



How to Choose a Vendor by the Quality of their PowerPoint

By Cliff Atkinson (published November 12, 2002 at www.MarketingProfs.com)

They say you can't judge a book by its cover. But you sure can tell a great deal about prospective vendors by the quality of their PowerPoint presentations.

Like it or not, everyone forms first impressions - it's human nature. When you first meet prospective vendors, you quickly form opinions about them based on their professional appearance, demeanor, timeliness, interpersonal skills, and sincerity.

Usually, within minutes of meeting, you'll probably be watching the vendor's PowerPoint presentation. Just as potential vendors make a statement through their professional appearance, they also speak volumes about themselves through the quality of their presentation.

What you learn by analyzing their PowerPoint is fair game in making a first impression of their knowledge and performance capability, and what you can expect in your relationship with them.

As you "read between the bullet points" of their PowerPoint, ask yourself these five questions to help you make your decision on which vendor is the best fit for the job:

1. Is my business really important to them?

If it is, they invested an appropriate amount of resources to produce a presentation that impressed you. They made an effort to understand what you already know, and tailored their presentation appropriately. They researched your company and were familiar with the problems you want to solve. They showed you real-world examples of how they were able to solve problems similar to yours.

If your business is not important to them, you're likely to feel like they've presented this PowerPoint to 100 other companies, and you're Victim 101. Fortunately for you, you don't need to be the Victim any longer than the end of this meeting.

After all, the quality of their work they invested in this presentation will likely correspond with the quality of their work on your project.

2. Did they respect my time?

If they did, they obviously planned the meeting in detail, and rehearsed what they had to say. They thoughtfully selected presentation material that was most relevant and appropriate for your situation, and presented it in an efficient and interesting way. They worked out time-consuming technology issues beforehand, such as whether their laptop is compatible with the projector.

If they didn't, the meeting was scattered, and they probably brought inappropriate presentation materials. There's nothing worse than a poorly prepared, aimless presentation that wastes both your time and theirs.

If they didn't make you feel like the meeting with you was the most important thing they did today, what was the purpose of the meeting?

3. Did they respect my intelligence?

If they did, they made a big effort to present a good first impression of their company's intellectual capital. They demonstrated their innovation and creativity by presenting information to you with a fresh approach.

They asked you thoughtful questions that made you think about your business in a new way. They presented compelling images and concepts that stimulated your own creativity.

If they didn't respect your intelligence, they used cheesy clip art and cliché cartoons that you've seen in everyone else's presentations, or relied on questionable visual or audio gimmicks to try to impress you. If they used off-the-shelf templates, they're probably selling you off-the-shelf solutions.

4. Are they critical thinkers who can figure out what's most important?

If they are, they had a clear and understandable message. They prioritized the most important information, and gave it the appropriate role in the presentation. They presented a series of slides in an understandable format, at an appropriate pace. Their slides showed that they think about these issues at a deep level, and can solve problems like yours on a regular basis, which is the reason you want to hire them.

If they're not critical thinkers, they probably brain dumped on you. You felt confused, and overwhelmed. Their slides were dense with tiny, unreadable text.

That's because they didn't make the effort to distill complex ideas into their core essence. If they couldn't do that, can they really help you solve your problem? The bottom line is, if they didn't impress you with their ability to get to the point, they probably won't impress you with their performance.

5. Are they passionate about solving my problem?

If they are, the presentation was dynamic, interesting and exciting. They obviously worked hard, and paid close attention to detail. Their enthusiasm carried the day. They showed they care about what they do, and will care about the work they do for you.

But if they're not passionate, the presentation put you to sleep when the lights went down.

A rule of thumb: if their own presentation was so boring to them that it bored you, they're probably not going to be passionate about finding solutions to your problems.

A direct reflection

For better or for worse, a vendor's PowerPoint presentation is a direct reflection of what they think about themselves, and about you as a potential client.

The more information you have, the better a decision you can make. Armed with this set of questions to ask yourself when you go into a presentation, you will be 5 bullet points closer to selecting the vendor that will do the best job of helping you solve your business problems.

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.