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Make every communication count.

How to Make Winning Team Sales Presentations

The customer says they want the entire team to present.

That's just great! The last time we did that, we got beat – bad!

Most sales professionals operate as solo acts most of the time. With that mindset, many of them are not prone to give any more effort to a team sales presentation than they would give to one in which they are the only actor on the stage.

Their belief essentially is that a team presentation is like a solo performance – with other solo acts simply tacked onto the front and back.

Experience proves that, when stakes are high, this can be a very costly error in judgment.

When a sales team walks into a team presentation room without having invested enough time to prepare *as a team*, its members are leaving the door wide open for better-orchestrated competing teams to take that business away from them – more easily than they ever imagined.

For a sales team to gain the greatest chance of success, the entire team – no matter how talented some or all of the individuals may be – must give the content, flow, and delivery of their presentation a great deal of focused planning and practice. In fact, team presentations need far more planning and practice than the more common solo-presenter variety (which also, from our observations, typically receives far too little customer-centric preparation and practice as well).

To help assure your team's success, we have outlined here six of the pivotal areas that require the team's intense attention long before you ever venture into the presentation room.

In addition to using the content development tools and personal presentation delivery skills that you've learned in your Mandel sales presentation skills training, be sure to:

- Enhance and Focus the Team's Knowledge
- Coordinate Around a Customer-Centric Theme
- Practice (and Practice Some More) to Ensure Excellence
- Establish Team Leadership
- Understand and Manage the Presentation Environment
- Use Team Interactions during the Presentation to Build the Customer's Trust and Credibility for Your Team

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Enhance and Focus the Team's Knowledge

Whatever the account strategy and sales-call planning tools your organization has chosen, utilize them thoroughly to prepare for team sales presentations. At the very least, be sure each team member has the benefit of as much of the following types of information as possible:

- A thorough and deep understanding of the customer's specific organizational goals, needs, and challenges
- Information about the needs, wants, "care-abouts," role, responsibilities, goals, technical competency, and loyalties of the individual customer representatives to whom your presentation will be delivered
- Clear, relevant presentation objectives that align everyone on the presentation team and are based on the team's understanding of the customer
- Customer-centric, cohesive, coordinated, and compelling presentation content
- A clear understanding and thorough rehearsal of the role that each sales team member will play in the presentation room

Each team member needs to be fully prepared to confidently engage with the audience, support the team, and move the customer to the desired action.

Coordinate Around a Customer-Centric Theme

A strong team presentation needs an overriding theme to give it customer-centric focus and content continuity. A team sales presentation should not be a disjointed series of talks by several presenters, each focusing – without adequate mutual connection – solely on one individual's area of expertise.

To build each individual's section of the team presentation, follow the *Mandel Sales Presentation Blueprint®* process, and then use that process to link the individual presentations smoothly together.

The *Blueprint®* tool can help ensure that all team members' individual presentations are soundly constructed and are then tied together to flow cohesively and convincingly as a complete story for the listeners.

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Practice (and Practice Some More) to Ensure Excellence

A team sales presentation made without practice sessions is like a world-class athletic team or concert orchestra trying to perform without practices or rehearsals. The pros know the value of practice – of doing it again (and again) *before the event* to get it right and natural.

Pros in other skill-demonstration fields make practices and rehearsals a major part of their professional lives. Practice and rehearsal are no less essential in high-stakes selling situations.

Practice out loud, on your feet, *with your team* to prepare.

For a variety of reasons, many sales people avoid practicing whenever possible. As a result, many are far less well off financially than they could be (and so are their organizations).

A caution: Don't let sales presentation team members just tell the team what they plan to do when they're up on their feet in front of the customer. Have them demonstrate in a practice session what they will actually do.

Costly experience shows that there is often a huge gap between knowing what to do and actually being able to do it – particularly when the pressure to perform is on.

