AMERICAN MARKETER

Business at its best

5 tips to help with your presentations

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Katie Lundin is a marketing and branding specialist at crowdspring

By Katie Lundin

I am about to lay down some truth.

How you present a design to a client can be as important as the design itself.

I can hear the outrage already. "Good design speaks for itself!" the naysayers will cry.

And, in some cases, that may be true.

Other creative directors, designers or visual marketers may be able to identify good design. But that does not mean that every client can do so.

Deck issues

Most clients simply do not see your work from your perspective.

But a strong presentation bridges the gap between a creative's vision and a client's perception.

And the right presentation can mean the difference between a client's buy-in and the outright dismissal of a design, strategy or proposal.

If you want a client to see your idea's true potential, you have to help them see it with your presentation.

Whether you are a design agency, a marketing agency, or a freelance designer or visual marketer, your client presentation skills are crucial.

In fact, I found that just one of the techniques discussed below is used in 71 percent of our winning designs.

So, if your agency is serious about winning over your audience and getting client buy-in, read on.

These are the best ways to effectively present your agency's proposal to a client:

Link your solution to the client's needs

Whether you are working from a design brief or a client intake consultation form, at some point the client shared the challenge they need your help to overcome or the goal they need your help to achieve.

And, yet, many clients do not always remember exactly what they asked for. Still, others remember it all too well.

No matter which type of client you have, it is always best to recap the challenges, goals and desires they shared with you that inspired the work you are about to present.

Since your proposal or design stems directly from their needs, you want to be sure that those needs are at the top of their mind. Only then should you go on to explain how your design or marketing strategy will solve their problem or meet their goal.

Directly linking your specific choices to your client's needswill help them understand your choices and see how your solution is relevant to *them*.

Your presentation action items

- Create a written summary of the most essential challenges/goals presented by the client.
- Quickly recap these points before sharing your solution including design, marketing strategy and ad concept.
- Verbally link these original goals and challenges to your solution as you present.

Communicate your vision with context

Most non-designers cannot envision a finalized brand or Web site from a work in progress.

A single logo sketch on a blank page is not enough to communicate a full brand identity. And technical drawings are not enough to help most clients really see the finished product.

So, you have to help the client see the completed vision.

Present designs and proposals in the most finished, polished form possible. And show clients how your design or strategy fits into your vision by providing context.

Present a clothing brand logo design on retail tags or on a garment. Demonstrate a Web site design as it will appear to a Web visitor on a mock-up of a laptop, mobile device or tablet. Include a style guide, if appropriate, so the client can see how this design would translate into overall branding and marketing visuals.

Most agencies already do this effectively when presenting package graphics for client products. After all, the client wants to see exactly how their product packaging will look.

You should apply the same approach to other types of designs.

When presenting a marketing strategy, include graphics that outline the complete process. Demonstrate how you will track your results, and include mock-ups of possible graphic design elements for the campaigns.

Do this even when you are helping clients develop other parts of their brand identity.

For example, if you are helping a client to come up with a great new business name, consider giving them some context and put the name on a storefront or a business card.

And, do not just take our word that context is important the data backs us up.

Our marketing team conducted an analysis of winning crowdspring entries. We found that 71 percent of the winning entries were presented with mock-ups, style guides, or some form of additional design to help the client understand the work in context.

Your presentation action items

- Never assume that a client can fill in the blanks of a marketing strategy or design give complete information and draw conclusions even if they seem obvious to you.
- Present every proposal or design in its most complete, polished form.
- Help clients visualize your idea in execution by showing designs in context with realistic mock-ups.

Remember to whom you are talking

Your audience is an important variable in every pitch meeting. Every audience is unique and every audience member has a unique perspective.

And I do not just mean people-with-a-design-education versus people-without-a-design-education, although that is a

And I do not just mean people with a design education versus people without a design education, although that is a valid consideration.

I mean target your pitch to your audience. Make your proposal or design presentation relevant for them. Marketers care about different things than project managers or chief financial officers.

The aesthetics of design are important but only as far as they impact the client's final tangible goals. It is your job to show how a design will accomplish the goals that your specific audience will care about.

So, learn as much as you can about the audience to whom you will be presenting. Then speak to how your design will help them reach the goals about which they care.

Your presentation action items

- Find out who will be attending the presentation and their role. And find out well in advance, if possible.

- Choose your talking points based on what your audience members will find most compelling. Include complete information in the accompanying write-up.

- Determine who the real decision makers in the group are and prioritize their concerns and feedback.

Visually design every element of your presentation

Sure, you could just slap your design on a white background and call it done. But, I would advise against it.

A beautiful design with a weak visual presentation loses credibility. And presenting a disorganized marketing proposal has the same negative effect. Why should clients trust your judgment if you undermine it with poor delivery?

Good designers, marketers and creative directors know that the whole visual package must work together to sell an idea. When presenting a proposal to a client, optimize your presentation materials to give them the best chance to impress your unique client.

Your presentation materials should reflect the brand of the business for whom you are designing. This will help capture their attention and gain their buy-in.

Also, remember basic design principles such as visual balance, readability, proportion and the inclusion of white space to highlight the featured design, if appropriate.

Your presentation action items

- Take the time to plan the visuals and presentation order for all of your materials.

- Design for your client's tastes keep in mind their brand values as well as their visual brand.

- Rehearse your presentation with the finished supporting materials to avoid hiccups during the actual client meeting.

- Remember to design the visuals surrounding your design to show off the main feature in its best possible light.

Only share ideas in which you are 100 percent confident

So, you included a weak design in your pitch options. You thought you were being clever and that it would make your favorite design look better in comparison. But now the ringer is the only design the client wants.

Or, even worse, you were short on ideas so you felt like you had to include the weak design just to make your numbers.

Please do not ever put yourself in this position.

Clients have an uncanny ability to choose the design or idea of which you are least fond. That is why it is vital to only ever share a proposal or design in which you have 100 percent confidence.

If the client chooses a strategy or design that you do not fully endorse, you are stuck executing it anyway. No one enjoys working on a project in which they do not believe. Not to mention that if or when it fails, that will reflect poorly on you.

So, do not take the risk. If you do not have work that you love to present, take more time to develop new designs.

Just do not present bad designs or ideas. Ever.

Your presentation action items

- Never present an idea you would not be comfortable with the client choosing as the final design or plan.

- Speak confidently and with authority know your design or proposal like the back of your hand.

- Offer at least three strong options for the client to choose from one "safe" option, one that pushes the boundaries, and one that is in between.

YOU WORK TOO hard to let your efforts falter in the final lap. Strong communication is the key to selling any design, strategy or proposal.

Do right by your clients and your business by presenting your work in the best possible light.

Katie Lundin is a marketing and branding specialist at Chicago-based crowdspring. Reach her at katie@crowdspring.com.

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