What makes a great conference presentation?

MARK CAREY-SMITH   JAN 09, 2023 09:34PM UTC

What are the attributes of a great presentation or webinar?

A good story

I find that an interesting story that ties back to the overall theme of the presentation helps when paying attention to a presentation. In cyber this usually ends up being a walkthrough or play-by-play of an interesting incident & subsequent investigation, but even non-cyber presentations are more interesting with an attached story or real world example

> *A good story is part of all of my presentations. It can be used to create interest (especially if the topic is a bit dry), and also to "personalise" an experience which helps the audience to remember and comprehend the topic/risk.*   — ANONYMOUS

I find valuable a presentation that is interactive and engaging directly with the audience. Sharing a story / add a bit of humor makes it more catchy

A presentation that tells an experience (good or bad) couples with technical concepts. The technical jargons are easily understood by all audience.

> *I think this means that any technical jargon used should be easily understood by the audience. I would add that explaining any acronyms the first time they are used is good practice in any form of communication.*   — MARK CAREY-SMITH

Keep it real

A great presenter is authentic; they engage with their audience by tapping into common values and emotions.

Body language - Tone - slides

I find that body language of the presenter plays an important role - expressive hand signals help to a lot.

Voice tone - knowing when to speed up and slow down; low and high etc

If presenter is using PowerPoint slides, fewer words and more images are better — I don't want to listen and read slides at the same time.

A good presentation provide real life example from the speakers and then engage with the audience to share more real life experience about a certain topic.
I will 100% loose focus and interest if the speaker talks too much about him/her self.

Understand the audience

It is critically important that you understand the audience, consider their level of understanding of the topic and then tailor the content to the group. If it is a wide spectrum of people start with the intro and just mention you are doing it for the wider group - this HBR link is great (https://hbr.org/2022/12/the-best-public-speakers-put-the-audience-first)

The Best Public Speakers Put the Audience First
Being an exceptional public speaker is about much more than making an attention-getting introduction, giving great eye contact, and knowing what to do with your hands. It's about addressing what your listeners want and need to hear - not what you want to say.

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW
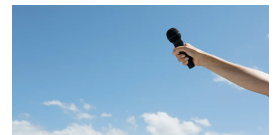
What are negative elements of a presentation or webinar that should be avoided?

Spending a long time on a specific point

The audience at our conference is full of brilliant people, everyone usually gets a point by the second time it's repeated, there's no need to keep going over the same information in different ways.

This comment is in the context of the annual AusCERT conference but this advice is relevant to most conferences and meetups. — MARK CAREY-SMITH

Not knowing your target audience, and not tailoring the content and timeliness accordingly.

This is definitely not a good idea and I like to "ask the audience something at the start if I think I need to understand the audience demographic in more detail. That also provides the opportunity for engagement. — ANONYMOUS

Using acronyms and complex verbiage that audience possibly does not understand. Reading the slides without story telling is also unattractive.

Talking in a monotone voice, with low energy, and/or too fast

Death by Power(less)Point

Just don't.

This video is a great resource for speakers of any level of experience: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iwpi1Lm6dFo — MARK CAREY-SMITH

Poorly developed content

1. Too many slides
2. Words packed slides

Speaker with big ego

If the speaker talk too much about himself.
Also being funny is good but some speakers have too many jokes and then the presentation looses it legitimacy.
Monotone tone through the enter presentation is also very hard to follow.
An unhappy speaker is also terrible to listen to.

In relation to the last 2 comments, one way to avoid these things is to do lots of practice, both on your own and to a small, friendly audience, even if that's just 1 person. — MARK CAREY-SMITH

To much content, unclear structure and being rushed

Don't try and put everything in the presentation, if you have too much content and rush it will come off like you are not clear what you are trying to communicate.

What advice would you give to a first time conference presenter?

Don't sweat the small mistakes, just push through and don't try to overcorrect or go in circles

PREACH — ANONYMOUS

Understand the content you are delivering fully.

This is valuable advice that I have been given and want to pay it forward. The good news about presenting is that audience does not know your content, so they will not know when you did a mistake. Preparation is important, gives the speaker more confidence.

Wear pants

First impressions count.
Consider your audience and dress appropriately for the occasion; always go "a step up". If the audience wears polo shirts, you wear a business shirt but lose the tie.

Prepare

1. Practise the presentation many times
2. Identify the key points on each slides
3. Don't read everything on the slides

Preparation

I have not done any presentation since uni but preparation and going through the content a couple of times before the conference is highly recommended

I would love to present soon

Maybe in the next 5 years I will be brave enough to get on stage and present ☺

Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice the presentation, I usually do it at least 3 times timed to make sure the flow makes sense and to get a feel for how long things take and so that when you are on stage you won't be unsure of time.

Then practice with some friends, they will give you heaps of awesome feedback.

Leave enough time so you can incorporate the feedback.

Don't mess with the slides the night before/day of haha

Anything else you'd like to contribute?

I would love to see new presenters, with diverse experience and culture backgrounds, including new industry joiners.

Inflections matter

Never finish your sentences with the same inflection you use for a question or it sounds like everything coming out of your mouth is a query.

Avoid "ummmmm" and repeating certain words too frequently.

Don't freak out - people want you to succeed

Don't freak out, people want to see you succeed!

Also, find the MC before you present, have a chat, they will give you top cover (I know I do ;))

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