

Skills 360 – Making your Ideas Stick (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. Name some PowerPoint habits that you find annoying or bothersome.
2. Can you think of any commonly used buzzwords in your field or industry?
3. Do you have any interesting ways of starting off a presentation?

Vocabulary

On the flip side: another or opposite aspect or result; “In terms of design, I love the new laptop. On the flipside, it’s pretty slow.”

To get behind something: to support something; “We need to have a big meeting with all the staff to get everyone behind this change in strategy.”

Littered with: to have many of something, especially something negative; “I don’t know guys, I just feel our website is totally littered with cheap photos that don’t really show what we do.”

To die a sad death: to disappear or be forgotten, unfortunately; “Palm Inc. died a sad death, as they failed to adapt within the growing smart phone industry.”

To convey an idea: to communicate an idea to other people; “If you want to convey your idea to visual learners, find good pictures that support your points.”

Fluff: something that is entertaining but not important; “We want to make a popular but serious news site, kind of like Yahoo without all the fluff.”

To prioritize: to decide the order of importance of several things; “These are all great ideas folks, but now let’s prioritize them and figure out what to work on first.”

Ideally: we use “ideally” to introduce what we think should be in a perfect situation; “Ideally, we can find a candidate with 20 years of experience who is still adaptable.”

Buzzwords: popular words in a particular field; “I didn’t understand Barry’s idea... it was just a bunch of buzzwords like ‘analytics’ and ‘bandwidth’ strung together.”

To be touted as: to be praised as or called in a positive way; "Black Panther is being touted as one of the most important movies of the past decade."

Seniors: elderly people; "Our company provides health and food services to seniors who still live alone."

Dynamic: involving energy, change, or movement; "Dave is known as a dynamic speaker who can wow crowds with his energy and enthusiasm."

To engage: to hold the attention of; "We're trying very hard to engage more young people through social media."

Rational: based on logical thinking; "A lot of buying decisions are not really rational, but based on emotional impulse."

Intensity: strength, or level of power or energy; "The boss stared across the table at me with such intensity that I was suddenly afraid he might fire me."

Chorus: the repeated part of a song; "For the launch, let's find an upbeat popular song and try to get everyone to sing the chorus together."

Melody: a simple tune or song; "A good advertising jingle puts a company or product name to a simple but memorable melody."

Number: an individual song; "For my next number, I'd like to play a classic rock that I'm sure you all know."

Ballad: a slow love song; "If we incorporate an old ballad into this video, I really think we'll get some people crying."

Chaotic: disorganized or happening in a confused way; "After working in an established, well-run organization, I found life at the start-up totally chaotic."

Unified: appearing as one, or having all parts connected; "A good leader is able to get his entire team unified around a single company vision."

Manila folder: a folder made of strong light-brown paper; "Jackson, would you please fetch me that stack of manila folders from the mail room?"

To strive for: to try to achieve or get; "Don't dress for the position you have, dress for the position you strive for."

The trash can of history: if something is in the "trash can of history," it is forgotten or seen as not influential or meaningful; "Microsoft had high hopes for their media player Zune, but the device has been relegated to the trash can of history."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at making your ideas stick.

Have you ever been in a meeting or listened to a presentation where someone talks about their big idea? And then, forty PowerPoint slides later, you're still not quite sure what they're talking about, or why their idea is so great? Well, there might be a good idea somewhere behind it all, but for some reason it didn't stick.

On the flip side, there are ideas that you couldn't forget if you wanted to. For whatever reason, people understand them, they remember them, and they get behind them. The ones that stick are the exceptions. Business history is littered with ideas – for products or business models – that never became popular.

So what's the difference? Why do some ideas stick while others die a sad death? In our last lesson, I talked about keeping it real and keeping it relevant. Those are two important ways of increasing stickiness. Today I want to focus on keeping it simple and keeping it dynamic.

Let's start with keeping it simple. That deck of 40 PowerPoint slides? There are probably just four or five in there that convey the core of your idea. The rest is fluff. Now, you might be thinking that you need details and explanation to support your idea. That's true. But you need to prioritize those points. Combine them. Support your idea with *three* smaller ideas, not 39.

Ideally, you should be able to express your idea in a single sentence. The founder of Uber once described his idea like this: "You push a button and in five minutes a Mercedes picks you up and takes you where you want to go." The company later simplified that even more to "Tap a button, get a ride."

