

CLIENTS PET PEEVES REGARDING PRESENTATIONS

When consultants prepare for an oral interview, they spend a great deal of time researching the project and how they will execute it for the client, and rightly so, for that's a given. But oftentimes they overlook an equally important element, which is to determine the client's likes and dislikes regarding the actual interview situation itself. How many people do they want to see? What type of media piques their interest, or turns them off? Who should do the most talking? Since most clients already have their procedures set in their mind, and know what they're looking for, presentation specialist Ernie Burden suggests asking the questions right up front. Here's a sample of some answers.

Q. How many should attend the presentation, and who are they?

(Private Client) "We want to hear from the project people that are going to be assigned to the job. We want to know what the project manager thinks about the project. We want to see that they've done their homework in putting the presentation together."

(Public client) "We specify that we want four people maximum; the principle, chief designer, main contact, and project manager – a core group. If the principal shows up, we need the commitment that they will be on the job, and I can call him or her if there's a problem. Otherwise, don't come."

(Private client) I look at how familiar the project manager is with the project.

(Public client) "Make sure that they all have something to say, and contribute to the process, and don't just sit there."

(Private client) "Don't have the entire group show up with ties that have the client's logo on it. Don't overdo it."

Q. Do you have any pet peeves about media, such as PowerPoint and LCD projectors?

(Public client) "The use of presentation materials and medium is the choice of the consultant, but you have to know who the client is. There may be three heads that make up that client, and one of them may not like flashy visuals.."

(Public client) "Just make sure it works before you get there."

(Private client) The 3D walkthroughs are great, and how they can show a project that's just been completed with what was proposed initially, and show how close they came, that's fine. The problem is duration. Time is limited, so if you start showing stuff that's not pertinent to the project, you'll see people on the panel starting to glaze over a bit."

(Private client) "It's important for you to understand who you're presenting to. In a lot of presentations the majority of end users are not part of the process. They may have no architectural training whatsoever, and pictures and animations are what's going to sell it."

(Private Client) "All of my staff is architecturally oriented. Some of the senior managers are not, but they know what to look for, and what excites them. So these types of visuals do work."

In the final analysis, Ernie maintains that clients are the most particular about one aspect of presentations; that is, who delivers it. A final word from a client: "Presentations are sometimes made by persons who will not be involved in the project. The key to success is to only hear from the people who will be involved in the project."