

Can You Hear Me Now?

By
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*Make sure you have finished speaking before
your audience has finished listening!*

-Dorothy Sarnoff

Pitch to the Way People Listen to Get Your Message Heard

Listening is at the heart of every perfect pitch. If you're not talking so other people can hear you, you will never get your message across.

Have you ever noticed how people look when they are really listening? Leaning forward, eyes locked on the speaker, nodding or gesturing as each point is made, people who are listening are working hard and you can see it. But, what about the part of the listening process you can't see?

Your audience is processing what you are saying faster than you are speaking.

Research shows that most people talk at a rate of 135 to 150 words per minute but can listen and process information at 400 words per minute or faster with some experts saying the number could be as high as thousands of words per minute. When you add that to the fact that we retain on average only 25% of what we hear, that 75% is lost, you're looking at a communication chasm that can seriously affect the impact of your message. No wonder sound bites have become ubiquitous in our culture!

So what's happening in the transmission gap between how fast you are speaking and how fast your audience is listening? Lots of things, many of them having nothing to do with your agenda.

What's happening as your audience listens?

- **They're deciding if they want to listen.** Make sure your physical appearance, your presentation materials, the setting and timing of your pitch maximize your target's attention. Don't give them any excuses to wander away in their mind.
- **They are wrestling with or giving in to distractions.** Even the mind of the most intent listener will wander from time to time. In fact, studies say to keep your listener's attention, it's useful to do something that brings their focus back to you every five to seven minutes.

- **They are following you or getting lost.** Make it easy for your audience to follow what you are saying by organizing your material into key concepts, points, or ideas. Re-cap each section and check for understanding with a few well-placed questions.
- **They are having an emotional reaction, good, bad or indifferent.** Incorporating stories and impactful images can swing your audience's mood in the direction you want to take them.
- **They are making judgments.** We all do it—judge on small bits of information and subtle cues. Be aware of how every aspect of your presentation can influence the judgments your audience is making.
- **They are interrupting you in their mind with questions or arguments for or against.** Build in answers to unasked questions as you go.
- **They are closed or open to your message.** Watch for body language cues. They will tell you how well you are connecting.
- **They are gauging how much they need to listen vs. how much they have to listen.** When you need to listen, what's being said takes on dramatically more importance. Raise your target's listening urgency by making your message personal and vitally important to him. This is where your own listening skills kick in. Ask big questions about your target's wants and needs and tie your pitch to that.
- **They are forming conclusions.** They may have even formed a conclusion way before you have presented all the information they need to draw that conclusion. Make sure your pitch leads them to the conclusion you want them to make.

Knowledge is power! The more you know about how people listen, the more impact your pitch will have.

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