

Twelve Tips for Effective Tech Presentations

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Let's face it – whether you are talking about securing your data or describing the functions of legal IT products, the average lawyer audience may regard your presentation as useful, but hardly as “sexy.” Since we have been successfully lecturing on these topics for 18 years now, we have amassed a number of tips for making our presentations entertaining as well as educational. A friend suggested we share what we have learned. Here are ten of our best tips:

1. Be a storyteller. Cold hard facts have very little allure. But everyone likes a good story. When we lecture on cybersecurity, we tell real-life stories of law firm breaches. Dropbox used as a data breach mechanism? They are spellbound. If we're talking about, say, which cloud provider to use, we tell them about the real-world cloud outages and breaches – and how they happened. When we talk about controlling e-mail Inboxes, we show screenshots of Inboxes with 40,000 plus e-mails in them and tell the stories of lawyers whose inability to control their Inboxes has gotten them in trouble with the state disciplinary authorities – that catches their attention.
2. Speak with passion. That is easy for us – we are indeed passionate about our subjects. But all too often we see speakers who speak professorially, often in a near-monotone. You are not supposed to be a soporific!
3. Use your hands. Using your hands is part of keeping an audience's attention and engaging them. Of course, not the same movements over and over. We actually think about motions that go with our PowerPoint slides. They rev up the presentation.
4. Use your presentation software well. In a panel situation, you may not need slides, or only a few that, for instance, have the language of the statutes being discussed. Whether you are using PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi or something else, less is more when it comes to words and larger is better when it comes to graphics. Ditch the text-heavy slides and offer short bullet points that summarize the points being made. Infographics and large photos that complement the text are attractive to audiences. Where appropriate, humorous images have a place. Don't have one slide up forever - we probably use 30-40 slides for a one hour presentation. We book along – and audiences seem to like it – they really have to listen to keep up and that retains their attention.
5. Prepare for a tech disaster. Make sure there is an extra laptop and that you have your presentation on a flash. Be prepared to have no technology at all – challenging, but it has been known to happen. Hence, we always have an outline of our slides in (it kills us to say this) paper.

6. Be good to your hosts. Speakers who get their written materials in on time, come prepared with a good PowerPoint, and have sent in bios and photos or other paperwork in a timely way are greatly valued by conference organizers. Our only special request is to have a pitcher of water or water bottles available – hardly a “high maintenance” request. Be courteous to the AV guys (they actually may know their own equipment better even if you are a technologist), the people at the registration desk and everyone else you come in contact with. People remember the speakers who have a ready smile, a handshake and a warm thank you for their help after the conference is over. Probably the compliment we hear most often from organizers is “You guys are so easy to work with – it was such a pleasure.” If you want to be invited again, remember that invitations don’t come ONLY because you gave a terrific presentation – they come because you followed all the rules and displayed good manners!
7. Engage your audience. This is actually more difficult (usually) than you would think. Unless the entire presentation is an interactive conversation, the point is for the speakers to convey their expertise on a subject in a relatively brief of time. It therefore tends to be a one-way street. We always tell audiences they are welcome to ask questions throughout, which sometimes means our presentations get “hijacked” – which is perfectly ok if you have good written materials and the audience has come with a ton of questions. Once, we didn’t make it past slide #6, but the audience came primed with questions and they were enthused that we had answers. Part of being a good presenter is being flexible!
8. Front load your presentations with the substance that is absolutely critical to convey. Note tip #5 – you may get hijacked by questions. If this happens, at least your audience won’t miss the most critical points. Once in a while, we ask the audience to hold questions so we can get to a certain pivotal point in the presentation.
9. Make yourself available after the presentation. We always say that we will stay for questions. If we are to be followed immediately by other speakers (a ‘hot swap’ in our business) we will tell audience members that, out of courtesy, we need to remove ourselves and our equipment, but will meet them in the hall outside if they have questions. Likewise, if there is a lunch, reception or dinner, we invite them to ask questions there.
10. Have no fear of saying “I don’t know.” What we have learned over time is that we usually do know the answers to the questions we receive. But questioners will take no offense if, for instance, you tell them that you are unfamiliar with a particular product and will need to get back to them. Ask for their business card. Whatever you do, don’t give out misinformation in an effort to answer the question or otherwise try to dodge

the fact that you don't know – that does not sit well with attendees.

11. Assess your audience. We can do IT or cybersecurity for beginners, those with mid-level knowledge and experts. We can even use the same PowerPoints for all three groups. But we need to have some sense of who is in the room. Lawyers? Paralegals and legal assistants? Large, medium or small firms? Asking questions in the very beginning is useful – it engages the audience and it tell you what levels of skill, size, etc. you need to tailor your presentation to.

12. Have fun. We couldn't be more serious. It is so apparent that we are having fun when we lecture that it's infectious. And there's not an audience member anywhere that doesn't enjoy having fun while they are being educated!

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