
Effectively Integrating Statistics Into Sales Presentations

by STEPHEN D. BOYD, Ph.D.

Presenting statistics to your board, committee or a group of customers does not have to be boring. Often you are required to present information that will include statistics. Keeping your audience informed in an interesting and captivating manner can be challenging. This article provides the presenter with suggestions on how to use statistical information in a powerful and informative manner.

Statistics can be authoritative in a presentation, but used in the wrong way, they can wreak havoc in communicating with an audience. For example, too many statistics in a speech are not only boring, but they can confuse an audience. If an audience is confused, understanding is impeded. Rarely can an audience be moved to action if they don't understand. Statistics also can mislead and misinform if not used carefully.

One way statistics can be used effectively is to get the attention of the audience in regard to your topic at the beginning of the speech. Grab and hold attention by picking a significant statistic about services at your place of business that will introduce the theme of your talk.

Use Statistics Sparingly

Don't bunch several numbers

together. This is a chronic problem we face when listening to a weather forecast. All we want to know is how hot or cold the day is going to be. Usually, however, we get the high temperature yesterday, the low last night, temperature predictions for the rest of the week, and numbers indicating wind velocity.

When possible, use only one statistic, and build up to it by qualifying its meaning to your point and the legitimacy of the source. Never use more than three statistics at a time.

Use Statistics in Connection With Anecdotes

Individuals are more likely to accept the impact of a statistic if it is connected to a story or example. A statistic is logical, and a story is emotional; the two used together allow the speaker to

combine the head and the heart in moving the audience.

For example, a professor of emergency medicine stressed in a presentation that to survive in an emergency situation, you should remember the rule of three. You can last:

- Three minutes without oxygen.
- Three hours without warmth.
- Three days without water.
- Three weeks without food.

Following that set of statistics with a specific story of survival that incorporates one of the statistics will make the statistics more memorable to the audience.

You might provide data that reflects the direction of interest rates, then follow up with a success story

Grab and hold attention by picking a significant statistic....

of a customer who made a financial move at just the right time.

Use Statistics for a Specific Purpose

Don't use statistics just to impress an audience. Generally, the purposes to which statistics should be used are to:

- Point to a problem you want to solve.
- Provide how your solution will work.
- Stress how well a plan of action or process is working.

Use Only Recent Statistics

If the audience knows a more

recent statistic on the topic than the one you use in your presentation, your credibility suffers and your message will have little impact. Though you are probably the expert on the topic, you may want to consult with other "experts" to make sure you have the most recent information.

"Current" depends upon how often research is done in the area you are drawing statistics from. Seek to determine that the information is from the most recent week, month or year.

Include the Source for the Statistics

Never say "Research shows..." "In an article I read..." or "Most companies..." Give the specific source and the date. If you can't locate the source, don't use the statistic.

Round Off Statistics When Possible

It is much easier for an audience to remember and assimilate "about 500 transactions each year" vs. "498 transactions each year." Of course, if every number counts, then include the exact figure.

Using Statistics Effectively Includes Delivery

Use the pause/punch method. As you approach the part of your speech that includes the statistic, pause before speaking it, then punch out the figure. The delivery of the statistic should be done with fervor, since you are using it to dramatize a problem, to offer a solution, or to show how effectively



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a new system is working. You are reaching a climax in your point, and this should show in your delivery. We often assume that when a

speaker uses statistics, the eyes of the audience will glaze over, but it should not be that way. Following the guidelines in this article,

statistics can be memorable and can have a strong impact along with your case studies, testimony and stories.

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