

Your Strategy for McDonald's

Idea In Short

Scope down the problem, tell a clear story and persuade without misleading. A great strategy presentation answers what, so what and now what in seven minutes flat.

The McDonald's Strategy Challenge

Students face a strategy presentation assignment targeting McDonald's Corporation. The task is eight pages total, including a cover page and appendix, delivered in seven minutes. McDonald's is easy because it is a well-known brand that everyone has experienced. It is fun because you can visit the store, go through the drive-through and observe with a detective's eye. It is difficult because McDonald's has been doing this for decades and seems to be doing well. The real question is what problem are you solving for them?

The assignment forces students to work as a team, get ahead of the work and scope down the problem. College students are among the busiest people on earth, so planning ahead is essential. The content can be overwhelming, and the presenter's job is to make it digestible. Spend more time on the treatment than the diagnosis. The solution should match the gravity of the problem. 1

Be a Team

The best teams stay on top of the work. Do not wait until the night before, because everyone has different working styles and merging them takes longer than expected. It is okay not to be the leader all the time. Sometimes the best way to lead is to take the backseat for the sake of the group. Colin Powell defined leadership as getting someone else to do what you want them to do because they want to do it. Work smart but lazy, which means planning with the group ahead of time.

Creating effective business presentations is a time-intensive process with multiple stages. Team formation, content review and audience analysis all come before the actual work. The

four hats of writing provide a framework for managing the creative process. Betty Sue Flowers introduced this framework in 1979, describing four personas that compete during the writing process. 2 The madman generates ideas. The architect structures them. The carpenter crafts the sentences. The judge deletes unnecessary parts. Do not put on the madman hat the day before the presentation.

Three Rules for Great Presentations

Rule one: do not let anyone get lost in the narrative. The structure of the presentation and the slide titles tell the audience where you are going. Do not waste titles. Watching a ten-part series without episode titles would be a mash-up of confusion. Pace the discussion and show the audience the path. Each slide title should make a point, not just label a topic.

Rule two: keep it simple. You are doing the audience a favor by telling them what to focus on. You have done the work, looked at the problem broadly and organized things into buckets. Now you are telling the executives where to look. Business storytelling is not a lyrical, emotional pitch. It is a chassis to hang all the analysis and insight on. The story answers key questions: what is the biggest challenge, what is the core competency, what will the future look like, how does path dependence affect the strategy and what is the impact on net profits or earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization [EBITDA].

Rule three: persuade without misleading. Think of yourself as a district attorney putting the recommendation in jail. You have done the work, you are competent and you have confidence. Hold strong opinions loosely. The audience trusts you to do a good job and will not double-check your math unless you seem disorganized or illogical. A clean restaurant with a see-through kitchen, an organized menu and a knowledgeable server builds momentum. A good server has opinions and guides your choices without explaining every item in the same detail. 3

Reverse-Engineer the Audience

Think of the PowerPoint as a deliverable for a company paying three hundred thousand dollars. You must provide the audience a so what. Do not just say empty words. Hold an opinion and persuade your audience that what you are saying might as well be fact. Make sure the presentation is directed to the appropriate audience, since franchisers and

McDonald's headquarters care about different things. Clients want to get to the point quickly and effectively.

Marketing means making it easy to buy. Executives just came from a meeting on a completely different topic. They are probably thinking about their kid's upcoming bar mitzvah or their house refinancing. Why should they care about your presentation? Answer that question before they ask it. Break down topics into buckets and follow a logical flow. Like a good movie, each scene works together to make the whole cohesive. Business storytelling and creative storytelling are different. Both matter, but you must decide which is appropriate for the setting and audience.

Use Titles as Prime Real Estate

Title slides are critical. In some circumstances, your boss will only review the titles. Make headings perfect and direct. You do not always need pictures. Good titles carry the slide. Your presentation slide titles should tell a story from first to last. If someone reads only the titles, they should understand the entire argument.

Make the executive summary slide last, after the entire presentation is done. Remember to answer the what, then the so what, then the now what. There are two types of presentations. The first is a stand-and-present format with minimal words on slides, like a TED talk. The second is a leave-behind deck that is information-heavy and stands alone without a voiceover. The second type is far more common in consulting. Of hundreds of client-facing presentations, the vast majority are leave-behind decks. They are info-heavy and can stand alone, but you should not read them line by line.

Simplify and Practice

Persuade aggressively without misleading. Great presentations require structure, socialization and effective delivery. It is okay to scope things down, but explain why and persuade the audience. Simplicity is key. You do not want to confuse your audience. Less is more. Be concise, get your point across and answer the so what.

Prepare. If you know the content cold, you will be fine. If you are faking it, that is low-probability gambling. Practice. That is the only way to know if you are on time and if your content works well with others. If your slides are not working, change them. Be yourself on

your best day. Memorize the first thirty seconds to build momentum. You are the star and the PowerPoint is just support. Do not read off the slide. Speak from your mind. Speak to one person at a time, even with a large audience. Start well and end well, because most people remember the beginning and the end. Rely on recency bias with a strong finish.

Pause and Have Fun

It is okay to pause. Pausing prevents filler words and lets you catch up momentarily. Silence focuses attention. When presenting, pausing is one of the most powerful tools available. It signals confidence and gives the audience time to absorb your point. Finally, have fun in learning. This is one of many presentations you will do. Enjoy the challenge of being a professional, not a technician. This is for a grade, but the bigger picture is your career strategy.

- 1McDonald's Accelerating The Arches Strategic Plan
- 2The Madman, Architect, Carpenter, Judge Writing Process
- 3The Pyramid Principle For Structured Business Communication

Summary

Great presentations are engineered, not improvised. Prepare relentlessly, practice until the first thirty seconds flow and pause instead of filling silence. Treat every deck as a deliverable worth three hundred thousand dollars.