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The Power of Threes

The Rule Of Threes for Messaging, Words and Visuals

It's as simple as learning your ABC's. Harness the Power of Threes to make your sales messaging easier to assimilate, easier to remember and easier to sell. Using groups of three's to sell is deceptively simple yet amazingly powerful. It's the equivalent of adding salt, pepper and spices to your business cooking.

Messaging

Although I haven't found too much scientific research on the subject, anecdotally it seems that we process information better in groups of three. Three objects can start to form a pattern or a series which the human brain is just more comfortable with.

1. **Foreshadowing in Threes.** To assist your audience in assimilating information you can slice and dice it into threes. Start with a statement such as "**there are three supporting facts for this proposal**". Then count them off as one, two, three or first, second and finally. Admit it, doesn't saying "**fourthly**" just sound weird?
2. **Authority.** By breaking down a message, problem or solution into threes it gives you a "been-there, seen-it, done-that" form of authority. Strangely just the fact that you have pre-processed the situation and divided it up into discrete manageable chunks makes you seem like more of an expert. Saying "**let's look at the impact of that change for a single PC, a local network and the entire company**" is way more authoritative than "**um, err, well .. that change will affect the enterprise on multiple levels**". The first statement has some closure; the second is open as to how many levels and the degree of change.
3. **Retention.** To help people remember your message you should deliver it at least three times during your presentation. This is a bit more subtle than the old-fashioned "**first, tell them what they are going to hear, then tell them, and then**

tell them what you told them." You should still do that, but in the "then tell them" section, go over it in triplicate using almost the same words. The first time they hear your main point it may be new, the second time reinforces it, and the third mention makes it feel familiar and comfortable. That is why executive coaches recommend you restate and then use someone's name when you are first introduced. First you hear the name, then you say it, and then you repeat it in conversation - and then it sticks.

Words

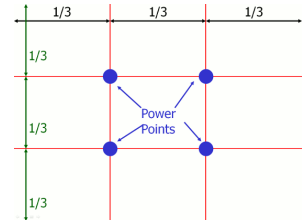
The Power of Threes introduces a rhythmic cadence into your speech. The pulse can be based around three individual words, three phrases or even three sentences. Some practitioners of this art give it the highly scientific name of "*Da, da-Da, da-Da.*"

1. **Words.** 'Blood, Sweat and Tears", "Friends, Romans and Countrymen" or "Faith, Hope and Love". Is there a way to describe the product or service you are selling in three simple, linked words? Can you do that and avoid the marketing clichés such as the -ables and -ibilities. Using "Powerful, Open and Scalable" probably isn't going to work. "Fast, Timely and Accurate" might be better.
2. **Phrases.** "*Increase Your Revenue, Reduce Your Expenses and Mitigate your Business Risk!*" What senior level executive wouldn't want to purchase a solution that could realistically accomplish one of those lofty goals, never mind all three?". Tommy Yan, a business coach, cites the example of using the cadence of threes to create common ground. His example revolves around childhood dreams. "Maybe you wanted to become a superhero fighting the forces of evil, maybe you wanted to cruise the stars in a spaceship; or maybe you wanted the house with the white-picket fence and two and a half children". Now you are thinking about your youth and your dreams going up. We are now in concert (Da), on common ground (da-Da) and ready to move forward (da-Da).
3. **Context.** The verbal rule of three works best when reinforced by gestures. My personal favorite is the "Bill Clinton finger counting" technique which involves physically counting off the points as he covered them to reinforce their completion. When using PowerPoint a big 1,2,3 doesn't hurt either - just to make sure that people get the point and know exactly where you are in your argument.

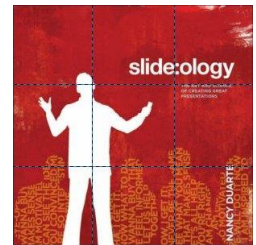
Visuals - Location, Location, Location

This section refers to PowerPoint, one of my least favorite sales tools. Yet applying the rule of thirds to your slide deck can really amp up your message when used in conjunction with compelling visuals.

1. **Power Points in Powerpoint.** Divide your key slides up into thirds. To start with you can apply the 'rule' facility within the tool to make it easier to see. Each of the four intersections is a Power Point (seriously - it is an artistic concept which has been around for hundreds of years). You should place key elements of your message at these points.



2. **The Horizontal and Vertical.** The horizontal and vertical lines at the 1/3 marks are also attention getters. Think about most landscapes or water pictures you see. The horizon line or skyline is never halfway across or down the picture - it is always presented asymmetrically. The same should be true with your images.



3. **Combine Image and Text.** Now examine any screenshots or architecture diagrams you may be using in your presentations. Where do you want the audience to focus their attention? Can you place any of those points on a Power Point so that their attention is automatically drawn there? This is a reason why boring old corporate slides with 6-8 bullet points are so boring - because they just ignore the aesthetically pleasing focal points on the slide and beat you over the head with big words that all look the same.



Does Your
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Summary

The call to action here is obvious. Go back and review your sales presentations for any opportunity to use the power of three. Can you describe a product in a grouping of three adjectives or words? Can you backup and defend that one very important competitive differentiator with three solid facts or examples? Examine your slide decks and apply the rule of thirds to amplify your key messages by placing them on the power lines.

"When shall we three meet again – in thunder, lightning or in rain?"

William Shakespeare, Macbeth (I, i, 1-2).

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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