

Do's and Don'ts of Pitching

It was confession time at a recent meetup: I get angry easily. Bored, disappointed, but definitely angry when I have to sit through a lousy pitch. Here you are, with the opportunity you've been dreaming of, and instead of wooing us, you blow it. Who let you in? I want to lash out. Why aren't you prepared?

Before you pooch your next shot at stardom, consider these Don'ts of Pitching:

Don'ts

1. Don't do a demo. Even Steve Jobs can't always get it to work, so you think you will? Save it for later, after we're more interested.
2. Don't show a video. "Look, we've been on TV!" Just tell us, don't make us watch some CNN TV personality gush over your startup.
3. Don't clutter your slides with photos.
4. Don't put elaborate diagrams on your slides. I'm terrified that you'll explain every part of it!
5. Don't do an introduction. "Here's what I'm going to tell you..." No, please. Just get started. This isn't Toastmasters.
6. No summaries, either. I'm chomping at the bit with questions. Don't make me wait. Just stop when you're finished.
7. No timelines, please. I know Guy Kawasaki likes these, but what a waste of breath! Let me guess, you started here on the left, you created something here in the middle and now on the right, you need money! I get it. Next slide.
8. No paragraphs of text. Let's go further, no sentences either. Because when you fall behind or get nervous because we're all checking our Blackberries you'll start reading your slides.
9. Don't read your slides. We can read 6x faster than you can speak. Don't torture us.
10. Don't hand off the next part of your presentation to your partner. We assume he can talk, but there's a 50-50 chance we won't like him as much as you, so don't get fancy, keep going. Next slide.
11. Don't orate, narrate. We'll remember stories and tell them to our friends. Don't stand up there and deliver a memorized speech.
12. Don't show us detailed financials in microscopic font, this is a presentation.
13. Don't cram your slides with text. When I suggest, "if you had used a smaller font you could've squeezed even more text onto that slide", I'm not being helpful. That's sarcasm.

Do's

1. Click the first slide immediately. Make your introductory remarks on the next slide. By starting the presentation right away we know you know your time limits.
2. Do tell us about your prior startup, even if it wasn't successful. Practice makes perfect and we offer extra credit to you whether or not you succeeded. (Whether we should or not, is another question.)
3. Close with the ask. Tell us your pre-money valuation, how much you want and what you'll do with the money. If you've done the rest of your presentation right this is where you should reach climax.
4. Start with a quick description of what you do and who your customer is.
5. Introduce your team on the 3rd or 4th slide. Not too early, we won't care; not too late, we'll be wondering instead of listening.
6. Use photos that take up the entire slide. A single image for a singular idea.
7. Only use trigger words as bullets, not whole sentences. For example, when you see the phrase MULTIPLE MARKETS, you'll know what to say.
8. Use a BIG FONT, like 44pt, so we can see something from the back of the room.
9. Bite size. Feed us one idea at a time. Put one idea on each slide. Yes you'll have more than the magical 12 slides, but you'll zip through them. Angels like fast moving presentations; we can keep up. Next slide.
10. Show financials we can see. Maybe only a couple of rows and a few columns, not that entire spreadsheet; this is our first meeting, if we want more detail we'll ask.
11. Read Garr Reynolds' [Presentation Zen](#). You'll be doing us both a big favor.
12. You don't need to tell us everything about your product. What you hope for is that when you finish, every hand in the room goes up. Now you're selling! Good luck!

You don't need to tell us everything about your product. What you hope for is that when you finish, every hand in the room goes up. Now you're selling! Good luck!