



Why a whiteboard and marker will out-sell a slide presentation every time

BY TIM RIESTERER

Brain research shows that people only remember about 10 percent of what you say to them just two days after hearing it. However, when you attach a simple, concrete visual to the message you are delivering, that number jumps to 65 percent. Researchers call that the *picture superiority effect*.

But what visuals work best for selling? And which drive the reaction salespeople are looking for? You can use what's known about how the brain works to help answer those questions.

First, you need to think about your sales conversations as being more about change management than about selling something. You are asking someone to do something different from the way they have been doing it.

The part of the brain that causes someone to change a habit or move away from the status quo is sometimes referred to as the *old brain*. The old brain has very specific requirements your message must

meet: it doesn't have the capacity for language, so it needs pictures to help it wake up and decide to do something different. It is a very basic mechanism—like an on/off switch—so your pictures need to be very simple. Finally, the old brain is connected to the human survival instinct, so it is most apt to change when the status quo is threatened.

What is the best delivery system for your sales messages? Original study results from Stanford Graduate School of Business professor Zakary Tormala show that whiteboard visuals are far superior to PowerPoint. They rated much higher on measures of customer engagement, enjoyment, credibility, recall, and persuasive impact.

The reason for this is that whiteboard images make your sales pitch a conversation, not a presentation. Prospects respond to watching images being assembled via a whiteboard (or other drawing surface, such as an easel, pad, tablet or the back of an envelope) as the salesperson tells his company's story. But don't worry; your salespeople don't need to be artists. Stick figures, arrows, and bubbles work just fine.

Remember these three critical components (the three Cs, if you will) for creating effective visual content:

CONTEXT: Since your prospect needs to see his or her status quo as unsafe, your presentation must depict, at the very beginning, the gaps and deficiencies in its current state that require a new approach.

CONTRAST: Your image should show a clear contrast between the status quo approach and what you are offering. Contrast is required to help the brain determine the virtues of your solution and make a decision.

Depict this current state/future state comparison by showing specifically how your new approach can help to fill the gaps and overcome the deficiencies of the existing solution. Put the current situation, and its problems, literally side by side with the proposed alternative and its remedies so the contrast is clear and value can be visually discerned.

CONCRETE: Complex visuals confuse the brain and prevent it from reaching a decision. Therefore, use illustrative, whiteboard imagery like numbers, arrows, stick figures, shapes, and icons to translate a potentially complicated concept into an approachable, understandable option.

If you implement the three Cs as part of your visual storytelling process and integrate whiteboard visuals, you will no doubt have more effective and successful conversations with your prospects.



Tim Riesterer is chief strategy and marketing officer of Corporate Visions, Inc. and coauthor of the books *Customer Message Management* and

Conversations that Win the Complex Sale. You can see his video presentation on this topic at corporatevisions.com/blog/2014/06/17/presentation-bma14/.