

Top 3 Mistakes Entrepreneurs Make that Cause Them to Lose Credibility, Lose Sales, and Go Out of Business!

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Times are tough and competition is fierce. You need to get the maximum results from every encounter and that's a challenge to you. But the way you're judged is often much more subjective than you would expect. Potential customers get a general impression of you from your public *persona*, and that sticks.

Do you have credibility? When you make a suggestion, do others accept it? The answer to these questions is key to your success, because it reflects the opinion others have of you. And those people make the decisions about whether your business is successful or not.

Here are 3 top mistakes entrepreneurs make that affect their credibility, and as a result, whether they get that sale.

Top Mistake #3: Lack of Effective Communication Skills

Did you know that the stickiest part of the impression you make comes from how you speak in a group setting? Recent research at the University of California, Berkeley showed that people who spoke up and offered suggestions in a group setting were considered to be the most competent — regardless of the content of their suggestions! They were also judged to be more intelligent, dependable, and self-disciplined.

Here's another fact. Employers responded to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers on the importance of candidate qualities and skills. The results shows that while employers rated communication skills as one of their most desired characteristics, they also reported that those are the skills most lacking. This applies to entrepreneurs, too!

The damage of poor communication skills

Why are communication skills so important and what happens when an entrepreneur has poor skills? The entire impulse that drives a business forward happens via communication. When miscommunication occurs, the result is:

- **Wrong decisions are made:** People don't understand the situation and act in a way that hurts the organization. Or they misunderstand and do a task incorrectly.
- **Necessary action is not taken:** People don't get the point, so they do nothing.

For these reasons, communications skills are important. You would think entrepreneurs would get some training, but they rarely do. Instead, entrepreneurs without the necessary skills simply don't get the sales they want.

Why are presentation skills so important? Although all communications skills are important, the skill that makes the most impression is how you communicate in person in a group setting, in other words, presentation skills. Not all presentations are formal and use PowerPoint. But those types of presentations are the most watched of all. Each time you give a planned presentation, the people in the audience subconsciously grade you!

In basketball, sometimes a player passes a ball to the wrong location and causes a turnover. The coach rolls his eyes, thinking, “Miscommunication!” It can lose games and it can hurt your business.

What should you do?

If you don’t have excellent communication skills, you need to get them—and fast. A presentation consists of 3 components:

- **Content:** You need well-organized points, clear logic, supporting data, a clear beginning and conclusion. And never stuff in too much information for the time allowed!
- **Design:** Your design needs to be clear and visual. Your supporting data needs to be readable by people in the back (what a thought!). Stay away from slides full of bulleted text—people will think you’re boring within 30 seconds and you’ll lose credibility!
- **Delivery:** Have a conversation with the audience and interact. Practice eye contact and using your hands appropriately. Avoid annoying habits like pacing, jingling coins in your pocket, or fixing your hair.

All aspects of a presentation are important. Take the time to prepare each presentation thoroughly, and then practice. If that’s not enough, take a course.

Top Mistake #2: Unconscious Arrogance

That’s pretty strong language, but it’s true. Most people think only of their own point of view when they communicate. It’s why managers are taught in business school to close the feedback loop when they speak—to make sure their audience really understands.

You need to think of the needs of your audience rather than speak out what you want to say. This is hard to learn. Really, you need to unlearn years of bad practice.

The damage of the self-centered approach

You’ve probably seen how this arrogance, or self-centered approach, can seriously harm an organization. How often have you seen managers fight to spend all the money in their budget, even when the money isn’t needed? Or make proposals that require their department to grow, regardless of whether it’s valuable for the organization as a whole?

Even an entrepreneur is part of a team. And, of course, you speak to potential customers. When you present in a self-centered way, the needs of your team and potential customers are not met. The results are a disaster.

What should you do?

When you present, you need to put yourself in the shoes of the decision maker in the room. This is called an audience-centered presentation. You might be thinking of technical issues, but your audience may be thinking of long-term strategy.

You should know what your audience's priorities are, but if you don't, ask. When you know you'll be doing a presentation, ask what's important, what the takeaways should be. Action steps? Market analysis? Each situation is different, but you need to know the goal of the presentation from the point of view of your audience.

In a formal presentation, you may not have advance access to the people in the audience. In this situation, you over-prepare, and ask questions when you get there. Involve the audience in the process and adjust on the fly. You can create a presentation that functions like a menu, letting you quickly move to slides covering topics that the audience members indicate are important to them.

Top Mistake #1: Lousy Presentations

How many presentations have you attended that fit the description of "Death by PowerPoint?" Dozens? Hundreds? What do you do differently?

When you put up a bunch of bullet-laden, hard-to-read slides, full of text and incomprehensible graphics, you're sounding the death knell for your business. After all, what do you think of others who do the same?

I see these mistakes over and over and it hurts. You've seen them too. Haven't you cringed as you sat through a Death by PowerPoint presentation? Where do your skills stand?

The damage of lousy presentations

When you display a slide that contains all or most of the text you're saying, you almost have to read the slide. Did you know that one of the top complaints of audiences is speakers who read their slides to their audience? They actually find it insulting! "I can read!" they tell me.

Research has shown that the brain doesn't multitask very well. (This research has been used to justify laws that outlaw speaking on cell phones while driving in several states.) When you display that text-heavy slide and start to read it, the audience reads the slide. During that time, they aren't listening to you, even if you're adding information not on the slide. Really!

They can read faster than you can talk. When they're finished, they turn their attention to you. What do they discover? You're talking about points that they've already read! Boring! So they tune out. You lose the audience while they're reading the slide and again after they're finished.

When you use illegible fonts and colors, or create graphs that can't be read ("I apologize that you can't read this, but I'll explain it anyway"), the audience gets angry and annoyed.

Audiences don't like to be treated that way. And it's embarrassing to you.

The result is a lousy presentation. The audience doesn't get the point you're trying to make. People don't appreciate what you're saying. Good communication is lost, with all its consequences.

What should you do?

Learn how to create slides that actually communicate. Make them visual and clear. Put one concept on a slide.

Keep slide design simple. Above all, avoid bullets and lots of text. You can use handouts for detailed notes and data. Stay away from silly clip art and overdone animation. (If animation doesn't help make a point clearer, don't use it.)

Read a book or take a course, if necessary. But make sure that your slides communicate clearly and look professional!

Where do I go from here?

It doesn't have to be this way. I've seen the damage and I want to help. I've written so much about how to help people present more effectively.

"I enjoyed your article and used many of your suggestions for my second speech at my Toastmaster's club. Prior to reading your article, I had designed a text-heavy slide show that included a colorful background. Based on your advice I changed my entire PowerPoint presentation so that there were only 7 simple slides with powerful graphics. The slides worked! The audience wasn't distracted by the slides and I felt in control of the presentation instead of the PowerPoint slides controlling my speech."
-Melissa Kew

I've given dozens of seminars and webinars, too. But I realized that these efforts weren't enough, so I created my 3-day, intensive workshop, **Create an Outstanding Presentation!**

This workshop guides you through the entire process of creating a presentation. It will change the way you do prepare, write, design, and deliver—and it will change your business.

The workshop is coming up June 15-17, so there's no time to delay! And there are only 6 seats left! Find out more today!

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