

Presenting Business Cases and Project Proposals to Management

Technical people often have a problem presenting business cases and project proposals to management because technical people give priority to the things of most importance to technical people. My aim is to help technical people translate their presentations to a language and style that talks direct with management.

Management includes two groups, the executive management who run the organisation day to day, and the board who set long term direction. If you understand the role of both groups, then you can optimise your presentation to suit both groups.

Have a Plan

You have a project plan. Build a project proposal plan. Plan how you will present your project proposal or business case based on your target audience.

Know Your Audience

Who will be the audience for your presentation? When you start collecting information for your business case, start collecting information about your audience. This is usually the role of the sales person when you are on a team from a supplier. If you are working for the same organisation as the target audience, then you have to collect the information normally collected by a sales person.

Match Your Audience

Who will present to that audience? If there is more than one person in your team and more than one person in the target audience, consider taking more than one person in to the presentation. Your expertise might be in projects for retailers but this target might be a charity. Is there someone on your team that has worked with a charity? Try to match up your team to your audience based on gender, age, interests, and educational background. Think of the presentation similar to match making at a party. The aim is to make the target audience comfortable and ready to talk.

Talk with the Decision Makers

Who are the decision makers? Who will talk with the decision makers? Often presenters talk to everyone except the decision maker and, after the presenter walks out, the decision maker states objections that could have been handled in the presentation.

Keep it Simple

If you have 20 minutes to present, you want:

- 1 minute of introduction.
- 1 minute of telling them what you will tell them.
- 1 minute of telling them what you told them.
- 5 minutes of questions.

That leaves you 12 minutes to present 12 slides, not 30 slides. They should be able to read a slide in less than 10 seconds without you explaining it. You want them listening to you, not reading the slide. You want them asking their questions before you leave the room.

Quality - Cost – Service (choose two)

There is a very old idea of offering customers the choice between quality, cost, and service, or quality, cost, and time. You let the customer choose one or two but not all three options. That works in retailing custom services where a customer walks in the door. Plumbers can charge once price for next day work and a higher price to arrive within one hour.

If you get the chance to present a project proposal then you should already know the customer's requirement and present to their requirement. Do they emphasise quality in their own advertising? If they need speed, then emphasise speed. Find out their number one and two priorities and focus on that. Your presentation to David Jones might be different to your presentation to Harvey Norman.

Read Business News

A recent BRW referred to John Symonds "BATTLE PLAN". Battle and War feature in descriptions of today's stagnant market. Do your prospects talk of war? Sell your project plan to sales oriented organisations using terms including "win the battle".

Business oriented publications make great textbooks for learning the language of business.

Make Love, not War

War is a good term to use when selling to companies. Not for profit organisations have the opposite need. They want you to help them love. It might be the environment or homeless people. They might respond to your project helping with the "war on AIDS" but are unlikely to respond to "win the war on the homeless".

Change

The first advert in the BRW is HP selling help with "change". Change is a word used by management. When you help management, help them manage change. The board sets direction. Your project can help them set a new direction. Use "change" when talking to management and "direction" when talking to the board.

EBITA

EBITA is "interest before interest, tax, and amortisation". Managers are focused on earnings, EBITA, so are less interested in projects that save on interest, tax, or reduce amortisation. The company's board are focused on dividends and share values, both of which occur after interest, tax, and amortisation.

Amortisation is the write down of goodwill or intellectual property. When you are selling projects based on knowledge management, you are selling something that can increase the value of existing intellectual property. That can help avoid write-downs of the value of purchased companies. You can talk about mining that intellectual property for increased value. The board likes intellectual property that increases in value instead of decreasing in value. When you present a business case for knowledge management projects, try to get the board involved.

Everything Else

Finance is another item on your agenda. Your target might love the project but not have the cash. If you are an outside supplier, you might consider changing your project billing to take a share of their profits instead of a fixed price. Even if that is not an option, try expressing the cost of your project in terms that relate to their income.

Do they budget monthly, quarterly, or annually? You can often cut large projects in to smaller chunks that fit the target's budget period.

Is your project tactical or strategic? Tactical projects last less than a year and provide one solution to one problem. Strategic projects last multiple years and include a change of direction. Strategic projects are always presented to the board.

There are a dozen areas where you need to learn the target audience's interests and language.

Summary

Tailor your presentation to your audience. Read the magazines they read. Learn their priorities and language. Ask them what they expect from the presentation.

If you are on a team with a sales person, practice your presentation with the sales person. For everyone else, hire someone like me to edit your material and to coach you through your presentation.