

Questions are the Answer to Building the Perfect Pitch!

By
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*You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers.
You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.*
-Mahfouz Naguib

*He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes;
he who does not ask a question remains a fool forever.*
-Chinese Proverb

The important thing is to not stop questioning.
-Albert Einstein

Questions are essential tools for building your pitch

Questions are a critical part of your pitch building process. It is through questions that you will uncover what is most important to your audience. Whether it's a job interviewer, a client prospect, an investor group or even your boss, adding questions to your pitch toolbox will help you position your pitch to best meet your target's needs and objectives.

Where is the gap?

The goal of your questions is always to identify the gap. The gap is the space between where your audience is right now and where it wants to be. The gap is where all your opportunity is. Let's say you are pitching a new client on your services. It's tempting to launch into a monologue about what you can do but if you don't know what your client is looking for you could be pitching them on things that don't matter or will keep you from closing the deal.

Values are important too

Once you have identified the gap, move on to questions that will reveal what your audience values. Values questions like, "What is most important to you in a relationship with your service providers?" tell you how to manage the business when you get it but also can guide you in how you present your pitch. Knowing what the client values gives you a chance to build that in from the beginning.

Questions 101

While there are many ways to ask a question, there are really only two types of questions. These are:

- Close-ended questions, also known as directive questions: These questions call for a yes/no answer. “Have you filled the position yet?” is a question that requires a yes/no answer. Yes/no questions can be useful but won't give you the whole picture.
- Open-ended or non-directive questions: These questions expand the possibilities for a response. Questions that ask who, what, when, where, why and how are open-ended. For example, “What qualities are you looking for in candidates for this position?” will tell you quite a bit about how to present your qualifications to address what the company views as important. Open-ended questions also communicate more about your level of interest in your audience.

What do you want to know?

Your questions will depend on what you want to know. Here are a few things your questions could uncover.

- Is this my ideal client, job opportunity or project?
- Am I talking to the decision maker or is that someone else?
- How urgent is it? What is the timeframe?
- What criteria will be used to make a decision?
- What is most important to the relationship?
- What is the desired outcome? How will success be measured?

Systems make the strategic use of questions automatic

The problem with questions is, in your excitement, you may often forget to ask them. That won't happen if you build them into a system for responding to opportunity. For example, if you get new business inquiries by telephone, you could create a system for gathering information you can keep near the phone. In my business, I created a series of pre-printed forms. The first is for the initial contact and conversation, the second is for enrolling a new client and the third is for capturing billing data. Each builds in sequenced questions I want to be sure I always ask like . . .

- How did you hear about my services?
- What is most important to you in your selection process?
- If we were to work together, how would you measure the return on your investment?

A few final thoughts on questions

Here are a few things to remember as you begin to add questions to your pitch building toolbox.

- **Cultivate curiosity.** A sincere interest in what your audience wants is a very attractive quality. Questions like, "I'm curious about how you started your company" or "I'm curious about what influenced your decision to change vendors" rivets attention on your audience and communicates your desire to understand the world from their point of view.
- **Know when to stop talking.** Just ask your question and wait. Don't fill up the silence. Let the silence pull the answer. Some people take longer than others to respond. You may be the first vendor or applicant to have taken the time to ask that. Give the other person time to frame a response.
- **Know what you are looking for in a client, business opportunity, investor, or job.** Don't be afraid to be very specific with yourself about what you want. Craft your questions to determine the degree of match between what you want and what is presented.
- **Prepare your questions in advance.** One or two opening questions will get the conversation flowing and help direct your inquiry.
- **Create a script you can easily refer to.** Scripts work very well on the phone but you can use them in face to face meetings too. In fact, a series of questions that are presented in a systematic way can say a lot about you as a professional.
- **Follow where the answers lead you.** Get off your script if the answers are taking you into new territory. You could uncover more opportunity than you first imagined.

Knowledge is power! The more you know about how to craft questions that uncover meaningful information, the more focused and targeted your pitch will be.

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