

MAY 2014

## Test Your Company Positioning in 1-Minute

Recently I had an opportunity to judge presentations at an early stage investment forum. In addition to a rapid-fire format that included eight 5-minute business pitches, I saw another dozen one-minute elevator pitches. Both formats are very similar to the screening process I've participated in for years in local angel investor groups.

Although it may seem unfair to ask an entrepreneur who has worked day and night perfecting a "big idea", to shave the story down to a one-minute pitch, the challenge has its benefits. Those that do the marketing and positioning work needed beforehand, reap rewards far beyond the funding sought. They learn how to successfully position their business and quickly hook their audience.

At its core, the one-minute pitch is the foundation of a well-considered positioning strategy. If done well, it creates a solid underpinning for marketing the business. With this footing, companies close more sales because they have the tools in place to create market buzz and engage prospects.

While listening to the one-minute pitches it dawned on me that regardless of how long your company has been in business, there are valuable lessons to learn by trying to tell your company story in a minute or less. The "one-minute pitch" forces a business to hone the message and toss out everything else that doesn't matter.

### 7 Tips Perfect a 1-Minute Pitch

Regardless of whether your company is a startup or decades old, these one-minute pitch tips will provide a great test to uncover any engagement gaps in your company positioning.

#### Executive Insights



Cheryl Isen

- **Use analogies to create instant clarity.** Is your company developing the next wiz bang, super gizmo with nitro-charged ionic chips? Yawn. Save the technical details for after you've been asked "how". Instead, close the understanding gap and create an instant "aha" by comparing your unique service or solution to an already known game changer. Are you the Netflix, Bitcoin or Kindle of something?
- **Show some personality!** Not only is bland boring, buyers want to know whom they're dealing with. Use words or visuals that reflect your company spirit. Is the business a little sassy and irreverent or deeply caring about an issue? For example, one company pitch stood out from the others because the presenter of a cider company dressed the part of an apple harvester, quite brave for a business setting. Another took a chance using humor and loaded the presentation with hilarious innuendo. Still another related a brief, highly personal story that gave heart and soul to the company vision. All showed passion that hooked my interest immediately.
- **Tell a story.** One wine company had me salivating for the "sensory therapy in every bottle" after describing the idyllic, well-tended countryside crisscrossed with sunbathed grapes ripening to flavor bursting perfection. The picture painted was so enticing I could almost see myself sipping wine in the vineyard. They wrapped the pitch by telling me they "blend sweet cheers" in every bottle and gave a perfect call to action—"share a bottle, tell a friend".
- **Make it about me.** Sure the pitch is about "your company" but no one will give you a second of interest if all they hear is a litany of boring "I, I, I's". Instead, turn your story inside out by putting your audience center stage. Demonstrate what is great about your idea by painting a picture and putting me center stage in a story about what your idea does for me. When you frame your story to the audience, they can't resist engaging and listening.
- **Name drop.** Everyone's a skeptic these days so if you have a customer or affiliation that will wow your audience, fold it into the story early. The power of a third party endorsement—be it a well-known brand name or media story, especially when connected to an unknown company, lends important credibility and makes your story exciting.
- **Break free of formulas:** One well-studied presenter did everything by the book. Yet sadly, after rattling off the well-constructed business vision, mission and services I couldn't remember a word that was said. Once the standard corporate recording started, I accidentally drifted off for a well-earned minute of daydreaming.
- **Don't forget the basics.** Remember to show some energy and be likable, real and relatable. Try to make your audience smile. Capturing a fan in one-minute is hard work, but it is definitely doable. It's also work every company, not just startups, should constantly work on. Putting together a one-minute pitch is the perfect starting point.

Cheryl Isen is president of Isen and Company, a strategic marketing and public relations firm she founded in 2001. Serving as an organization's "CMO to go", Cheryl and her network of talented associates run or supplement a company's marketing and Public Relations efforts.