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Entrepreneurial expert explains how to master your elevator pitch

An elevator pitch demands confidence even for those with years of business experience. Entrepreneurial expert Alan Manly gives his professional advice.



By Alan Manly
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Trial and error over time is one way to perfect your elevator pitch. But who has the benefit of time? Instead, there's a simple way to get both your foot in the door and the self-confidence to see it through.

The elevator pitch is synonymous with entrepreneurship - convey your business idea and its merits within the time of a typical elevator ride (about 30 seconds).

Being an entrepreneur means having your own ideas. That can be applied to your elevator pitch too.

Many are not comfortable with the hard sell, even after many years in business. And an elevator pitch demands confidence.

So rather than forcing something that doesn't come naturally, I can - with the benefit of personal experience - recommend this simple approach.

Step 1: Introductions

Entrepreneurs know who we are, what we do and the value we create for paying customers (or at least we should!). Conveying that to other people is something else.

Remember, time is of the essence here - use the other person's time wisely. Concise and easy-to-understand language pays huge dividends here.

Go back to basics: even pronounce your name so the person listening can understand it. Say, "Hi, how are you? My name is Alan." Then just listen. The other person will likely reply along the lines of, "Fine thanks, Alan. My name is Alex."

You could follow up by asking another question. But try this one instead: "Good to meet you, Alex. Can I give you my card?" In all my years using this approach, no-one has ever said no.

Step 2: A purposeful prop

Why a business card, you ask? Because it is a valuable prop.

Yes, it should have the usual: your company name and logo, name and contact details. But be different. Adding your photo here is a point of difference and a great way to help whoever you meet to correlate your face with your name.

Use the reverse side too, which many people leave blank. Feature the company logo again, this time alongside a list of your products or services and your tagline.

Step 3: Create curiosity

You may consider business cards to be a questionable cost. However, they are by far the cheapest single item for any function.

Having the photo, for instance, is a great icebreaker. In my experience, many comment on it being a clever idea. Others cheekily suggest it looks like someone much younger.

Either way, their response is an invitation to provide a follow-up comment (such as, "You'd be surprised how often I hear that" or "I must have been around longer than I thought!").

Then one of two things typically happens:

They ask what your company does: you can refer them to the reverse side of the card and read out the key points. If others are within earshot, curiosity takes over and they do the same. Your pitch has now been delivered. They turn the card over themselves: what your company does is written in front of them. They now have the opportunity to ask a clarifying question; use your product knowledge to give a brief answer. Again, your pitch has been delivered.

Step 4: The alternative pitch

If someone else breaks the ice and begins the introductions, let plan B kick in. Introduce yourself and make a point of understanding their name and asking them for their card.

Once you have exchanged cards, revert to using your card as a prop to deliver your pitch. And now you have theirs to send a follow-up email later.

While this approach may lack the great self-confidence of someone skilled in the hard sell, you can work a room with confidence armed with a pocket full of business cards and the knowledge that your card does the hard work for you – even after stepping off the elevator.

Alan Manly OAM is the CEO of Universal Business School Sydney and author of The Unlikely Entrepreneur.



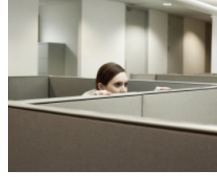
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