You'll notice that there's no buzzwords there. There's no talk of "platform" or "users" or even "app." It's just a simple description of a great idea. So use simple sentences and simple words.

Sometimes it helps to use common reference points in your one-sentence idea. For example, a new dating app called Stitch is touted as "Tinder for seniors." Everyone knows Tinder, so Stitch can use that knowledge to make their idea clear.

Besides keeping it simple, you need to keep it dynamic. What do I mean by dynamic? I mean make it surprising and fresh. And engage multiple senses or emotions. This is especially true for presentations. You can't use the same template for every purpose. Getting your new idea to stick isn't the same as making sure a team of managers understands the sales figures from the first quarter.

When you're presenting information, you might follow the standard pattern of "tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you've told them." That might work for some purposes, but it's not a really sticky format.

You've got to get people's attention, then keep it. Start by saying something that's never been said before. Wake your listeners up with a shocking fact, a mystery, or a bit of humor. Appeal not just to their [rational](#) brains, but their hearts. And give them a visual that enhances the shock, or the mystery, or the humor.

Think of music. A good song has changes in volume and [intensity](#). It includes some repetition – just think of the [chorus](#) and the [melody](#) – but if it has only one emotional level it won't have impact. And think of a whole album of songs, if you still listen to albums. You've got to mix up the dance [numbers](#) with the [ballads](#).

At the same time, you need to work around the melody and chorus. If you're using PowerPoint, don't completely change the formatting on every slide. That just confuses people. You need to make it dynamic, but not [chaotic](#). It needs to be exciting, but still [unified](#).

Now, I want to talk for just a moment about someone who really knows about stickiness: Steve Jobs. It was just over 10 years ago that he introduced the MacBook Air. How did he do it? Well, he chose to emphasize one simple feature: how thin it was. And he did that in a fresh and dynamic way. During his presentation, he picked up a simple [manila folder](#) and showed it to the audience. Then he pulled the MacBook Air out of it. Simple, surprising, and effective.

And that's what you should [strive for](#), as you keep it simple and keep it dynamic. And if you also keep it real and relevant, as I explained last time, there's a good chance your idea will stick, rather than ending up in [the trash can of history](#).

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the [BusinessEnglishPod.com](#) website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. To support an idea effectively but simply, you should...
 - A ...use as many points as possible.
 - B ...avoid PowerPoint.
 - C ...decide which supporting points are most important.
 - D ...provide just one powerful supporting idea.

2. Which of the following should you do to state an idea simply? [choose 2]
 - A Express it in a single sentence.
 - B Use popular buzzwords.
 - C Avoid simple words.
 - D Talk about things people are familiar with.

3. Which of the following sentences demonstrates using a common reference point to describe an idea? [choose 2]
 - A This new mouse is unlike anything you've ever seen before.
 - B The new Kia Stinger is the Porsche for the common man.
 - C I'm talking about building the Starbucks for tea drinkers.
 - D I'd like to see everyone give up their iPhones for our new mobile device.

4. When giving presentations, you should remember to...
 - A ... incorporate music.
 - B ... tell people what you'll talk about at the beginning and end.
 - C ... use a simple template.
 - D ... change your approach according to your purpose.

5. Which of the following are ways of keeping it dynamic? [choose all that apply]
 - A Using shock.
 - B Using numbers.
 - C Using humor.
 - D Using mystery.
 - E Using logic.
 - F Using visuals.
 - G Using a melody.
 - H Using emotions.

6. What feature of the MacBook Air did Steve Jobs choose to emphasize?
 - A Its memory.
 - B Its thinness.
 - C Its packaging.
 - D Its color.

Review Answers

1. To support an idea effectively but simply, you should...
C ...decide which supporting points are most important.
2. Which of the following should you do to state an idea simply? [choose 2]
A Express it in a single sentence.
D Talk about things people are familiar with.
3. Which of the following sentences demonstrates using a common reference point to describe an idea? [choose 2]
B The new Kia Stinger is the Porsche for the common man.
C I'm talking about building the Starbucks for tea drinkers.
4. When giving presentations, you should remember to...
D ... change your approach according to your purpose.
5. Which of the following are ways of keeping it dynamic? [choose all that apply]
A Using shock.
C Using humor.
D Using mystery.
F Using visuals.
H Using emotions.
6. What feature of the MacBook Air did Steve Jobs choose to emphasize?
B Its thinness.