Practice not only the formal parts of your presentation. Also practice answering the questions – particularly the hard and challenging ones – that you expect to get during your presentation or after it.

Arrange for in-the-moment coaching by a skillful manager or a professional presentation coach during your practices. Your team's success deserves nothing less.

If some or all of the team's presentation will be delivered virtually, team practice is even more important. In our experience, virtual team sales presentations, to be great, need even more preparation and practice than face-to-face ones.

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Establish Team Leadership

The designation of a presentation team leader is an important step. Often, but not always, that person is the most senior account manager or account executive for this customer.

Make the selection of the team leader explicit, and make sure that the leader's responsibilities are specific, well understood, and well supported by all on the team.

The role of the presentation team leader often includes being responsible for the team's success at gathering and using *insightful* information about the customer's business, organization, and people. Typically, the leader also gives the sales team guidance about the presentation's objectives, the strategic and tactical situation, customer personalities, their needs and styles, the competitive situation, and critical success factors.

The team leader may help the individual presenters coordinate their presentation sections. The *Mandel Blueprint®* tool can guide the team in staying focused on audience needs and in determining the required amount of presentation practice and coaching for each presenter and for the team as a whole.

The team leader is often the central focus for the customer. Most likely, therefore, this is the person to whom customer team members have already granted some trust and credibility and with whom they have most fully shared their needs and criteria for decision making.

As such, the team leader is also the person the customer is likely to contact with additional requests, concerns, questions, objections, and/or suggestions after the sales presentation event has been concluded.

It is usually the team leader's responsibility to open the overall presentation, deliver some portion of the presentation content, field questions along with others (as appropriate), and close the presentation with summaries and next steps.

Clearly, the presentation team leader needs to be a leader in the truest sense. He or she needs to understand the strategic value and tactical essentials of successful team presentations. This key person must make the teams' hard work happen before the event so that the team's level of thinking, planning, and practice creates the highest probability for the presentation's success.

Understand and Manage the Presentation Environment

If possible, practice in, or at least become familiar with, the environment in which you will be presenting. When that is not possible, arrive early to gain as much sense of the locale and layout as you can before you need to start.

At the very least, if the assignments are known beforehand, ask your customer contact to describe the room and the seating arrangements planned for your team's presentation.

Be sure to ask well in advance if you prefer any particular seating arrangements or will need presentation equipment provided, e.g., projectors and screens, flipcharts, white boards, etc. (Carry your own team back-up items. It's hard to use a customer's flipchart when no one at the customer's site has remembered to provide marker pens for you.)

Position the presentation team members strategically in the room. If given the flexibility, manage your environment so that it works to your team's advantage. Remember, however, that each environment and situation is different, so adjust accordingly.

As a general guideline, place yourselves so that: (1) no team member will distract customer attention from the team member who is presenting at any point in time and so that (2) each team member who may need to interact with the audience will be in a place where he or she can do so naturally, as appropriate, when not presenting.

Whether the team sits together or is seated among the customers attending the presentation is a situational judgment call.

When presenting formally to larger audiences, many teams like to position themselves up front (or on stage, if there is one), seated to the audience's right or left in chairs placed fairly close together, but "cheated out" a bit (at a slight angle) toward the audience.

Only the current presenter or person addressing a question should be standing; all other team members should be seated off to the side, keeping their attention on the presenter.

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Use Team Interactions during the Presentation to Build the Customer's Trust and Credibility for Your Team

Don't consider yourself *offstage* at any time during your team's presentation.

Your customers are not only evaluating your content during a team sales presentation, they are also watching and listening to see how your team members treat each other. Decision makers often consider your team interactions to be valuable previews of how your organization is likely to treat them if they elect to do business with you.

Consequently, whenever your team makes a change from one presenter to the next, the way each team member handles the transition will become a focal point for your audience. It's critical that each speaker introduce the next presenter in a positive, respectful, and friendly manner.

