

Pitch Optimisation Tutorial



1. Welcome

Introduction

Welcome to this Invest Northern Ireland tutorial on writing and delivering a successful sales pitch.

Pitching skills are essential for the success of any business. In this tutorial, we'll explore the skills you need to ensure potential customers are as enthusiastic about your business as you are.

We'll look at preparing and structuring your pitch and explore persuasive presentation through verbal and nonverbal communication and visual aids. Finally we'll outline some strategies for handling Q&A sessions with confidence and look at the renowned 30-second elevator pitch scenario.





2. Knowing your audience

To create a successful pitch, you need to understand who your audience is and what they're looking for. You need to understand their needs and motivations before you can craft a presentation that will resonate.

Knowing your audience will help you to:

Appeal

Appeal to your audience by referring to topics that they show an interest in and enjoy.

Present

Are the people in the audience specialists in your field? Probably not. With this in mind, avoid using special words or expressions that could potentially be difficult to understand. If you do use jargon, make sure that your audience understands what it means.

Avoid

Steer clear of embarrassing or tactless remarks.

People attend pitches for all sorts of reasons. Many come because they believe the product will cater to their needs whereas others have been sent in someone else's place. Whatever their reasons, set out by capturing their attention and then appealing to their needs throughout the presentation. Keep their interest by keeping it relevant.



3. Preparing your pitch

When you come to draft your pitch, ask yourself these essential questions:

What is the purpose of this pitch?

What does my audience need to hear?

What would success look like?

How will I support my pitch with visuals?

What handouts or notes will I need?

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is a useful tool for organising your ideas. It helps you see connections between ideas that you might have missed and ensures that you don't overlook vital information.

Objective

Write your objective in the middle of a sheet of paper.

Ideas

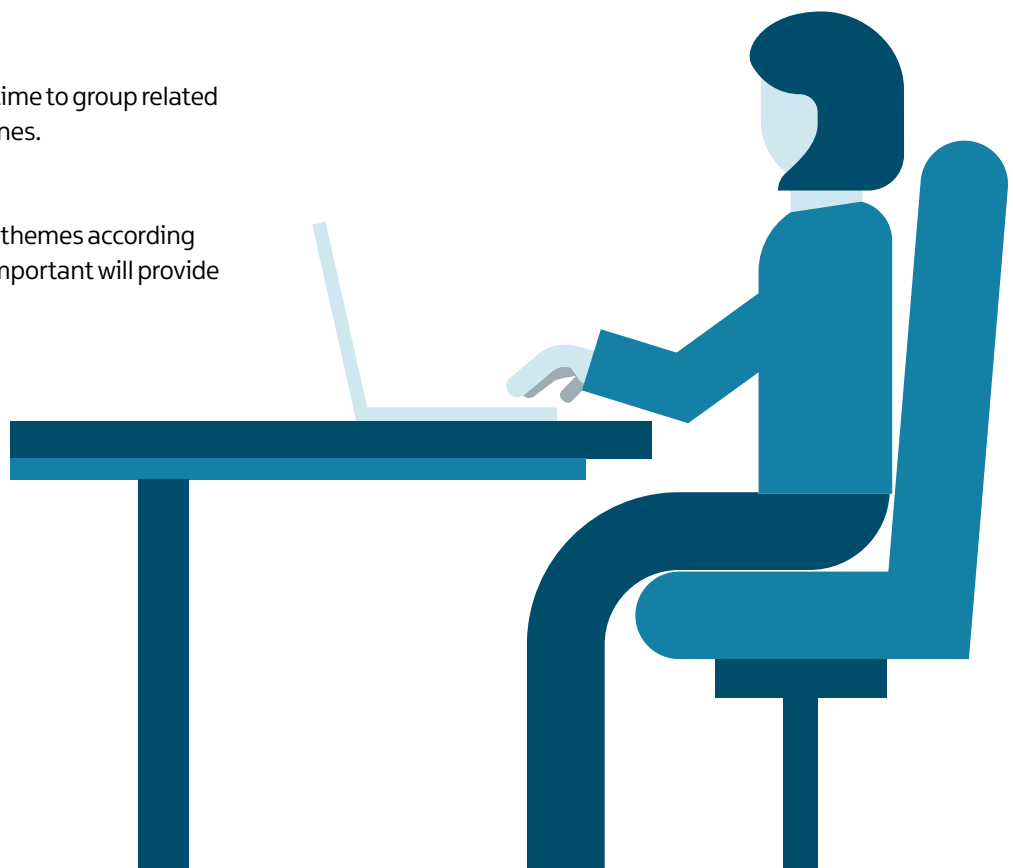
Write down all the ideas that your objective brings to mind.

