

YOU Are The Pitch

By
Mariette Edwards

Communication is the secret to success in business. As an owner, partner, executive or leader, selling your board, your investors, your staff and your customers on your vision and values is one of the most important things you will ever do. But what is your audience really buying when you pitch? And more importantly, what can you do to increase your chances that they will buy?

People want to do business with, they want to work for, they want to follow, people they believe in, know and trust. They want, in short, to do business with people they like. Your significant business others are not buying a pitch, they are buying you. In other words, YOU are the pitch.

Take Steve Jobs, for example. Would you buy what he is selling? Millions upon millions of iPhone users do. And, Wall Street certainly does. Recent rumors of ill-health, dispelled by the way, have briefly sent Apple stock on a downward run. Why? Steve Jobs *is* Apple. Steve Jobs *is* the pitch! Let's look at what that means and what lessons we can all take from his success.

First, Steve Jobs is authentic. When he strides onto the MacWorld stage each year in his signature black shirt, worn blue jeans and white sneakers, he is totally in synch with who he is and who he is speaking to. If he were wearing a suit, would you believe him then? I'd say, "Probably not." There's nothing off about the way he looks before he ever starts speaking. That leads us to the second important element of his pitch.

He's congruent. Everything works. Nothing about what he says or does takes you out of the magic. Nothing distracts you from his message.

Third, he's crystal clear about his vision and fourth, he is passionate in the way he expresses it. He draws you right into the world he wants you to play in. And that is the fifth and most important element. He knows how to connect with his customers, his investors and his employees. He knows what his customers and investors want. Steve Jobs is masterful at giving his customers what they have only dreamed of while at the same time talking ROI in sufficient detail to keep Wall Street optimistic about the company's prospects. He builds his people into his presentation, too, mentioning many by name. He is clearly proud of everyone that works there. Who wouldn't want to buy from this guy?

In short, Steve Jobs is the five most important parts of any pitch—authenticity, congruency, passion, clarity and connection.

Benjamin Franklin said that, "If you would persuade, you must appeal to interest rather than intellect." Leveraging "interest" is the heart and soul of every successful

pitch. And even if you pour authenticity, congruency, passion and clarity into the situation, without appealing to your “buyer’s” interest, you will never create connection. It will always be all about you.

Webster's defines “interest” as both “a sense of concern with and curiosity about someone or something” and “the power of attracting or holding one's attention.” When you are concerned and curious about someone or something, it naturally shifts your focus away from what you want and places it where it belongs-on what your buyer, partner, customer, or investor wants. You may have a great idea, an important new product or a sure-fire solution to your client’s biggest problem but if your pitch doesn't appeal to what is most important to your buyer, you won't get buy-in. One of the biggest mistakes I see people make when they are in a pitch situation whether it’s with a client, a prospect, a job interview or a meeting with investors is that they make the event all about themselves. So even if you think you know what the problem is, it's absolutely critical to match your take on the situation with your buyer's.

In a recent pitch workshop, one of the participants was showing us how she pitched the managing partner on an idea for a new way to produce the company newsletter. Her pitch was based on what he asked for so she was frustrated and disappointed when he did not buy into her solution. A closer look at how she positioned her pitch revealed that she had omitted any reference to his original objectives. Instead, she had skewed the pitch toward the glamour of her problem-solving creative idea, making the pitch more about her creativity than the partner’s goals. She threw everything she had at the pitch but missed the most essential element.

Getting back to our Steve Jobs model, here are five ways to build connection into every pitch you make.

1. **Know and leverage what your buyer wants.** Your opportunity for delivering the perfect pitch is hidden in the gap between where your buyer is now and where he or she wants to be. Ask BIG questions to uncover that gap. An ad exec I spoke with recently had just pitched a concept for an on-line ad campaign. He knew going in that the client was concerned about the size of his agency but he didn’t factor that into his pitch. He went to the pitch alone and left feeling the next presenter (with four colleagues) showed up as a larger and more stable company. He could have easily done the same thing. Instead, he spent the pitch trying to convince his prospect that his business was bigger than just himself (which it was). The client never heard the rest of his pitch because they were so focused on *their* key issue. He knew his audience but he didn’t use what he knew and so he never connected.
2. **Frame your pitch in terms of results.** People buy results. Pitch your background, experience, vision, concept or idea in terms of the results you have produced or in a way that incorporates a result that matches your buyer’s objectives. Shift your point of view to see the pitch from the other side. What’s most important to them? For example, a landscape designer who wanted to move

into a new career in environmental advocacy pitched the results she achieved in fund raising and citizen advocacy as two connecting points with her target audience.

3. **Create vivid images.** Make your pitch come alive with vivid images that stir the senses and build an emotional connection. The broader the range of sensory involvement you create, the more connection you will make. When Steve Jobs rolled out the iPhone last year, he not only had a giant image on a screen that everyone could see, he had an actual working iPhone in his hand that he used to show each feature and function. Not only could you see how easy it was to use, but by holding it, the audience got a sense of its actual size and, I suspect, could almost feel it in their own hands, too.
4. **Keep it short and sweet.** Resist the temptation to say too much. Talking too much breaks the connection. Instead, focus on creating short, easy-to-remember sound bites that convey key concepts while stirring an emotional response.
5. **Pitch when people are ready to buy.** Timing really is everything. If you have the solution to a problem your buyer has, that's a great time to schedule a pitch. Timing can also mean time of day, day of week, time of year. Pay attention to the cues your buyer gives you about timing so you can use them to maximize your results.

Knowledge is power! You are the pitch and it is your authenticity, congruency, clarity, passion and connection that will make buying YOU an easy decision.

###

Mariette Edwards is an executive coach with an insider's perspective on how businesses make people decisions. Visit her web site at www.starmakercoaching.com for more information.
mariette@starmakercoaching.com / www.starmakercoaching.com

©Copyright 2009 Mariette Edwards All rights reserved.

May be copied or reprinted provided nothing is changed including copyright and contact information.

