6 Tips for Creating Better Presentation Scripts (Mar 11)
By Tom Mucciolo

The following are a few tips for creating a more effective story or *script*, or one that allows you to control the flow of the message using a well thought-out pattern. Perhaps you can incorporate some or all of these ideas into your next presentation.

1) Structuring a Script

No matter which way you choose to present the information, you still have to develop a pattern or a structure to the script so the information can be absorbed properly. Think of the structure as the type of script that is used to convey the message. Most presentations follow a linear pattern which moves from an opening through the body and finally, into the closing.

Like any movie or book, there is an expectation to have the anchors of a beginning, middle and end.

This *open-body-close* process is very common and usually expected as the metaphor for receiving information. Regardless of the type of script you create, the audience is pre-conditioned to accepting a linear pattern, the end of which includes some closure (call to action).

If the opening and closing parts of the script mostly tap emotions, then, for balance, the *body* should mostly tap the intellect. Since the body of the message is filled mainly with facts, we also need to add some feelings (such as stories) to avoid a massive data dump.

It is the *timely* mix of facts and feelings, spread over the *open-body-close* pattern, which allows the message to create a lasting impression.

2) Micro-to-Macro Scripting

In a presentation, you usually separate the *macro* items (market data, trends, company information, and competition) from the *micro* items (stories, analogies, specific examples, features, and benefits).

Although the big picture is usually chosen as the starting point for a script, the small details are the qualifiers of the argument. Because time is an issue to a listener, getting to the details is more critical than hearing about the general trends.

For example, you would obviously prefer to know whether the route you take to work is clear before you care to know that your city is the eighth most traffic-congested in the country.

When a script is constructed in a *micro-to-macro* fashion, the *unique* issues you bring to the table are discussed first and the broad-based marketing data is secondary.

The good news is that if you accidentally run out of time in the presentation, the audience only misses the general information. Chances are, they can find that data whenever they choose.

3) Matching Ideals

This script structure is really a set-up for the audience. The strategy is that you describe the ideal product or service, which, you already know, will closely resemble your product or service.

Since the audience accepts your description as the premise of the argument, it is quite easy to match your argument to the premise you set up in the first place.

This structure is usually used more for products than for services since attributes of a product are more tangible (visible) than qualities of a service.

For example, you selectively mention the ideal attributes of a good car. You say, "*The ideal car has front-wheel drive, dual air bags, a rear defrost, and a trunk release.*"

By setting this premise, you naturally get the audience's agreement that these are the ideal attributes of a good car. Then you describe your car in terms of the ideal, making sure you only compare to about 90% of the ideal.

You say, "*OUR car has front-wheel drive, dual air bags, a rear defrost, BUT we're still working on the trunk release.*"

You never want to compare to 100% because that would mean you have the perfect product (which no one does), and it would leave you no room for improvement. After all, how do you improve on perfection?

The *matching ideals* script is designed to lead the audience to believe that the product (or service) is the *best* one for the job, but it may not do the *whole job*. This leaves you an open-ended reason for later updates and improvements.

4) Main Points

Typically, this script is used with information-based presentations such as those dealing with financial results and other historical data. The process follows the time-honored pattern:

Tell 'em what you're gonna tell `em
Tell 'em
Tell 'em what you told 'em

One way to identify this structure is the appearance of an *agenda* early in the presentation and a corresponding summary at the end. This lets the audience know what to expect and then anticipate what to remember.

The summary at the end is critical because main points can be hard to remember, especially when many supporting points are discussed.

The audience may get lost unless it is constantly made aware of how the supporting information relates to the main points. If you limit the number of main points and supporting points, the recall process will be easier for the audience.

5) Question-Answer

Question and answer scripting is similar to the educational activity of PRE-TEST and POST-TEST. This is useful in training sessions when a lot of unrelated, yet comprehensive information must be covered.

First you *pre-test* the audience's knowledge of a subject using easy-to-answer questions (true/false, multiple choice). The questions cover all the major points you expect to convey.

Then, during the session, you reveal the correct answers using supporting visual elements to explain each answer as you elaborate. Finally, you ask the audience as a group to answer the original questions (post-test).

A question-answer scripting structure can be used in a variety of situations including surveys, polls, and research studies. The objective should address how the information will be used by the audience to achieve a particular result.

One way to ensure that the information is more than just a data dump is to repeat key points and summarize conclusions at several stages of the presentation.

6) Problem-Solution

Also known as the *divide & conquer* script, the problem-solution structure is one of the most effective scripts. It is especially useful for high-level, decision-oriented presentations. The problem-solution script can concentrate either on mistakes or on missed opportunities.

If the script focuses on failures, it accentuates the negative. If it points out overlooked potential, it stresses the positive. Either approach leaves the door open for a hero to save the day.

The process follows a simple pattern. First, the overall problem is described and presented in a manner that makes it look positive (or negative). Then, you dissect the problem into smaller sections that can be addressed individually.

Finally, the solutions to the smaller areas will solve the big problem, as well. Whether you focus on the negative or the positive aspects of the problem, the result of the script (the solution) will *always look positive*.

Every presentation is based on a line of logic or reason for imparting the information. When you structure the data according to a consistent pattern, the audience is better able to follow your discussion and remain focused throughout your talk. And that's the whole story!

About the Author:

Tom Mucciolo is president of [MediaNet Inc](#)., a presentation skills company in New York City specializing in the design and delivery of electronic presentations. He is the author of several publications including *Special Edition: Using Microsoft PowerPoint 2007* (and 3 prior editions), *Purpose, Movement, Color*, and two interactive CD's.