

Do I Have Your Attention?

Don't present like your audience has unlimited time, attention or energy.

One certainty faces every business presenter: the audience wishes you would finish your presentation quicker, get to the point sooner and wrap it up faster. No audience has unlimited time, attention or energy – so don't present like they do.

If you see people's eyes glazing over, notice sighs and hear yawns, you are in the "dead energy zone." Your audience is switched off and waiting for you to finish. Those who are less polite will even walk out. To become a better presenter, you need to first understand how the brain retains information.

Vision is the king of the senses

Studies have shown that when information is presented orally, people usually remember about 10 percent when tested 72 hours later, compared to remembering 65 percent when pictures are added. These brain studies have shown that using graphics (images, charts or pictures) while introducing a topic will push up retention and interest.

People who have grown up with interactive technology like video games

and the internet are called digital natives and tend to think in fast bursts. By mixing up the way you deliver information, you can increase audience engagement. Groups given multi-sensory presentations of problems generated 50 to 75 percent more creative solutions than uni-sensory groups. So allow time for video clips, images without text and short periods of discussion. These will improve your audience's attention span.

Spaced learning improves attention span

Audiences often become bored during presentations because there is too much information with little time to connect the dots through vivid examples and practical applications. The result? Very little digestion and a completely unmotivated audience.

One antidote is spaced learning. Advocated by Dr. John Medina in his book *Brain Rules*, spaced learning stops trying to force information on the brain and instead aligns with how memories are actually formed. Spaced learning increases memory by inserting 10 minute physical activity breaks for every 20 minutes of content. During these breaks, participants engage in activities involving hand-eye coordination such as juggling, basketball and plate spinning. It may sound crazy, but the results are amazing.

Physical activity breaks during a presentation may seem unconventional, but you can create spaces in your presentation for your audience to take a break. Consider inserting a video clip for every five to seven minutes of content. The video should relate to the content

and reinforce the key points. To substitute, think about telling a personal story which links to the key points you want to convey. This break from presenting will allow the audience to deepen their understanding and increase their retention.

A refresh is as good as a break

Other techniques you can use to increase retention of key messages include recalling key points by going back to them during the presentation, refreshing them quickly after breaks, inserting colorful summary slides or graphics and giving short "Q&A quizzes" throughout the day. By combining these fast refreshes, you help your audience "hook" onto the key points, and with the added visual cues to stimulate their memory, you will be doing everything you can to ensure the message sticks.

If you give whole day training sessions or longer presentations over several hours, insert more five minute breaks throughout the day where people can take a break, move around and then be ready for a quick review when they return. After you complete a major section, review it with quick "check slides" which have gaps in the key messages and ask the audience to fill in the missing words. Use handouts that ask key questions about the messages. Most importantly, dump your text-based slides for visuals which use pictures and slogans that will make your slides resemble billboards.

While you cannot completely eliminate audience members wishing your presentation would finish early, by using these techniques you can be more certain that they will leave with your key messages embedded in their memory. That is a goal worth striving for!



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