislikes, and their primary drivers. With this information we can incorporate topical elements into the presentation's content. We can introduce industry sector news and key issues into the subject matter. We can make reference to key figures in certain organizations or industries -- we can demonstrate that we have a rapport with the people and concerns that fill our audience's working days.

In demonstrating relevance we also demonstrate effectiveness. We still have some way to go, not least we have to ensure that our presentation is useful and meets our mission requirements, but we have achieved relevance by knowing our audience. We are well down the path to being an effective presenter.