Themes

Once you run out of ideas, take some time to group related ideas into themes using connecting lines.

Topics

On another sheet of paper, order your themes according to their importance. The three most important will provide you with the core topics of your pitch.





4. Structuring your pitch

Once you have your themes assembled, you can begin to structure your pitch in more detail.

Opening Address

This is your first opportunity to grab your audience's attention. Start with a statistic or fact, an amusing or moving anecdote, or a rhetorical question. In short, get them thinking.

Introduction

First, introduce yourself and your role. This will give your audience an idea of who you are and why you're standing in front of them. Give them an idea of how long your presentation will be.

Next, draw their attention to your PowerPoint presentation or any handouts that you have brought to support your pitch.

Lastly, let them know that you will be happy to answer questions at the end of the presentation.

Topic

Now it's time to get into the body of your presentation by outlining the topic. Explain why you are pitching and what you hope to get as a result.

Outlining your product's benefits clearly and succinctly is the most important part of your pitch. Keep it positive by focusing on your offering and its benefits.

Conclusion

Once you have covered the material you prepared, move to the conclusion. Keep it short and to the point. Remind your audience of your objective, and the themes that you've covered.

Make sure that you make your request – what do you want your audience to do?

Don't forget to invite questions.

5. Verbal & nonverbal communication

There are four things to think about when engaging with your audience:

Movement
Eye contact
Gestures
Voice

Movement

Movement is important as it engages both you and the audience. The movement arena is your stage while presenting and includes your audience, the projector screen, your laptop and any other elements nearby.

It's a good idea to plan how you will use movement to get the best out of the available space. If you have the chance, pace out the movement area by counting the steps between your standing position, the audience, your laptop and the projector screen. This will help you to internalise the space and free your attention for your audience.

Try to make your movements and posture as seamless and natural as possible. Use the pace of your voice to set the pace of your movements. Take your time and remember to breathe – this will help with any nerves.

You can blank your PowerPoint presentation at any time by pressing the “B” key. This will allow you to pause your presentation, open up your movement arena, and redirect attention to what you are saying.

Eye contact

Making eye contact with members of the audience will draw them into your presentation. Ensure that your eye contact is balanced to include them, but be careful not to focus on any one individual for too long. You may make them feel uncomfortable.

Having to think on your feet is one of the pitfalls of pitching and can be seen as a sign that you are unprepared for your presentation. Practice makes perfect. Practice your presentation thoroughly to ensure that you have mastered the content and are free to maintain eye contact with your audience.



Gestures

We frequently use our hands to support what we are saying. Thinking through how you use gestures to communicate can enhance your pitch.

Position your hands in the “box” at the beginning of your presentation. This is a space no higher than your shoulder and no lower than your hips. Let your hands flow in rhythm with your words as you warm to your topic - but without them moving outside the “box”.

Another recommendation is to keep your hands free. Don't hold paper, pens or the slide clicker and avoid putting your hands in your pockets, clenching your fists, or pointing.

Voice

Think about how you sound to your audience. Being heard is clearly essential. Remember that your presenting voice may have to be louder than your day-to-day voice.

It's normal to use non-words – ums, ahs and errs – in your everyday speech but try to keep them to a minimum in your presentation.

