



Turn Hollywood Secrets into Blockbuster Sales

By Cliff Atkinson (published August 6, 2002 at www.MarketingProfs.com)

Who's the biggest star in Hollywood?

You might be surprised to learn that from Hollywood's perspective, anyone you see on the screen is not the star. The star is you. And the rest of the audience. Hollywood convinced you, after all, to bring your body into the theater and pay \$10 plus popcorn to experience an altered reality. You have to get something out of the deal to make you want to do it again.

One Hollywood secret is that the ultimate goal of any movie is to make you feel like you're a star. To the degree that a film makes you feel like you're the one on screen, is the degree to which it is successful. That's because audience empathy translates into dollars. Audiences are willing to pay top dollar if they feel like they "own" the characters, as if they had created them and lived their lives.

Like a movie, every sales presentation you give is a performance. You are the talent, your PowerPoint is your media, and your potential client is the audience. When you give your business performance, what do you do to make your audience feel like they are the star? Have you fallen into the trap where you think your product or company is the star? Or even worse, that you are the star?

Take Hollywood's advice, and look at the experience from the perspective of the audience. You need to figure out what to present to your prospective clients that will make them feel like they are the center of the universe. For many presenters that won't be easy. Adapting successful Hollywood media techniques means they'll have to leave their current thinking about presentations on the cutting room floor.

When big movie studios use tired script templates, they can afford to spend millions on marketing, an all-star cast, and impressive animations to make it critic-proof. But unless you're a big company with similar resources, you can't afford the risk of a box office flop by counting on a template to do the job. Like independent filmmakers, most companies have to use their creativity and smarts to turn a modest investment into a popular and profitable venture.

To avoid making your audience feel like you don't care about them, the best thing to do is to throw out your current PowerPoint. Or at least reinvent it. If you use the same presentation every time, and use canned profiles of you, your company, and your product, you're going to have to do a "Take 2." Your presentation needs to make your audience--the potential client--feel like they are the star. You should tailor the content so it seems like they are unique and special. They don't want to feel like the cookie dough in somebody else's cookie-cutter template.

As they say in Hollywood, image is everything. The secret is that it's literally true. If you can't tell your story using pictures, you might as well call it a wrap. After all, what was the last movie you saw that used bullet points? Just as Hollywood discovered years ago, business media professionals are beginning to understand the power of pictures to communicate.

Every film has a host of creative folks whose job it is to take information and communicate it through imagery and sound. Cinematographers, set designers, costumers, lighting experts and composers all contribute to turning a script into a powerful and moving sensory experience. Of course if you don't have a Hollywood budget, you have to make do with the business media tools that you have.

As you go to the next level in business media quality, the good news is, PowerPoint isn't just for

bullet points anymore. Until recently, few people have even begun to tap into the potential of this versatile media creation tool. PowerPoint and other presentation software can be effective platforms for a thoughtful media performance that can bring your business big ticket earnings.

The central creative shift for your sales presentations should be to use mostly images instead of text. Many people mistakenly look to word processing and spreadsheet software as predecessors to PowerPoint. That's one reason so many presentations look like a Word document with some cheesy clip art inserted into the background. To unlock the power of PowerPoint, the place to look for inspiration is the big screen, where visual stories are told.

When you redesign your own blockbuster content, remember to stop talking about you. Start talking about your audience. Look for ways to help them see themselves. Apply the information you have gleaned from your Internet research, preliminary discussions and competitor analysis. What problems do they face? What are their hopes and dreams? What would it look like if they were where they wanted to be? The content of your presentation should reflect back to your audience an accurate image of who they are and how your offering will help them achieve their dreams.

When you've put yourself in their shoes, you can imagine what your audience wants to see, and turn those learnings into pictures. You can create the imagery yourself if you have the time and talent, or you can hire a talented graphical artist, or use imagery from web sites such as www.Corbis.com or www.GettyImages.com. Almost every slide should include a visual reference to your audience's logo, their situation, or the problem they would like to solve. Use images to show how happy and successful your clients will be after they enlist your talent and reap the benefits of your product or service.

Finally, keep in mind that any and every Hollywood movie begins with a script. Solid storytelling remains the bedrock of any production. You have a compelling story to tell, and need to learn the appropriate dramatic techniques to communicate it. With your existing high power sales talent, and some professional media to enhance your presentation, closing the deal and earning record sales are only a debut away.

Cliff Atkinson is an independent management consultant specializing in organizational issues related to PowerPoint. Visit his website at www.sociablemedia.com or contact him at cliff.atkinson@sociablemedia.com.

© 2003 Cliff Atkinson

sociable media®