

Sell Yourself in Ninety Seconds or Less: How to Develop a Great Elevator Pitch

What comes to people's mind when they say your name? You probably haven't given it a lot of thought; few of us have. When we don't develop and manage our professional image, we invite others to do this for us, and we lose control of how we are perceived.

In business, creating and managing our image is called personal branding. A brand is the relationship or position an object or person holds in the mind of the consumer. For example, when you think of Volvo, what comes to mind? Most of us would answer "safety."

When your name is spoken, what do people think? Whatever bubbles up is your personal brand. Personal brands summarize those key attributes that describe us and an unique selling proposition that differentiates us. When I work with clients to create personal brands, we develop three products.

Brand Summary: A brand summarizes our unique selling proposition, or what separates us from our competition. My brand is "The Career Engineer." Other examples include a therapist whose brand is "the Wizard of Ahhs" and a high level manager and motivator who uses "the Pied Piper." I once worked with a college president who decided her brand was "the Energizer Bunny" because she was known for her ability to energize conservative institutions.

Positioning Statement: Once we identify our "sweet spot," or those attributes where desired image, others' perceptions of us, and our own opinion of ourselves meet, we can isolate three to six attributes that define our image. From these attributes, we can write a positioning statement. This document is for our eyes only and is used as a focusing device.

My positioning statement is: "Elegant but approachable, most people feel an instant connection with him. They sense that he is totally devoted to their, and his, personal and professional growth. By sharing his self and search, he encourages others to become the full expression of who they are."

I use this statement to ensure that everything I do from the car I drive to the organizations in which I belong support my positioning.

Elevator Statement: An elevator speech distills our personal sales pitch into a few succinct sentences. It's called an elevator statement because in the time it takes for an elevator to travel from one floor to another, we should be able to build a compelling case for ourselves.

An elevator speech is intended to open doors, not close sales. Most of us begin by telling people what we do, specifically their services, forgetting to tune into that all important station WIFT (What's In It For Them?).

A far more effective way to introduce ourselves is to talk about the clients we serve and the challenges we help solve. In mere minutes, we should be able to cover the following: target market(s); what pains or pleasures them; an example; a case study; the result; and an open-ended question.

For example, here is the elevator speech I use for presentation training:

Target Market: "I work with businesspeople..."

Their Pleasure/Pain: "...who are ready to take their careers to the next level." (Or, "...who feel their communications skills are holding them back.")

Example: "They may have their eye on a big promotion or want to make the best possible impression during an important presentation." (Or, "They may have received a less than stellar review.")

Case Study: "Just this week, I worked with a CEO who had been asked to make a presentation to a prestigious professional association. She had always gotten positive feedback from past presentations, but she knew she could be better. Something felt like it was missing."

Result: "I showed her how to energize her speech. Her public relations officer told her it was her most powerful presentation to date, and she told me that she has never experienced such a sense of personal power."

Open-Ended Question: "What kind of presentations do you make?"

Remember, an elevator pitch is intended to pique interest, not tell the whole story. When you develop a pitch that has them asking for more, you know you've on the right track.

Try this simple formula to create your own elevator pitch, and use as many words as you need. Then, start removing sentences and words that are unnecessary. Imagine that you're being billed \$1,000 a word and keep only the most cost-effective language.

One final note: your first draft doesn't have to be perfect. It takes time to get our elevator speech down pat, but once you do you'll be on your way to promoting a stronger image.

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About the Author

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