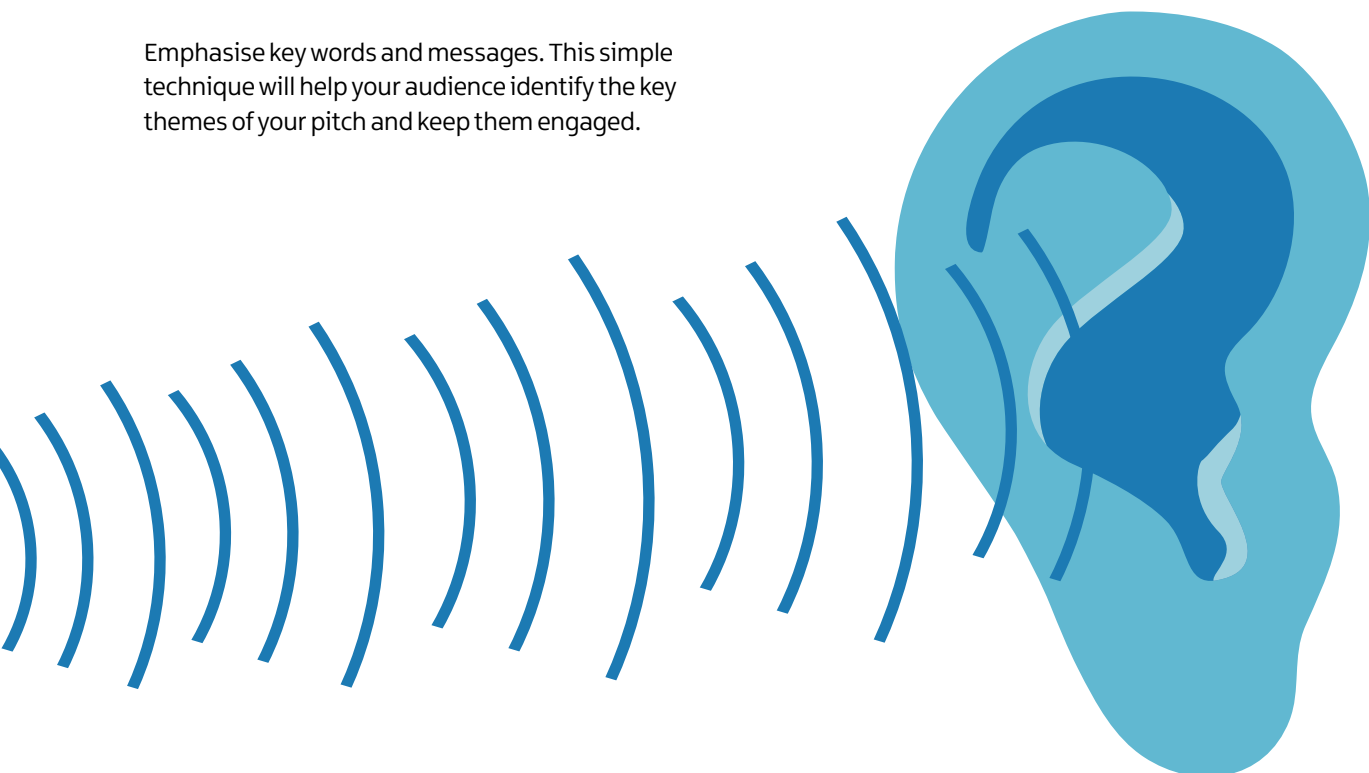
Emphasise key words and messages. This simple technique will help your audience identify the key themes of your pitch and keep them engaged.

Pauses

A pause can add a great deal of value to your message. Not only does it give you a chance to breathe and centre yourself, it also allows your audience to reflect on key points and helps to separate one section of your pitch from the next.

Body Language

We've discussed some aspects of your body language but what about your audience's body language? Try not to over-interpret their postures. If one member of the audience is folding their arms, it is most likely out of habit. That said, look out for clusters of body language. Puzzled looks are a clue that you may have to clarify something. Sudden gestures might indicate comments, ideas or questions. Frowns or head shaking are clues that you may have a disagreement. Address these cues as you proceed.



6. Visual aids



Decide what visual aids work best for you. PowerPoint and handouts are the two most common options, each with their own advantages and disadvantages.

PowerPoint

PowerPoint has become the standard visual aid for presentations of all kinds, and sales pitching is no different.

