

newstalk 2, 2008: Presenting to English-speaking audiences

When writing ads or designing websites for English-speaking audiences, you know you have to account for cultural differences. But did you know the same holds true for presentations? The level of detail is different, the purpose of your presentation – even how you interact with the audience!

Worry not, dear readers. Check out our tips on engaging, tightly focused presentations that have English-speaking audiences hanging on your every word.

Don't recite – relate!

No matter how shaky you think your English is, it's not a good idea to write down everything you want to say on the slide when you're addressing international audiences. Your job is to draw your audience in and tell people why this information matters – *in your own words*. Familiarize yourself with your material until you can speak off the cuff. Just use short bullet points or phrases on the charts as a prompt. If you read off your slides line by line, your English-speaking crowd will stop listening to you and simply read what it says on the screen.

Tell a story

Not a funny “what-happened-to-me-on-the-way-to-work” anecdote. They just come across as hollow. Instead, tell a compelling, relevant story that helps your audience understand a difficult point. It's an excellent way to make your presentation even more memorable.

Take advantage of another kind of story: a clear narrative flow. Consider how you want to organize your thoughts. Will this structure make sense to your listeners? Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end – so your presentation should too.

Go easy on the number of slides

Avoid slides packed with information in a tiny font. They don't benefit the listener and they certainly don't benefit you since you end up reading from the screen. Stick to short phrases that move your story along and keep the attention on *you* – the presenter. Worried about forgetting important vocabulary? Store the details in the “Notes” view. They'll still be there for you but it won't clog up the slides and distract your audience.

Remember: English-speaking audiences have less tolerance for long presentations than German-speaking listeners. And no matter which culture we come from, humans process verbal and visual material differently – plus we can only handle a few pieces of information at a time. So as you prepare, ask yourself: do I need this section? If I show this, what do I want my audience to do with it? How does it fit into the bigger picture? Could it go into a handout?

Here are two “truths” of good advertising that we believe also apply to presentations: it tells a good story and is designed to appeal to people.

Don't sweat the English!

Delivering a presentation in a foreign language can be incredibly stressful. So take some of the pressure off yourself by remembering that you're not there to impress everyone with your flawless grammar and vocabulary – you're there to communicate an idea. Say things in your own words (easy if you avoid long sentences and use bullet points). And focus on your structure and content. That's what your listeners are interested in!