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Mastering the Art of Show and Tell

Media Presentations That Lean too Heavily on Numbers and Templates Fail to Capture the Client's Enthusiasm

By Mark Dominiak

Special to TelevisionWeek

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As my wife goes about her daily routine, one of her habits is to turn on the tube as entertainment popcorn.

I confess that I got snared by her popcorn recently during "The Ellen DeGeneres Show." One of Ms.

DeGeneres' guests that day was John Spencer, who plays Leo McGarry on "The West Wing." As a "West Wing" addict, I was hooked. In the interview, Mr. Spencer talked about one of his own addictions: a fascination with TV advertorials and buying products they sell. He went on to explain he is a sucker for the product demo.

Advertorials succeed because they shrewdly ply the principle of "show and tell," something most media people fail to leverage when presenting plans.

Today's presentations are largely uninspiring because they only make the grade on the "tell" part of the equation. Why? Presentations are another instance where media people fall victim to the power of numbers. When riches of data are available, it's natural to display it and tell a client what the conclusion happens to be. "This number is bigger than that one, therefore" Unfortunately, numbers make for extremely dry subject matter, meaning most presentations never mine the emotional energy of "show."

Compounding matters, most media organizations now use presentation templates as standard operating procedure. Templates propagate "telling" and cover all parts of the process: pre-planning, objectives and strategies, final plan and execution. They leave little flexibility to leverage "show." Further, seemingly small things like the physical page are poorly engineered. Self-promoting logos many times are overemphasized. It's just more "tell" and gets in the way of selling solutions to the client.

Even with this tendency in media presentations, we can easily identify media people who know exactly how to bring a plan to life, and in doing so succeed at selling it. Did you ever wonder how it is they weave their magic? Successful media presenters "tell" well because they also "show."

Show Business

Why is the "show" part of the equation important? Presentations are made to people. People like to be viscerally engaged. They love seeing a show. Our creative counterparts know this. They are masters of the show. Creatives bring storyboards and copy to life, generating emotional energy and thereby engaging the audience. Clients enjoy the energy creatives generate while presenting ideas and look forward to creative presentations. Client enjoyment is an equity creatives draw upon to help sell message ideas. Good media presentations do the same thing.

Secondly, the ultimate intent of the plan is to influence end-consumers. What does the presentation do to show how the carefully created plan actually influences human beings? A good job of demonstrating how the plan prompts consumer action will turn up the "show" quotient and increase the odds of convincing a client of the plan's worth.

Here is a checklist to create presentations that deliver both "show" and "tell."

- Actively engage the audience (show)
- Communicate important ideas and detail (tell)
- Demonstrate the power of the plan's intent (show)

If a presentation can hit on all three of these elements, it can more successfully sell a plan. Let's look at two examples.

A packaged-goods client needed to generate impact for a line of products under a brand name and for

the line in total. We determined that if we focused the available, limited resources in a print-only effort, we could generate significant impact for the line and for component brands. The print-only idea scared the client, and our big opportunity to sell the notion was the final plan presentation.

Before one slide was shown, we demonstrated the plan's impact by creating a physical flow chart of planned magazine outlets in monthly stacks down the center of the table. Each copy represented one planned insertion.

Hitting High Points

As the copies were laid out and the stacks grew, we described the high points of reach build and how promotional elements, bonus units and merchandising touched consumers as the year progressed. When finished, we placed cards atop each month's stack detailing coverage metrics for the line and brand components. With the physical flow chart dominating the table, we prepared to show the actual slide presentation. Before we did, the divisional manager gave us a rousing ovation. The visual demonstration in the middle of the table engaged the client's attention, generated interest in the upcoming presentation and ultimately helped obtain approval for our approach.

In another instance, we faced a tough rollout situation for an e-commerce client. Our plan solution included an integrated approach, leveraging multiple media types, various forms of traffic-driving merchandising and promotional collaboration by nonaffiliated vendors. The clients were not media-savvy people, which made the sale of a complicated plan solution a thorny problem.

We hit on the idea of bringing in media vendors to present with us. This notion allowed our team to focus presentation energy on the strength of the strategy. Reps who participated (15-plus) were able to directly communicate the relevance of their vehicle as part of the solution to the client's situation. They also could immediately answer questions about their vehicle, merchandising details or promotional components.

Additionally, we leveraged the energy each rep had for his or her property, something we could never do as well as the reps. Our presentation demonstrated the complexity and interwoven nature of the plan and its components. Seeing all of those people in a room, working together to address their needs, immediately engaged the clients and told them a lot about how the aggregate plan was going to work to influence the target consumer.

Media plans are critical components of a communications effort. Unfortunately, presentations frequently fail at conveying the impact a plan will create in the marketplace. Media professionals can improve presentation success rates by taking a page out of the advertorial playbook: "show and tell."

Mark Dominiak is principal strategist of marketing, communication and context, Insight Garden LLC.

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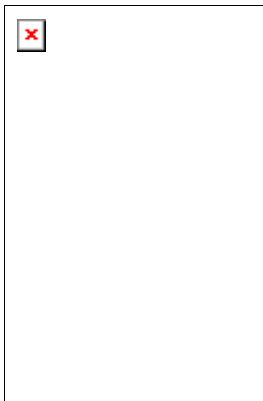
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