It is relatively easy to use, adds professionalism and helps to structure your presentation. However, it does require a laptop and a projector which can fail from time to time.

A few tips for using PowerPoint successfully are:

Clarity

Simple, straightforward messages will have more impact than reams of text.

Continuity

Have a similar layout for each slide, with regular features like titles, subtitles and logos.

Variety

Bring variety into other elements of your slides. Follow a photograph with a graphic. A graphic with text.

Being prepared to present your PowerPoint is just as important as the delivery of your pitch.

Here's some tips to help you prior to your presentation:

Set-up

Get in early and set up in advance to check that your equipment is in working order.

Lighting

Check the lighting of the room. Can your audience read the slides on the projector screen?

Space

Assess your space. Is your movement arena free from cables?

Presentation

How will you change slides? With the clicker or the keyboard?

Presenting

As you are presenting, remember that the laptop and the projector screen are showing the same thing. Refer to the laptop, not the screen.

Handouts

The alternative to a PowerPoint presentation is a handout. This is a great tool to help you communicate complex ideas and provides a record of your pitch for your audience to take away.

However, handouts require a bit of thought and preparation. If you are pitching to multiple groups, you might find that your handout needs to be reviewed and adjusted for each audience as well as kept up-to-date.

It is important to type all your materials in a consistent format. Use headings and bullet points to organise your ideas, page numbers for easy reference and use diagrams and pictures if possible.

Decide if you want to distribute your handouts at the start or end of your pitch. If distributed at the start, you may find that the audience will read your handouts instead of listening to your presentation.



7. Question and answer session

Question and answer sessions come at the end of most pitches. So long as your pitch has addressed the needs and concerns of your audience, they are likely to see you as a positive source of information. The golden rule of question and answer sessions is that you do not have to answer every question. It is up to you which questions you choose to answer.

It is important that you listen to each question all the way through so that you can answer each point in full. Use the **TRACT** method to frame your answer.

TRACT

Thank

The first step is to thank the person for asking the question.

Repeat or Rephrase

Repeat or rephrase the question. This allows the rest of the audience to hear the question while giving you time to think of an answer.

Answer

Answer the question briefly and clearly.

Confirm

Confirm that the questioner is happy with your response.

Thank

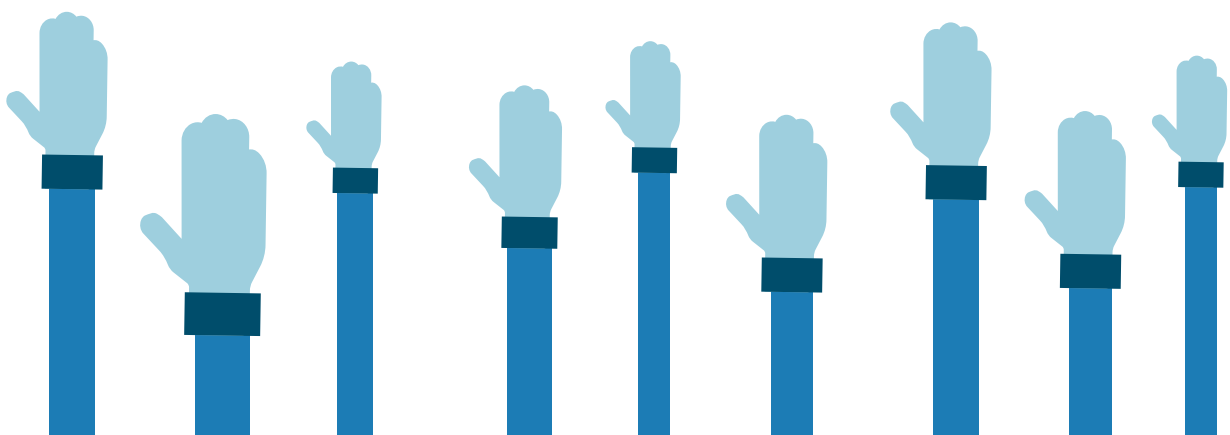
Thank the questioner again.

