



Tips for Presentations to Businesses

1. Focus, focus, focus. If you are invited to talk about “translation” (a vast subject!), ask the organizers to help identify the language combination(s), document types, legal requirements, etc., that will be of particular interest to your target audience, and make these your focus. Select three or four key points; these, plus examples, will usually be enough. The easiest solution is to start with ATA’s customizable Client Outreach PowerPoint, available free of charge to ATA members at http://www.atanet.org/client_outreach/download_main.php.
2. Do your homework. Know when and where the presentation will take place (address, building and room number, how to get there, contact info/cell phone for an on-site coordinator, exact time). Check with organizers to see what equipment is available, and have a plan B up your sleeve (e.g., if you plan a PowerPoint presentation, bring overhead transparencies of same and have an overhead projector on standby just in case). Practice your presentation in front of a mirror or friends, especially if you are not used to speaking in public. And get to the venue at least 20 minutes ahead of time to get the feel of the place and the audience, especially if you have never been there before.
3. Watch the clock (discreetly). The length of your presentation will depend on the organizers and your own aims—up to half a day for corporate communications teams facing a specific challenge, 20 or 30 minutes if you are a warm-up act for a keynote speaker at a chamber of commerce event. Do not overrun your slot. Save some time for Q&A and/or announce “I’ll be glad to answer questions during the coffee break/lunch.” (Even successful business people can be shy about showing their ignorance in front of the whole room.)
4. Prepare a handout. It should be easy to read and professionally produced. If you have several pages, consider using a different color for each; this can make it easier for your audience to follow (“Now look at the example at the top of the yellow sheet...”). Include contact details for your professional association, the organizing team, yourself, and useful resources.
5. Content (A). If your audience is monolingual, you must find a “bing!-light-bulb-goes-on” example that brings home to them how language can help project the image they want in their chosen market. A striking visual or anecdote may do the trick. If you use a skewed example *into* their language, be sure to follow up with an odd *into-foreign* one. Remember, your message gets through only when they are able to put themselves in the shoes of foreign readers of their documents, however briefly!
6. Content (B). If your audience is multilingual, they may find it easier to take your information on board. (But not always: nodding heads are no guarantee that the penny has dropped.). Try to put yourself in their place as you are writing your speech. Why are they there? What will be of use to them? Set the stage with a few key statistics, then review basic steps in quality assurance/how to get organized. A nuts-and-bolts approach is often best (checklists, how to buy translation, how to find

a translator, etc.). Empowerment is also a good argument. Remember, everybody finds language fascinating—it's the linguists themselves who can get strident and/or boring!

7. Content (C). During your presentation, keep your finger on the audience's pulse and modulate your delivery. Skip over material that's tanking, if necessary. Keep an eye on people who look quizzical or bored, and see if you can get them to smile and concentrate. Striking visual aids are a good way to start, end, and sustain audience interest en route.
8. Avoid at all costs: rambling tales of stupid clients' poor decisions. If you plan to use particularly scathing examples, at the very least make sure the offenders are not in the room, or have a good sense of humor; check with organizers if in doubt. Likewise, do not present translators as underdogs or noble struggling losers that nobody listens to. Your audience may take you at your word.
9. Make a list of questions your audience is likely to ask. Develop short answers, with visuals—which you will “just happen to have handy”—should that issue arise in Q&A. If a questioner starts rambling and shows no sign of relinquishing the mike, break in (pleasantly) to say you have a particularly appropriate example to show him/her during the coffee break and move on.
10. If you have organized the meeting yourself, consider producing proceedings (by taping speeches/Q&A and editing the transcript, for example). Arrange to have this report—or your handout, slides, or summary—published in sponsors' newsletters or on their websites to cash in on the ripple effect.
11. If nobody invites you, create your own event for the businesses/industry you serve. Team up with translators in the same field and offer to organize a short session for buyers of the documents you specialize in. This can be an attractive option in fields where buyers are particularly clueless or, better yet, face an outside constraint (looming legislation on bilingual healthcare delivery; criticism from ethnic groups; export drive ahead; new markets opening up).

Ask a key buyer/industry body to host the event (this will make it easier to attract speakers and participants; it may also get you well-appointed premises for free). In your promotional materials, speak your target audience's language. Focus, focus, focus. Make it clear that attendees will leave with at least three practical insights/solutions that they will be able to implement immediately. Bring in additional speakers with related subject-matter expertise to round out your offering (make sure they are good speakers). For your audience, look for quality not quantity: five attendees can be enough to make a meeting work, provided they are the right people (key industry representatives, for example—see “ripple effect” above).

12. Follow up: thank the organizers/hosts/partners in writing within the week, and ask if they have received any feedback. You might even orchestrate a positive feedback campaign from translators or other language-aware people attending the meeting. In all subsequent public discussions of the event, lavish praise upon the hosts/sponsors

for their foresight in identifying the need for this meeting and organizing it (yes, even if you and your team organized it). This will make them more willing to host a second event.

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