Many sales opportunities have been lost when a team presentation was poorly orchestrated and delivered. The client reaction is, "If they can't coordinate a team presentation, how can they coordinate the work we need to have done?"

Any professional sports coach will tell you that in order to win you need an effective team. The same can be true of a team presentation. After all, speaking is an audience-centered sport.

Instead of a touchdown or homerun, however, the members of a speaking team strive to win over their audience to sell their ideas, products, or services.

How can this be done? Common sense dictates that all members of a team need to work together to achieve the common goal. Before you can do anything, some decisions need to be made -- the most important being who will be an effective leader for the team? After all, without John Elway at the helm, the odds are his team, the Broncos, wouldn't have won the Super Bowl.

**Every Team Needs a Leader**

So who will the team select as its leader? Someone who is responsible for all aspects of the presentation - an overseer of sorts. The key role of this person is to develop and implement the proper strategy and preparation.

A team presentation leader should be a SME -- subject matter expert. He or she also should be organized and dedicated to seeing the presentation to its successful conclusion. The team leader needs to be aware of a potential pitfall - delegating too soon. The leader should be hands-on until the entire presentation is decided and planned, then some aspects can be delegated.

The team leader is the person who needs to know the presentation’s PAL™ -- Purpose, Audience and Logistics.

**Know the PAL™:**

If the team's purpose is to inform the audience, then it needs to provide new and useful information. If, however, the group's goal is to persuade, then it needs to make audience members believe in the message or call them to action. The team leader needs to get answers to many questions: Who is in the audience? Are they colleagues or prospective clients? Why are they there? What are their demographics (Where are they from? How old are they?). What is their attitude toward your objective? What knowledge do they have and do they need?

How many people will be in attendance? It's important to get an idea of the audience size - you definitely don't want the presentation team to outnumber the audience! Even seasoned professional speakers sometimes forget to do all their
homework and wind up feeling foolish. Don’t let the same thing happen to members of your team.

Knowing other logistics about the occasion is important, too. What visual equipment is available? How much time do you have to present? What time of day will you be speaking? If this is a sales presentation, who are your competitors? In what order are you speaking? The answers to these questions are crucial factors in helping you tailor your presentation.

Once you have determined your PAL, write your overall objective in one sentence or less. What do you want your audience to know, do, or feel as a result of the presentation? This helps you maintain focus during the preparation process.

Answering all PAL questions is critical, and allows the team leader to decide who are the best people for the team.

**Build the Right Team**

When putting a presentation team together, the leader needs to evaluate all aspects of the speakers - their personality traits and overall skills. Are they known for their humorous style? Do they always use props during their presentations to convey points? Are they bad at fielding and answering questions?

Building an effective presentation team is a lot like baking - you need the right mix of ingredients and attention to detail to create something worthwhile. And each team "ingredient" needs to remember how important his or her role is to the final product.

Resist the temptation to go overboard when composing a team. The more people there are, the longer it will take in preparing for the presentation.

**Prior and Proper Preparation**

Each presenter should get his or her own written "marching orders." These responsibilities need to address speech content, transitions between team speakers, visual aids, audience materials (handouts, books, etc.), and participation in scheduled practice sessions.

Once you clarify your objectives, it's time for each team member to prepare his or her section of the presentation. The first step is to collect material. Unless you plan on a "data dump," look for analogies and metaphors, stories, examples, audience involvement techniques, or case studies to support the facts and figures.

Each member of the team needs to use proper transitions to guarantee a good flow of ideas between segments of the overall presentation. Writing out these transitions helps to reinforce primary themes without being redundant. It can also ensure that each team member be prepared for his or her "part."

The speakers selected to open and close the presentation write the introduction and conclusion after the body of the presentation is completed. They need to start with impact, including the benefit of the presentation to the audience. They need to end with strength and something memorable.
A user-friendly final draft works best as an outline on notepaper, minimal 18 point boldface. Highlight the must-know, should-know and could-know materials in different colors.

**Practice Does Make Perfect**
Use the latest technologies to keep in touch with your team members prior to the presentation. Send mass e-mail to inform them of practice sessions or event changes requiring a change in presentation content.

Individual team members can practice their respective parts, but the whole team needs to practice together too. Practice needs to be coordinated so there is enough time to make any necessary changes. In addition to team practices, have at least one last "dress rehearsal." When team members practice, tell them to do so at least three to six times, out loud -- saying the speech differently each time to keep the spontaneity. Having them practice in their heads won't work as well as them actually saying it. Record team members practicing. Remember, if you don't find your presentations interesting, no one else will either.

**Try for a Similar Yet Different Feel**
It's OK if team members want to make their own visual aids, but the leader needs to ensure that they all have the same overall look or format. If team members don't know how to create visually exciting and appropriate visual aids, consider using one outside source - a design house that specializes in computer graphics, perhaps.

Continuity in visual aids should also carry over into content. Each presentation should use similar vocabulary for common phrases. For example, if the first presenter says "overheads" to refer to a visual aid and the next person says "slides" when pointing to the same item, audience members may get confused.

**Remember the Ins and Outs**
The most overlooked aspects of team presentations are often the introduction and transitions. When used properly, these bind the presentation into a smooth, cohesive effort. Used incorrectly, they not only reflect poorly on the speaker, but also the group or company coordinating the event.

The team leader needs to decide ahead of time, with group input, how introductions will be handled. Will each presenter do a self-introduction before they speak? Will the previous presenter announce the next one? Will the team leader perform all introductions? Or, will the host or coordinator of the meeting take on the "emcee" role?

Each team member needs to create his or her own snappy transitions. There needs to be a common thread to all presentations, so when one ends, the next begins logically, following a similar line of thought as the previous speech.

It's also extremely important that each presenter watch each other speak, reading the audience for their response to various aspects of the presentation. This can help determine if the audience is tired, hostile, friendly, etc. - allowing subsequent members of the team to avoid sensitive topics or use various
strategies.

Q & A
Team members should also handle questions from the audience in a uniform way. Beforehand, the leader needs to decide - will questions be answered at the end of each speaker segment? Or, will audience members be asked to hold all questions until the end of the entire presentation - answering questions in an open format. Also, do all questions go to the team leader so he or she can redirect, or do questions go directly to an individual speaker?

Questions should be answered concisely. Paraphrase the question before answering it. This will help to clarify it and to make sure the speaker understands the question. At some time you may encounter someone whose only objective is to stump the speaker or put you on the defensive. If you don't know the answer, say so. Perhaps another member of your team can address the question. If not, tell the questioner that you will find out the answer and get back to him or her.

When a question is targeted to one team member, but another feels compelled to address it, the team leader should step in. The danger here is that a concise, 20-second answer can turn into a several minute diatribe. Decide beforehand who will answer certain subject areas, or which cues to use to invite other speakers to address the question.

Too often, companies don't value the impact of a powerful team presentation until they lose business due to poor team sales presentations. Just like in sports - planning, preparation, and practice prevents poor performance.

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