

The Magnificent Seven: Tips for a Killer Elevator Speech

Okay, so you want to develop a killer elevator speech. Now what? Here are seven easy steps designed to help you develop an elevator speech that will help your business. For the past decade or so we've been helping companies get to the point and use language that matters -- and not that marketing babble into which so many executives lapse when asked the simple question, "What do you do?"

Step One: Shoot yourself

Most companies have a good elevator speech. Unfortunately it's frequently buried beneath jargon and self-promotional language. One way to remove all that excess language is to videotape yourself talking about your company. We've taped hundreds of executives, and it really helps uncover those buried nuggets of truly memorable information that help tell your company's story. And it's not just you. Videotape 10 colleagues. Are they clear? Are they consistent? Are they concise? Are they compelling? The camera will tell.

Step Two: Develop your story

In truth, no one really cares about your company; they care about what it can do for them. Do you sell cars? No, you help families stay safe on wet and slippery roads. Are you an accountant? No, you help businesses make sure Uncle Sam doesn't get too much of their money. Do you write software? No, you save companies money and time using computers. It's all about benefits to the prospect or customer. Smart companies know this and have great elevator speeches full of stories, anecdotes and examples that illustrate the business value they provide.

Step Three: KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid)

We call it "Corporate Klingon." We've all experienced it in some form. Corporate Klingon is the indecipherable blather that's spouted by some company executives. It's fine and understandable: if you're a Klingon. Keeping things short and simple is always preferable. If they're short, simple and in plain language that's even better. For a great example of meaningless babble, watch the video on our home page at www.elevatorspeech.com. The bottom line is that if you can't tell your story in plain language, you can't tell your story at all.

Step Four: Practice

It sounds simple enough but almost no one does it. Practice your elevator speech out loud. In the bathroom mirror, in the shower, in the car, on your morning walk, into your voicemail at work. That way, you get used to the rhythms of your speech; you understand what to emphasize and what to edit out. Be merciless in what you remove. Not sure what works or what doesn't? Deliver your elevator speech to a colleague or a friend. What makes sense? If there's anything that doesn't add to the understanding of what your company does, toss it out.

Step Five: Be explicit

Examples are the lingua franca of elevator speeches. They illustrate broad business strategies. Use them early and use them often. When it comes to making people care, you have to get granular. It's not enough to say your company has saved its customers millions of dollars, even though it may be true. But if you say your company saved Acme Inc. \$18 million in four years due entirely to your product, you have their attention. When you have an audience whose attention span is measured in nanoseconds, you've got to be as concrete as possible.

Step Six: Pass the "So What?" test

Before you release your elevator speech into the wild world of business, take a moment to sanity check what you're saying and how you're saying it. Does the language you've chosen pass the "So What? Who cares?" test? Is the way you're saying it effective? Language-wise you want to whet their appetites, not unload your entire business strategy. Delivery-wise you want to remove any verbal, vocal or visual barriers to delivering your elevator speech. Without good language and effectively delivery your elevator speech won't be effective.

Step Seven: Brevity

Get right to the point. Remember, you've got 30 seconds or less. An elevator speech isn't everything your company does; it's just enough to whet the appetite of the prospect.

In summary, what you're talking about is nothing less than business value. If the person next to you in the elevator or at the cocktail party or networking event is an investor, you may win or lose a \$100 million deal based on what you say. If they are a potential customer, the impact can be just as massive. Elevator speeches aren't rocket science. But they are critical elements to winning in business.

Think of it this way: What's the first thing you'll say if the elevator doors open, and Bill Gates steps in?

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