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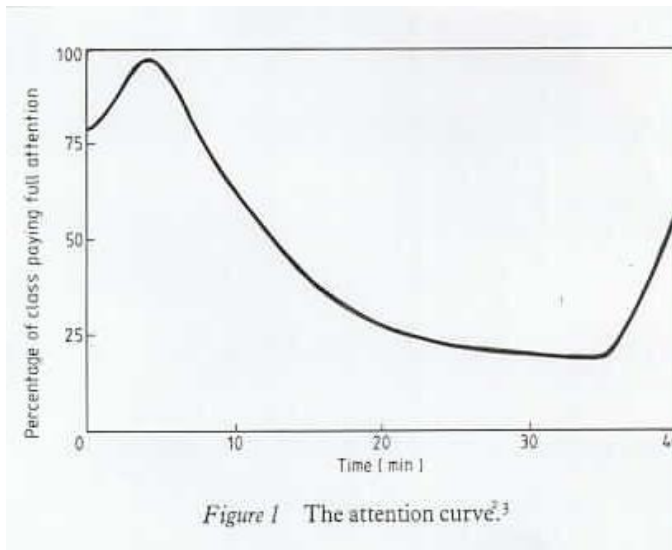
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John Care, Managing Director

The Last Slide

The Finale: What Goes On The Last Slide?

A lot of thought and effort goes into the start of a presentation. We have Energizers, Grabbers and "that one Great Slide". *Great Demo!* teaches us to do the last thing first. Yet the end of your presentation is just as important as the start. So how should you finish your pitch - what goes on the last slide? We'll look at several common, but poor, choices and then the recommended approach.



Communications experts speak about the concept of a *residual message*. This is loosely defined as the one thing you want your audience to remember after they have forgotten everything else about you, your company and your solution. So your conclusion should be the trigger to re-inforce that residual message. As a good rule of thumb, your conclusion should be about 10% of your presentation. So a 40 minute pitch should have about a 4 minute wrap-up, culminating in your final slide to emphasize your residual message.

As the accompanying graphic shows, audience attention is highest during the first 5 minutes of the presentation, and then gradually falls off - the sudden peak at the end is caused when you utter one of the magical phrases such as "in summary" or "to conclude".

You now have the audience's attention - do not waste it!

1. **"Thank You"**. This is a very weak ending. Although your audience may feel that you are polite and well-mannered that is not the differentiating impression you really want to leave behind. The time for thanks is close to the start of the meeting - you can even let the rep cover it in their introduction. I usually handle the "thanks" if I

have a "what we heard from you" section covering previous discovery sessions. That way you cover the pleasantries, and gain the extra benefit of making your presentation feel more like a collaborative effort between you and the customer to solve their problem.

2. **"Any Questions?"** I view this as the worst possible way to finish off a presentation. Even though it seems to be the way that almost every single internal/corporate webcast concludes. Maybe there is a hidden message there.

The reason it is so weak is that you are giving up control of the meeting right at the critical point - the end of your pitch. Although you may get a few great questions, you can get some off-topic questions and sometimes even be hit with a competitive shot. Even worse is complete silence (it's happened to all of us) and you hastily say: "Well that's all for today. Thanks for coming and we truly appreciate your time." In effect you've now mixed two of the worst possible endings together!

My preference is either to take relevant questions throughout the presentation, or else to foreshadow your conclusion. Try something like "Ok. This is a good place for us to stop and handle some questions for 5-10 minutes. Then I'm going to summarize everything we talked about and finish with a reference/illustration/financial analysis I know you'll appreciate." Now you have established a way to regain control at the end of the Q&A.

So just to beat you over the head with the obvious: **Q&A should precede your conclusion, do not finish with Q&A.**

3. **The Wrap.** Humans love repetition, and humans love closure - closure in movies, closure in relationships and closure in presentations. So although your wrap should include your summary, it really needs to *wrap* around to your beginning, include a call to action and light up the audience's brain to form that residual memory.

Here is an example. You are making a presentation about quality, efficiency or effectiveness. You start with a visual of Disney World - something instantly recognizable to the audience. "If Disney's Magic Kingdom engineered to a one in a million standard - 17 people would be killed on their rides each year". You move into your presentation and then finish with a shot of some very happy people just coming off Space Mountain - because they trust the Disney safety and maintenance team. By

using the appropriate words your residual message is that your product will raise their effectiveness because one in a million just isn't good enough.

Summary

Take as much time to work on the final 10% of your presentation or demo as you do on the first 10%. It's an extremely important point in the attention timeline and you should not waste it with thanks, questions and other relatively unimportant items. Instead use it to reinforce the call to action and the residual message to want to imprint on your customer. Put yourself in your customer's shoes. He has seen four or five vendor presentations this week - what do you really want him to remember?

"I sometimes worry about my short attention span – but not for long"

Herb Caen, Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist @ San Francisco Chronicle 1916-1997

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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Attention span graphic from: Mills, H.R. (1977) *Techniques of Technical Training*, 3rd Ed. Macmillan, London