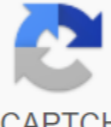


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The opinions expressed by the participants of the entrepreneurs are their own. As a young entrepreneur I spend most of my life outside the office pitching for investors and potential clients. Despite spending countless hours practicing my presentation, I always get feedback on how I can improve. Last month, I introduced my startup Alumnyfy - a platform to attract alumni - at the V2 Pitch competition at the University of San Diego and walked away from first place and a \$40,000 cash prize. Not bad for a day's work, but I don't think I wasn't preparing for it. Led to the contest, I did A/B testing on presentations I would practice. I then analyzed which aspects of my step led to better results and determined how many practices I needed to deliver a first-class presentation. Fortunately, I traced the patterns in that greatest triggers to the wau audience and win that next customer, investor or employee. Related: This VC powerhouse doesn't want to hear your elevator step 1. Show your customer discovery. When you're in early enterprise, people will always look to knock you out for lack of traction. One of the reasons why the audience likes to hear the traction is confirming that the problem you are tackling is worth it. If you don't have any evidence in your customers or income yet, use customer interviews, beta tests, and reviews you've received. For Alumnyfy, I always mention that we are coldly called over 850 universities in my field. This not only shows that our team has taken the time to understand who the customers are, but it also gives our company credit that we appreciate the needs of our customers. 2. Keep them guessing. We all know that the best stories are the ones with amazing endings, don't we? After all, this is what your audience cares about the most, all they want to know is how the story is going to end. Related: Pitching for Profit: Delivery Presentation Investors Love While the ending may be what everyone wants to see, I learned how important it is to end your pitch right before the climax. Be open about your progress, struggle and how far you've come, but set your pitch in a way that makes it tell your audience the best that's yet to come. By doing this, investors or customers are more likely to track your company's progress to see how the climax plays out. (People hate to see only half of the film.) Give your audience the feeling that they can help become part of your amazing end story by buying your product or investing in your company. 3. Practice, clarify and repeat. Unable to prepare, you prepare for failure. -Benjamin Franklin Two weeks before my contest, I started rehearsing my pitch. In total, I practiced more than 300 times to the point where I could read my pitch word for word in the shower, or if someone woke me up in the middle of the night. To to part of the contest, I turned to fifteen angel investors and asked them to give me a list of questions that I should expect. Then I made more more notecards with all the questions the judge could ask me. By the time the contest, I left nothing before the event. As I pitched more and more, I learned that the best way to guarantee success is to get more prepared for your pitch. Practice so much that you don't need to pitch the deck and can still nail the presentation perfectly. Once you can pitch anytime, anywhere (even in the worst conditions), you'll be so confident when you say that your enthusiasm and message will rub off on your audience. Related: 8 simple steps to create a powerful presentation August 1, 1997 6 min read This story appears in the August 1997 issue of the entrepreneur. Subscribe Two-syllable phrases like free book, quick help and lose weight are the kind of promotional messages that don't have to be read to be effective. By that I mean they are so easy for the brain to interpret as the whole thought that they read in the blink of an eye rather than as linear phrases. So for an advertiser trying to attract attention in a world awash with promotional images, it makes sense to try this message in the eye of a flashing route of public consciousness - whether it's for a sales slogan or even a product name. This approach is especially necessary for billboards because drivers have little more than worth an eye blinking time to look at advertising and understand it before whistling past. Newspapers and magazine readers make their own form of whistling as they skim a magazine or newspaper page for something that catches the eye. Think a quick look around and you'll find many examples in advertising where such eye blink phrases are used. Small ads in particular realizing that they have to compete for attention with their big brothers tend to make one and two words of bold beseechments. One ad the size of a tea cracker blurs the embarrassing issue of Gas Pain?, which flags down its bloated audience and makes its point pretty quickly. Another tiny ad in a computer magazine just roars STOP as a headline and then subtitled a background of frustration. A perfect example in the product name category is Breathe Right. (It's the glue strip you place across the bridge of your nose to open the nasal passages.) Breathe Right is a big name because it not only registers in