Show appreciation

Keep the question and answer session positive by showing that you have really listened to each question and appreciate the chance to answer. Phrases like “that’s an interesting angle”, or “I’m glad you asked that” validate the questioner and encourages others to put their questions to you.

Outline the next steps

At the end of the question and answer session, you need to draw your pitch to a close. This is all about outlining the next steps. You may choose to arrange a follow-up meeting with individuals once they’ve had time to think things over or have had a trial period to use your product.



8. Thirty second elevator pitch

Imagine that you've entered an elevator, only to find that the only other occupant is a buyer or customer that you've been trying to get hold of for weeks in order to sell your latest idea, product or service. Unfortunately, you have only 30 seconds to grab their interest before the elevator reaches their floor.

What will you do?

Thirty seconds isn't long enough to deliver a successful pitch, but it is long enough to persuade them that this is a conversation worth continuing.

Within those 30 seconds it is important to explain:

Who you are?

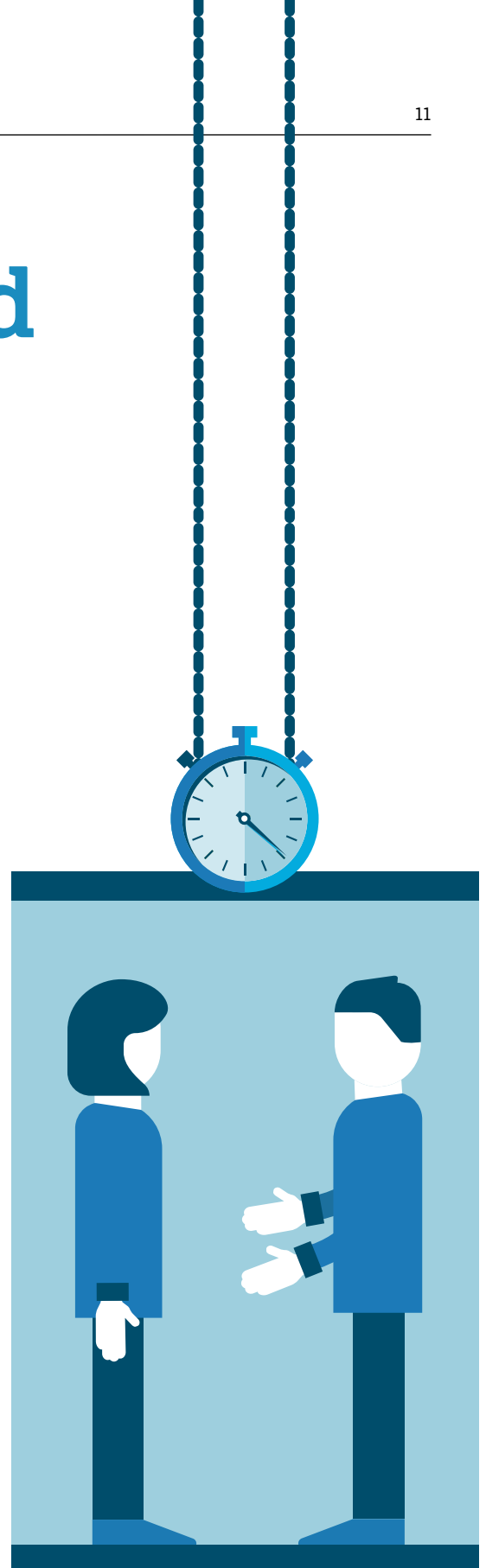
Introduce yourself in one sentence.

What do you do, and for who?

Keep it brief and concise.

Benefits of your solution

How will their customers benefit from your solution?
Better still, how will they as a specific prospective buyer benefit from your solution?



Conclusion

That wraps up our tutorial on how to successfully deliver a sales pitch. We've looked at ways to prepare and structure your pitch, communicate both verbally and nonverbally, the use of visual aids, how to navigate a question and answer session and the essentials of a 30-second elevator pitch.

For further information on pitch optimisation and other Invest NI programmes, visit investni.com or speak to your Invest NI contact.

Visit us at investni.com to learn more.