Be enthusiastic. Smile and make eye contact with the next presenter on your team. He or she should acknowledge the introduction with at least a genuine "Thank you, Sally," or better yet, "Thanks, Sally. I'd like to pick up on a key point that Sally made and that you had several questions about. That's the idea of…."

Act as though you are proud to be introducing or following your colleague.

Also, be continually aware: Your audience will be observing what you personally are doing when you are *not* presenting.

When not presenting, make sure you do not appear uninterested in the customer or disconnected from the current presenter. Avoid gazing blankly ahead or looking as if only your part of the presentation matters to you (even if it does).

Please, please never check your cell phone or PDA while in a sales presentation room, even if you think no one will catch you – someone will (and you probably won't even know it).

Noticeably checking your cell phone or mobile device, even during a break in your presentation, sends the message to customer observers that you are not totally concentrating on them. It's an all-too-common practice, but why take the chance of unnecessarily diminishing your performance in the customer's

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eyes? Get out of sight and earshot if you can, or better yet hold off altogether until your presentation is completed and you are out of the building.

Pay close attention to each of your colleagues when they are presenting, even if you have heard it a thousand times before. (Avoid artificially nodding and smiling at everything that's said, though. Be sincerely engaged.)

While it's fine to periodically cast your eyes over the audience for looks of interest or confusion or for nonverbal signals (nods, frowns, smiles, leaning forward, etc.), most of the time you should pay attention to and give your support to the person who is presenting for your team.

A last over-arching thought

Remember that most people – whenever they can justify it – buy from people they like (even if they don't know those people very well).

Be thoroughly planned and practiced as a team so you can be relaxed and engaged with the customers in the room – before, during, and after your team's presentation.

Make your sales team the people with whom others want to do business.

"Finalist" Note: If your team sales presentations are often "*finalist*" presentations, please download from our website the Mandel whitepaper entitled, *Best Practices to Win High-Stakes Finalist Presentations*, which is an expansion of this whitepaper to include insights into how to succeed in the highly competitive "finalist" communication setting.

That whitepaper can be found under the Insights and Resources tab at **www.mandel.com**.

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About Mandel Communications

When the stakes are high, the quality of what you say and how you say it can make all the difference.

Every day, worldwide, organizations are turning their people's communication skills into a strong competitive advantage through Mandel's training, skills-building practice, and expert feedback.

Call on Mandel Communications whenever your organization needs to:

1. Build the Skills to Improve High-Stakes Presentation Results

- Sales Presentations
- Customer Briefings
- Presenting Ideas at the Executive Level
- Technical Presentations
- Executive and Manager Communications

2. Build the Skills to Sell Effectively at Executive Levels

3. Develop Trusted Advisor Relationships

Working with Mandel, you will gain a unique combination of demonstrable benefits:

- **Rapid skill improvements that can make the winning difference.** Mandel-trained professionals, managers, and executives can quickly create content and messaging that are listener-centric, clear, and compelling. Equally important, your communicators' personal "presence" will become increasingly "real," reassuringly confident, credible, and interactive.
- **Job performance improvements whenever masterful spoken communication skills are a key requirement for business success.** We will precisely tailor all that we do for you to achieve your organization's unique business goals, and our skills-building processes and tools will concentrate directly on producing your desired on-the-job results.
- **Global skill-building scalability.** To align with our client organizations' global activities, Mandel has expert trainers and coaches located throughout Europe, AsiaPac, India, and North America, and we build new communication skills in fourteen (14) different languages.
- **Face-to-face and virtual delivery options.** Clients consistently evaluate Mandel's face-to-face group training workshops and coaching services as world class in all aspects. Equally impressive are our capabilities to use digital delivery media - such as virtual meetings, virtual collaboration platforms, and TELEPRESENCE - to create outstanding skill-building results for you when face-to-face work is not the best option.

Please contact us whenever a significant improvement in spoken communication results could benefit your business performance. It would be our privilege to discuss these benefits with you.

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