an instant, but also sends a message about the benefits. For years, the phrase Get Met. It Pays was an easy-to-read advertising mantra for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. Even Smokey Bear ads to prevent wildfires capture readers quickly with the title Match Point, to address the need to put out bonfires. Examples of eye-blinking advertisements abound, taking serious warnings about consumer indifference, as described in the salty old rhyme Say It Fast and Say It's True, or, Darling, to hell with you. If you can get your message from paper to brain with such Phrasing, you stand the best chance to reach the scan, often overstimulated by the reader. This is my message to Kevin Groid of Del Del, California, which wrote recently. Groid runs a mental health referral service called 1-800-THERAPIST, which helps people in need of psychological counseling find the appropriate therapist in their area. The service also helps mental health professionals develop their practices as part of Groid's nationwide network. Groid is already glommed at understanding eye-blinking advertising and memorability with his hard-to-forget 800 number. But he says the disadvantage is people sometimes think the number relates to physical therapy. There is also possibly a secondary misinterpretation that this phone is in the therapy service, just like the crisis hotline. To solve the first problem, Groid included an illustration of a small character looking like he could use a sit-down session with a therapist. Reasonable enough. But he wonders what else he can do in a small space like this to further define the service and get attention. My answer: extra advertising with a flashing light. More good thing since Groid goes off to a good start with his quick sign up phone number and illustrations, I suggest he add another eye blinking element. First, I wanted to move the phone number, still dominant and bold, at the bottom of the ad and, at the top, use the fast-read headline FIND HELP. Then I would include the following words of a body copy: Just any therapist wouldn't do it. You want to find someone with special sensitivity and experience in your area of need. That's how we help. Call us now. We can help. Then, where Groid uses part of the ad to recruit therapists for the network, I'd just use these words: THERAPISTS: To be part of our referral network, call: 619-481-1515. I suggest that change, because to be honest, if I was looking for a therapist and saw this ad, I would be offended to read the current petition. Therapists: call 619-481-1515 to build your practice. Possible misinterpretation is that the advertiser insensitively promotes the creation of businesses on the backs of psychologically in need. The new headline Find Help more clearly defines the number 800 as a referral service. And combined with the illustration and a new copy of the body, it is quite clear that this is a service related to psychological therapy, not a physical kind. These suggestions should help Groid overcome the ambiguity of the previous ad and add extra motivation to download. Searching for words needs creative momentum? Sit down to study. If you're a do-it-yourself advertiser, like many entrepreneurs, you always face the proverbial - and sometimes intimidating - blank page when you sit down to develop advertising. What am I saying, and how can I say that? Goes through your mind. This process can be frustrating and stressful, not to mention unproductive. Why? Because You're trying to get good ideas out of the air. Sometimes one of these rare birds flies through your consciousness and you bag it. But more often than not, you drum your fingers, make a few a few in the fridge, twist half the box paperclips into S shapes, check your email dozens of times, and still nothing comes on the screen in your head. So what if the idea doesn't come quickly? You may not have thought about it, but there is an advertising-idea emporium in your city: a public library. You say: What kind of creativity can lurk in a soy old place like this? Well, let me tell you. You can pull out numerous books on the topic of your advertising - say it's food - and just reading cleverly written chapter headlines will give what I call the trigger words that get your creative juices flowing. I borrowed snippets and paraphrased liberally from chapter headlines to develop headlines, subtitles and descriptions of different species. Then, when I go to the actual text of the book, I find a sparkling treasure trove of words, concepts, thoughts and reflections related to my subject that evoke my own thinking on the subject. Call it a leap, call it a fire lighting, call it a massage on the right side of the brain, but such stimuli can make thinking creatively much faster and a much more productive process. And despite all this valuable help, the price is also right. Jerry Fisher is an advertising copywriter, consultant and author of Creating Successful Small Business Advertising (\$39.95), which is available at (800) 247-6553. If you want Jerry to review your materials for conversion in this column, send them to Advertising Workshop, Entrepreneur, 2392 Morse Ave., Irvine, CA 92614, or contact Jerry via America Online atJerry228@aol.com. atJerry228@aol.com.

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