

Volume	3	Starting a Company
Chapter	03	Pitching the Opportunity
Section	02	Preparation
Key Word	Risk, Reward, Relationship	
Tags		
Stage	Needs to raise money	

PITCHES, HOME RUNS, AND STRIKE OUTS

File No. 3.030206 | 2019-04-20

Quick Summary: The same universal pitch universally does not work for all audiences.

Abstract:

We are all constantly selling. We could be trying to persuade our significant other or a child, asking a prospect to purchase our offering, asking investors for funding, or even trying to convince others that our position is correct. Clearly understanding your goal and your audience and planning the best way to communicate with them needs to be determined well in advance of your “sales pitch.”

There are seemingly countless “pitch” opportunities for entrepreneurs in virtually every major metropolitan area in the US. These opportunities range from formal pitch competitions with cash prizes to informal free workshops conducted by organizations and individuals. Adding to these resources are hundreds of websites, examples, and blogs available on the Internet. An entrepreneur can easily become totally consumed with working on and delivering their pitch, leaving little time left to work both on and in their business! Just as a pitch audience is selective and critical, an entrepreneur must use the same prudent approach to determine what they should pitch to whom and when. Thinking of pitching as a numbers game – sooner or later, the right person will respond – is a total waste of an entrepreneur’s most precise resource: their time. It can also be disrespectful to the audience – wasting their time as well.

Digressing and using a convoluted baseball analogy, an entrepreneur is both a “pitcher” and a “hitter.” As a pitcher, they decide what type of pitch to throw, where to aim it over the home plate, and how fast to throw it. Their goal is simple: get the batter out. The hitter has the opposite goal: get on base or hit the ball so that other teammates score or are in a better scoring position. Digressing even further, there are seven ways a batter can reach first base, and there are twenty-four ways of being “out.” When waiting to give your next presentation, you can look up the answers on the Internet.

Simplistically speaking, just like in baseball, the ideal scenario for a presenter is to hit a home run. How they define a home run can vary significantly. For example, if the pitch is the first exposure to a venture capitalist, a home run may be as simple as having them agree to a second meeting! In reality, it is just a base hit. The batter still has a long way to go before they cross home plate!

Major league baseball players spend years perfecting their skills and continue to practice while playing a grueling 162-game schedule. Even the best hitters are rarely successful, only getting on base three out of ten times. Babe Ruth, the famous Home Run King, was also a Strike Out King. No baseball player

steps up to the plate without a clear goal, knowing their strengths and weaknesses, the competition (the pitcher), and what they are likely to do. With all that experience, knowledge, and focus, they still only get on base a fraction of the time.

Shouldn't an entrepreneur follow the same rigor when preparing their pitches? Long before the pitch slide deck is created, several other steps should be taken. It is easy to "think" you know what to do or have a "feel" for what you want to accomplish. However, when you begin to write down your thoughts, you will probably end up with a significantly different approach than you originally intended. Here are some basic questions you should consider before beginning the tactical activities of creating your pitch and presenting it.

1. What is your goal for the pitch?
 - a. Can you articulate it precisely? (There should be only one goal.) (Walking away with a check should not be your goal – if it is, spend time at the bar instead.)
 - b. Are you trying to inform or influence the audience?
2. Who are you pitching to?
 - a. What is their experience level with you and your subject?
 - b. Is the audience capable of helping you achieve your goal?
3. What is the pitch setting?
 - a. Will it be live, recorded, in-person, audio-only, video, one-on-one, small group, large group, broadcast-style or interactive?
4. How much time has been allocated?
 - a. Are you planning to speak faster to cover more material?
 - b. Is your presentation about the "forest or the trees" (either may be OK)?
5. What media will you use?
 - a. If slides, are they intended to list details or only prompt talking points?
 - b. If handouts, are you prepared for the audience to read ahead?
6. Is your presentation standalone or one of many?
 - a. When will you be presenting?
 - b. Will the audience be fresh or fatigued?
 - c. Are they likely to be preoccupied?
7. Can you enlist an "observer" to gauge audience reaction, capture comments, and help in a postmortem review?
8. What one or two very short and succinct messages would you like the audience to remember and be able to repeat to others who were not present?
9. When the dust settles and your presentation is behind you, what criteria will you use to determine if you accomplished your goal?

10. What do you anticipate could go wrong, and what can you do beforehand to minimize its likelihood of occurrence?

The ten items listed above are general, but they can be applied to virtually any time of pitch. They apply to prospects, customers, business partners, investors, employees, and even to general-interest audiences. In all cases, you are asking each of the audience members to commit a resource that they can never replenish – their time. You owe it to them to not waste it. “Do-overs” are costly in terms of time and credibility. Retrenching because you have missed the mark is an all too common occurrence. How many times have you said or heard: “That is not what I meant...”?

The convenient but simplistic approach of using the same presentation material and only changing the spoken words is not effective. The answers to the ten items listed above will vary considerably based on the target audience.

There is, however, some common ground to consider for each situation. Article 3.020306, “*The Three Rs for Investors*,” in this collection describes the three Rs as “Risk, Reward, and Relationship.” Although the article discusses the three Rs in seeking funding from investors, the three Rs are equally important when presenting to any group. From an audience perspective:

- Risk: Should I embrace what the presenter is saying? Does it pass the common sense test? What if they are wrong?
- Reward: How, what, and when will they or I gain from this?
- Relationship: Can I trust what I am being told? Your connection with the audience will only solidify if you have first addressed the risk and then the reward issues.

Whether the audience is investors, prospects, customers, business partners, or just some random group, it is made up of individuals that will listen and interpret what is being presented from their own perspective. A recurring theme in many of the articles in this collection is “It is not what you say that matters; it is what others hear that counts.” Take the time upfront to determine what you want them to hear and do.

One final question: Would your time be better spent working on your business than preparing your pitch? I think you know the answer.