Make a Good Presentation

Idea In Short

Build your presentation in four steps. Define the narrative and structure first, draft meaningful content second, refine through collaboration third and socialize findings with key stakeholders before the meeting. The presentation is game day, so make it count.

Consulting Equals PowerPoint

One colleague joked that he gets to client sites, turns on the computer and opens PowerPoint before checking email. Like a baker who turns on the oven as soon as he enters the kitchen, it is a large part of what consultants do. Here are four steps to create presentations that matter.

To be clear, it is more than just making fancy graphs. There is hypothesis-based consulting, Excel work, interviews, benchmarking, industry research and analysis. The presentation is where it all comes together, like the finals of a tournament. It is game day.

Define the Narrative and Structure

Presentation development usually comes toward the end of a project phase. The assumption is that you have already collected data, analyzed it, developed potential solutions and become genuinely smart on the topic. Now you are putting those great ideas on paper so they can be communicated effectively. The presentation should be so good that your client can use it repeatedly to sell the recommendations internally to peers and bosses.

The first step is to define the narrative. What is the story line? If you were trying to explain the project and recommendations to your teenage niece or the waiter at your local restaurant, how would you tell the story? Would the punchline be at the front or the back? How important is the background? What is the big takeaway?

The second step is to define the presentation structure. Think of this like chapters in a book. If you have a sense of the narrative, how many sections does the presentation have? Is it chronological? Is it organized by geography? Sorted by function? It all depends on what you are trying to say and how the audience thinks about the topic.

Choosing the Right Organizational Lens

Larger projects typically follow a chronological structure since it is easy to follow. A large project might have a separate deliverable for each phase, and the final deliverable would simply be the sum of the previous presentations. These tend to be long and a bit boring but demonstrate rigor. Good thud factor, the sound of a dense stack of pages hitting the table.

A geographic structure appears when the client is responsible for a region. This lens helps the client compare between regions and weigh the pros and cons of centralizing or decentralizing activities. It can also serve as a functional review when looking at the entire enterprise.

Most executive presentations follow a prioritization format. These are shorter presentations that are very direct and usually target a response from the audience. Consultants use the pyramid principle heavily with this approach 1. Start with the conclusion in an executive summary, which helps executives fine-tune their thinking as they hear the supporting data.

Draft Meaningful Content

There are entire books written on this topic, but the key point is that you need to put meaningful content on the page. Do not put filler on the page. If your content is obvious or marketing blah, do not bother putting it on a slide. The question you must constantly ask is so what. If you do not ask it, your boss will. The presentation must answer the key questions and scope of the project. Just as some busy students might seek external writing support, such as DoMyEssay when they are under pressure from tight deadlines and complex assignments, professionals also seek efficient ways to outsource non-critical tasks, manage their workload and still deliver high-quality results.

That is why good slide writing is really an exercise in judgment. It is not enough for a slide to be accurate or well designed; it also has to move the story forward and help the audience reach a decision faster. This is the discipline that turns a presentation from a collection of

information into a persuasive client story. Once you start evaluating slides through that lens, editing becomes much easier, because you stop asking whether a slide is interesting and start asking whether it is necessary.

Every slide should earn its place in the deck:

- clarify an issue
- support a recommendation, or
- prepare the audience for the next point

If it does none of those things, it is taking up space rather than creating value. A slide that does not advance the argument or answer a question the client cares about is a slide that should be cut. Discipline here separates good consultants from great ones. The client is paying for insight, not volume.

Refine Through Collaboration

During this phase, many slides get combined, thrown away or reinvented. A presentation is a living document, so edit and refine as you go. If the slides lack accuracy, logic or organization, you have serious problems that need addressing. You want the deck to be persuasive, brief and professional. It is cathartic, but you actually develop a stronger point of view the longer you refine the slides. You cut away the fat that needs editing.

This is where collaboration comes in. A partner or senior manager will review because there are different ways to make slides easier to understand. It might seem trivial, but clients pay significant money for deliverables and expectations are high. It pays to listen to feedback. Effective collaboration requires three ingredients. Diversity of skills, because there is no point if everyone has the same skills. Trust, because without it any feedback feels like nitpicking. Mutual understanding of the goal, so input is useful and you remain open to feedback 2.

Socialize Findings With Key People

The last thing you want is to walk into a key meeting and surprise the client with an off-base recommendation. All good consultants pre-sell their recommendations with key people before the big meeting. Japan is the home of consensus-based decision making, and the

Japanese word for this pre-selling is nemawashi, which literally means digging around the roots to prepare a plant for transplant 3.

Pre-selling is not manipulation. It is respect for the decision-makers' time and intelligence. It gives stakeholders a chance to raise concerns privately, refine assumptions and build comfort with the direction before the formal meeting. When the presentation lands, the room is already aligned.

Executives Are Visual People

Executives have busy schedules and short attention spans. They want to see an executive summary of 10 to 15 slides, not a 300-page novel full of words. Sometimes you only have two hours with a chief executive at the end of a four-month project, so your presentation must make an impact. Visual clarity, clean charts and a strong narrative thread are what make that impact possible.

Storytelling Is the Foundation

Consultants are good at many things, but in the end it always finishes with a presentation that tells a story. There has to be a narrative. It sounds idealized, but it is all about storytelling. Business development and sales professionals tell stories verbally. Marketers tell stories through public relations, branding and advertising.

There was a project where the team spent almost two days crafting a single slide that was notoriously named the $10,000 slide, because that was the facetious estimate of how much consulting time went into it. Sometimes a single slide is that important. The story it tells can change a decision, redirect a strategy or unlock budget. That is why the craft matters.

- 1Barbara Minto And MECE, McKinsey
- 2Structure Your Presentation Like A Story, Harvard Business Review
- 3Nemawashi, Wikipedia

Summary

A consulting presentation is where analysis meets storytelling. Define the narrative, structure it logically, draft content that answers so what, refine through collaboration and socialize findings before the meeting. Executives want a clear story in 15 slides, not a 300-page novel. Make every slide earn its place.