

## MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS AND YOUR AUDIENCE'S TIME

By Mindy Ferrentino Wolfle



**T**his past spring, I attended a well-publicized and promising networking event/seminar. The first 45 minutes resulted in brisk and productive networking. But then came the spoiler – the seminar. Wrap a seminar up in clever nomenclature – “expert panel discussion” – “interactive program” – “professional lecture” – what it ultimately boils down to is content. What the audience expected was a program billed as educational, with a very specific theme and professionals addressing that theme from their own business perspectives. What the audience actually experienced is far too common - a program that was largely an advertisement by some of the presenters.

Often, speakers are so focused on selling their products or services that they lose sight of what an audience really comes to hear, and that is tangible, unbiased information. Just like networking, seminar presentations are most successful and useful when they are not “pitches” to the audience.

Here are several recommendations for when you’re planning your next speaking engagement:

- Keep your PowerPoint presentation simple. The less you project on the screen the better. Use bullet points, and expound upon them during your speech. There’s nothing worse than a presenter who reads the PowerPoint verbatim while the audience follows along.
- Omit tired statistics that everyone’s heard before. By sharing real stories of real people whom you or your business has served, you plant real seeds in the minds of your listeners.
- Practice, practice, practice. Do you “um” and “ya-know” when you speak? Look down or feel awkward in front of a crowd? Work on your presentation skills and take advantage of the many resources available in this area.
- Show your knowledge and expertise by being informative and well-informed. Don’t let your presentation be an advertisement. Your audience is subjected to enough unwanted email,

flash advertising on websites, and commercials on television, radio and in every print publication. Who wants to be bombarded with advertising at a business event?

- Make your brochures available to the audience, but do not base your presentation on them. You can be certain that your audience hasn't come to watch a live-action version of your marketing materials.

The next time you have an opportunity to make a presentation, be true to the agenda you have promised. Use your audience's valuable time, and yours, in a way that will boost your standing in the business community and serve to enlighten, not alienate.