

## **GREATEST PRESENTATION CHALLENGES**

Presentations are always a challenge. Concerns about your performance, uncertainty of the competition, and receptiveness of the selection committee to your approach to the project. What are the clients really looking for, how formidable is the competition, and have you prepared amply to meet the client's end game?

These are but a few of the many challenges identified in a series of surveys conducted during presentation workshops offered nationwide among an audience of architects and engineers. The firms were represented by principals, business development and marketing VP's, project architects and engineers, and project managers.

Participants were asked to identify their top 3 greatest presentation challenges. The results varied somewhat depending on the exact mix of the audience, but certain trends became evident. The top eight factors that emerged were used as the benchmark for all the subsequent surveys described in this article. The top national AE challenges were:

1. Understanding needs of client (25%).
2. Time to prepare properly (22%).
3. Skills for the new technology (14%).
4. Choosing right type of visuals (11%).
5. Benchmarking competitors (8%).
6. Public speaking skills (8%).
7. Training the team members (7%).
8. Getting the team to rehearse (5%).

The same eight factors were given to participants at a presentation workshop at the SMPS/PSMA (Society for Marketing Professional Services / Professional Services Management Association) national convention. They were asked to identify only the top 3 challenges. The audience consisted of business development and marketing directors, and marketing coordinators. The results showed a different mix, based on the day-to-day tasks of the marketing department; i.e. to prepare presentations primarily for others to deliver. What previously came in last, jumped into first place.

1. Getting the team to rehearse (22%).
2. Benchmarking competitors (17%).
3. Understanding needs of client (16%).
4. Time to prepare properly (16%).
5. Training the team members (14%).
6. Public speaking skills (7%).
7. Skills for the new technology (5%).
8. Choosing right type of visuals (3%).

Additional surveys were conducted using the same eight criteria among several other national audiences. One was a webinar with an audience comprised of a range from principal to project manager. Another consisted of a mix of AEC professionals, including members of the DBIA (Design Build Institute of America). The results:

1. Understanding needs of client (27%).
2. Benchmarking competitors (22%).
3. Time to prepare properly (17%).
4. Getting the team to rehearse (16%).
5. Training the team members (8%).
6. Public speaking skills (5%).
7. Choosing right type of visuals (3%).
8. Skills for the new technology (2%).

This particular mix has shown to be consistent with nearly every survey conducted since, with both in-house and public workshops. Understanding the needs of the client always shows up in first place, with the next three items trading places within a few points, but always remaining within the top four.

Give this same survey to members of your team and compare the results with this national average.

**Here's a few tips on how to meet these challenges.**

**1. Understanding client's needs.** This process begins long before the presentation, in image surveys, client satisfaction surveys, and debriefings from previous presentations. Finally there is the detailed homework you need to do prior to the presentation to understand the exact end goals that each client is looking for.

**2. Benchmarking competitors**

It is extremely important to know as much as possible about the tactics your competitors use in presentations. Do they come in with video when you show up with boards. You must do surveillance on their methods, or you can be blind-sided without knowing it.

**3. Time to prepare properly**

The secret is to start early. Don't wait until notice of short list, if you're confident you'll be on it. Begin preparing for the presentation when you prepare the proposal. The presentation is simply a proposal in action. It's where you must prove the claims you made in the proposal.

**4. Getting the team to rehearse**

Begin impressing them early on with the importance of rehearsals. Make certain that they clear their calendar. Pick a time that is most conducive for them to attend, and insist on full participation by all members of the team.

**5. Training the team members**

This is best done by an outside consultant, using generic examples that teach concepts of presenting, rather than internal props that are familiar.

**6. Public speaking skills**

Presentations are not public speaking, in fact just the opposite. The presenter must be true to their own nature in order to be credible to the review board. Practice in one's delivery is certainly admirable, but forthright enthusiasm wins more clients than a polished speech.

**7. Choosing the right type of visual**

There are many options for visuals to use depending on the exact nature of the project and the reviewing board. Certain public agency review boards have sophisticated setups for viewing your presentation on individual monitors. Board presentations do not work in that setting.

**8. Skills for the new technology**

PowerPoint is still the easiest and most effective to use, and is here to stay despite some critics. Certain complicated engineering concepts require computer animations, but put them on video. Live demo's are sure to evoke Murphy's Law.