

Four Tips for Effectively Training Your Marketing Team

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Most marketers strive to communicate as effectively as possible—except, too often, when sharing their knowledge with other marketers. Because that's when, for some reason, PowerPoint takes center stage.

I come from a teaching background, and during my relatively short time as a digital marketer I've witnessed keynotes, classes, and presentations where information was recited from slides—and expected to be digested and implemented efficiently.

Old-School Is the New Cutting-Edge

Don't get me wrong, PowerPoint slides are useful when used sparingly. But the key to teaching is less about "cutting-edge" technology and more about helping your audience learn the information.

With that in mind, next time you're called upon to share what you know with colleagues, interns, or even the general public, here are some old-school ways to help ensure that your audience learns and retains information:

- Group work
- Open-ended questions
- Problem-based learning

These suggestions may seem less sexy than a spiffed up Prezi, but they can be remarkably effective. This article briefly describes these old-school pedagogical techniques and gives some brief examples.

1. Group Work

Through dialogue and collaboration, group work allows you to connect with the knowledge and experiences of your audience. In general, for every hour of time in front of an audience, I usually plan at least three small group activities. By small groups, I mean 3-5 people per group. So, in short:

- Plan at least three group activities per hour.
- Keep groups to fewer than five people.

Doing so helps break up time into digestible chunks and establishes a reasonable expectation for audience participation. It also helps audience members come out of their shells and become more vocal because they often form bonds with their fellow group members and have more opportunities to interact on a personal level.

To help you get started, here are some ideas for small group activities:

- Discuss an open-ended question (more to come below).
- Complete a questionnaire.
- Search social media for topic-related content.

2. Open-Ended Questions

Group work can take various forms. I like to start by posing an open-ended question that audience members then discuss in their groups. Open-ended questions break down barriers to participation and can be used to warm up your audience.

To get a better idea of exactly what I'm talking about, let's consider what constitutes the opposite of an open-ended question. Essentially, when I pose a "close-ended" question, I am looking for one, specific answer. For example:

- Close-ended question: *Is Utah a state?*
- Open-ended question: *What is Utah?*

My open-ended question will most likely produce a set of answers that includes the answer to my close-ended question (i.e., Q: "What is Utah?" A: "It is a state"). Plus, it has the advantage of encouraging other unexpected answers (Q: "What is Utah?" A: "It is a mountainous, semi-arid state located in the US").

Audience members have to think through their own answers, of course, but they are also exposed to much more information—especially when you have them share their answers with the entire group at the end of each activity.

3. Problem-Based Learning

Likewise, problem-based learning can help your audience learn more effectively because it encourages critical thinking and facilitates collaborative experiences; those, in turn, help cement acquired knowledge.

To give you an idea of what I mean, here's an example of two approaches to solving a real-life problem:

- We can combat drought in Utah by using water-efficient faucets.

- How do you think we can combat drought in Utah?

In the first example, I give my audience a solution right away (i.e., water-efficient faucets help combat drought). In the second example, however, I can gather various answers from my audience that may or may not include my desired answer. The good news is that I can always add to the group conversation by discussing the desired answer in addition to all of the creative answers that I have gathered from my audience.

As a group, you can then revisit the answers and critically evaluate which are the most relevant to your discussion. Audiences are thus transformed from consumers of information to active participants, which can help them learn and retain new knowledge more effectively.

4. Time Management

Now, you might be saying to yourself, "That's great, but I've got a lot of material to convey in a short amount of time, so..." To which I might reply, "That may be true, but I would guess that you're trying to present way too much information given your time constraints." Also, I might add, "You most likely don't know how to manage your time well."

I recommend thinking of your presentation in the simplest terms possible. First, break down the information that you need to convey into two or three main points of discussion. Next, start thinking of how you can develop your discussion using group work. Finally, plan out how you're going to manage your group activities. So...

- Focus on 2–3 discussion points.
- Create corresponding group work.
- Plan out how to manage group activities.

Admittedly, group work can get away from even the most seasoned teacher, so here are some quick-and-dirty tips to help you stay on track:

- Chunk up group work into 2–5 minute segments.
- Give your audience time updates.
- Use a timer to stay on task.

During your class, presentation, or workshop, communicate time limits to your audience (e.g., "You'll have five minutes to complete this task.") and then inform them as their time limit approaches (e.g., "You all have two minutes left."). Doing so helps your audience stay on task and helps set expectations for participation.

Yes, you will need a timer. But don't worry, you don't have to look like your short-short wearing seventh grade gym teacher. Use your phone as a timer and walk throughout the classroom, keeping tabs on what's going on. That will help you stay on task and interact more with your audience.

By effectively managing your time, you'll help your audience focus on essential information and

produce knowledge that you may have overlooked. It's a win-win that doesn't require anything more than a few old-school techniques.

Conclusion

In the beginning, it may feel strange to loosen the educational reins a bit. But, in the end, you'll notice that your audience will be a lot more responsive to what you have to say.

Next time, instead of fetishizing your PowerPoint, involve your audience just a little bit more and you'll see the difference in how much the knowledge you share takes hold.

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