

Marketing Insight: Real Talk Investing the time to become a strong public speaker can advance a business message and career

By Wanda Kenton-Smith February 27, 2026



Microphone Close Up In Front Of Blurred Audience, Conference, Public Speaking, Presentation

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Let's set the stage: You have an exciting product to debut or a major announcement to share. Perhaps you've finally gotten the nod to present to a highly coveted prospective client or partner.

Whatever the scenario, marketers encounter a variety of speaking opportunities to position their organization for success. It's vital for designated corporate spokespeople to be well-trained and prepared to deliver when opportunities arise.

Marketing consultant Joel Staley addressed this topic recently, writing about why it's important to stop spokespeople from sabotaging a campaign. He wrote about specific challenges marketers can face when entrusting their campaigns or P.R. responses to an inexperienced or unprepared person.

Becoming a competent, confident presenter or speaker should be a top priority for career marketers and those who speak on behalf of organizations. Few people are born with the natural ability to stand before an audience and deliver an effective message.

In fact, for many people, public speaking — whether in front of groups or peers — is a daunting proposition. Teleprompter.com says 75% of people worldwide fear public speaking, with many ranking it above the fear of death.

Business mogul Warren Buffett admitted his crippling fear of public speaking in the early days of his career. Recognizing his limitations, he worked to master the stump, becoming one of the most influential and sought-after business speakers of his generation.

For marketers, dedicating resources to presenter or spokesperson training yields significant rewards. There is a powerful correlation between skilled presenters and marketing success.

According to the Public Relations Council, 85% of trained spokespeople report increased confidence when handling media inquiries and public speaking. The Media Research Center says trained professionals receive 30% more positive media coverage than untrained counterparts.

Tips From the Pros

Liz Walz, director of learning vision and impact at the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, built and oversees MRAA's educational programs. Her top tip for presenters is to put the audience first.

The single biggest mistake presenters make, Walz says, is ignoring this mandate. "I see them focus on themselves and their own objectives instead of the people they're serving from the stage.

Soundings Trade Only Group vice president and general manager Michele Goldsmith concurs. A popular speaker and panel facilitator, she advises speakers to "know your audience and their expectations. Know your topic well. Do the research and be prepared."

Another common mistake presenters make is jamming in too much content instead of focusing on a few key points. "Follow the KISS rule," Goldsmith says. "Focus on one to three key messages you want the audience to walk away with."

Correct Craft CEO Bill Yeargin echoes this sentiment. He refined his speaking chops over many years, through experience and by observing speakers who do it well. He addresses internal teams dozens of times a year, and makes a few dozen outside presentations, with audiences ranging from a crowd of 50 to 10,000-plus.

Tips and Tricks

Audiences make decisions about presenters within the first 15 seconds of visibility. These precious moments set the tone for the entire presentation. Instead of delivering weak introductory statements like "thanks for having for me" or "it's great to be here," open like a boss.

The best presenters exude confidence and natural enthusiasm. They are polished without appearing robotic, well-prepared without sounding scripted and dressed for success in keeping with their audience profile. Everything from shoes to wardrobe, hairstyling and jewelry should complement and build credibility, not distract from the presentation.

In addition, while speakers should sweep the crowd throughout the presentation, it's also important to make eye contact with individuals. This personalized approach further engages the audience and builds trust quickly.

Great presenters always invest time to plan, orchestrate and nail down every aspect of their presentation. That includes the opening, body of content and closing. With an average 10-minute audience attention span, it's imperative to apply winning techniques at every step.

Avoid using corporate jargon or acronyms that few people may understand. A great speaker communicates in short bites, using conversational words, as if chatting with a professional colleague. Seasoned speakers also avoid common traps that belie nervousness, such as throat-clearing prior to starting, speaking too fast, crossing or uncrossing arms and looking down.

Staley, like most executive trainers, recommends making mock video recordings of a presentation to review the performance objectively. A video assessment with a coach can pinpoint areas for improvement, such as tendencies to sway, pace or fidget. It can also determine how effectively physical or vocal gestures are being used to reinforce key points.

Rehearse and Repeat

In my early days as a marketing vice president, I planned, produced and presented at international dealer conferences. As part of my due diligence, I studied the most popular sales and marketing presenters. I spent weeks planning, preparing and rehearsing so that when I walked onto a stage or into a boardroom, my voice and legs wouldn't buckle.

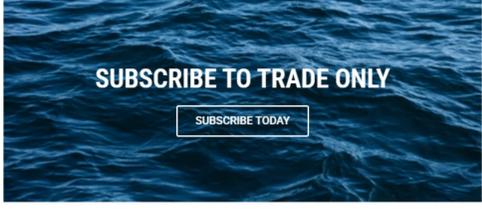
Walz says she took similar steps. "The first was attending a Dale Carnegie class where we were challenged to speak to the group on various topics throughout the 12-week program," she says. "The second was working with a speaking coach to help me prepare for my first big presentation representing my organization in front of a large audience.

The more often she presented, she adds, the more at ease she felt. "Tony Robbins is right," she says. "Repetition is truly the mother of all skills." Being a lifelong student is also key, she says. "I don't think I'll ever be done learning how to improve. I still get nervous before every speaking opportunity.

Goldsmith, who initially learned basic presentation skills while leading exercise classes, invested in professional training. "I have a dear friend who is an award-winning professional speaker who has spoken around the world," she says. "She helped me understand use of movement, voice inflection, storytelling and how to clearly deliver a message. Part of the program she teaches films you delivering a speech, and then you are critiqued. I am a work in progress; there is a lot to learn. My goals are to deliver education, insights and messages that are valuable, impactful and resonate with the audience."

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Wanda Kenton-Smith



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