Grabbing Attention

Inquire: Why Pay Attention?

Overview

When presenting, it is important to get your audience to pay attention. Different people pay attention to different things. This lesson will set the stage by telling you first why you should get people to pay attention at all. Then it will teach you about what an effective attention getter is. You will learn about the use of humor as an opener, and what other kinds of attention getters you might use when starting a presentation.

Big Question: How do you get people to pay attention to you when you speak?

Watch: Attention Getters in the Real World

Grabbing the attention of your audience is vital to ensuring success in the rest of your presentation. Whether it’s an informal toast at a wedding, or an important business report, your audience needs to have their interest peaked before they will listen. You want your audience to listen for three main reasons: so they learn, so the presentation is effective, and so you feel better about the presentation.

Now that you know how important it is for your audience to listen, you’re probably wondering just how to get their listening ears! You’ll need an **attention getter**. An attention getter is the beginning of a presentation that is designed to make an audience interested in the content of the presentation. Your attention getter should be interesting, relevant, and understandable to your audience. Let’s take a look at some attention getters Antonio is considering for his presentation.

Antonio will be presenting to his coworkers and management team. He is proposing an idea to buy a new software that will help with data management of customer relations and sales. He has three ideas for attention getters that he will potentially use.

First, an example: We’ve all been there, a customer is talking to us on the phone. She says one sales representative told her something, but that information is false. Wouldn’t it be nice if we could look up this customer’s file and see a note from any sales representative who has talked to her before? Well, we are in luck! This software exists, and it’s time for our company to invest in it!

Second, a statistic: From a recent study conducted at North Tree School of Business, 44% of lost sales are caused by miscommunications. We could potentially make that number go down if we could better the way we communicate with customers. This new software could help us do just that.
Third, a narrative: I personally have been the victim of bad data management, and my sales numbers have reflected that. It is the worst feeling when you drop a sale because of the outdated software we use every day. It’s time to change that.

Which attention getter do you think is best for Antonio? After this lesson, you will know how to make an effective attention getter just like Antonio has.

Read: Getting People to Pay Attention

Overview

When people give presentations, the success of the presentation can be determined by how it starts. Getting your audience to pay attention can make all the difference in whether the presentation is a success or a flop. This lesson will teach you why your audience needs to pay attention, what an effective attention getter is, how to use humor at the start of a presentation, and specific ways to grab attention.

Why Does Your Audience Need to Pay Attention?

Getting your audience to pay attention is very important. In general, there are three reasons you want to get the attention of your audience: so they learn, so the presentation is effective, and so you feel better about the presentation. When you give a presentation, you should really only be giving relevant, important information. That means you need your audience to pay attention to what you’re saying. They need to be able to internalize what you are trying to convey. Effective presentations have a clear message that the presenter wants the audience to learn.

Effective presentations at their core are those presentations that convey information to their audience. You want your audience to pay attention, even if not everyone will learn something right away. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, audience members will pay attention, but not learn. Just because they don’t learn doesn’t mean it was an ineffective presentation. Getting them to listen and consider what you are saying is often successful enough to consider the presentation effective.

Finally, your feelings as a presenter are important to consider. When presenting, it can be demoralizing to look at an audience and see people ignoring you, falling asleep, or generally not caring. Having an effective attention getter can help you feel better about having to stand in front of people and present to them. It seems small, but having a strong start is the key to a strong finish.

What is an Effective Attention Getter?

Now that you know why you should bother getting people’s attention, let’s talk about what an attention getter is. An attention getter is the beginning of a presentation that is designed to make your audience interested in the content of the presentation. An attention getter should be three things: interesting, relevant, and understandable.

Boring attention getters don’t work to get your audience interested. You want the attention getter to be, for lack of a better term, clickbait. You want people to look at what you lead with and stay around because of what you said. Now, that doesn’t mean making things up or lying. No matter what you’re presenting, you still have obligations to be an ethical speaker. But, it does mean finding ways to make your audience want to pay attention to what you’re saying. One other way to make them pay attention is to make the topic relevant to them. If they relate to the material you are speaking about, they will pay better attention. But, no matter how interesting something might be, if the audience doesn’t understand what you’re talking
about, they won't be interested at all. Find ways to break down complicated or technical information into things that are more easily understood in order to have a better attention getter. You can make things more complex in later parts of the speech. If you start things at a highly complicated level, people are less likely to want to engage that material.

**Should Humor Be Your First Choice?**

Oftentimes, people think that if they open with a joke, more people will pay attention them. While this might be true, humor might flop. Here are some things to consider before writing that hilarious joke for your presentation. First, make sure the joke is actually funny and fits your sense of humor. If you aren’t funny, or aren’t funny in the way the joke requires, don’t go for it. Failed jokes can make you feel worse about your performance, and can make your audience focus more on the bad joke than the content you move on to. If you are committed to telling the joke regardless of the risks, make sure the joke is something that will go over well with your audience and won’t be inflammatory to anyone watching your presentation. It comes down to respect and knowing your audience. If you think that you can pull it off and people will like it, try telling a joke as an opener. If you aren’t as confident in yourself, then maybe consider something else.

**Ways to Grab Attention**

We’ve talked about jokes as attention getters, but what if you aren’t funny? There are three options to consider other than jokes: **narratives**, **statistics**, and **examples**. Narratives are personal stories about a circumstance. You might tell your story about how the topic relates to you, or you might tell someone else’s story, but those can be powerful ways to get your audience to immediately understand the real world implications of whatever topic you are speaking on. Statistics are quantitative data from a scientific study. You might find data to explain how many people are affected by your topic, or how much money you could save if something changed. This sort of attention getter can help people relate the information you are presenting to something real and countable. It helps them realize the size and scale of your topic. Examples are explanations that provide specific possibilities of your topic. Examples can be real, similar to narratives, or they can be hypothetical examples that could happen but haven’t necessarily happened yet. Mastering different kinds of attention getters will help you relate to many different kinds of people and audiences.

**Reflect Poll: What Works Best?**

What kind of attention getter works best to get your attention?

- Joke
- Narrative
- Example
- Statistic
- No attention getter needed
Expand: Grabbing Attention of Different Listeners

Overview
Mastering the types of attention getters can be tough. But, there is an easy way to know what kind to use. Different listening styles like different kinds of information, so thinking about what kind of listeners are in your audience can help you know what attention getter to use.

Listening Styles and Attention Getters
People-oriented listeners — those who like personal connection and emotional appeals — like jokes and narratives. If you have an audience composed of individuals who want to connect with you on a personal level, try giving them what they want. Have something they can feel sympathetic or empathetic toward, or have something that makes them feel good about the situation.

Content-oriented listeners — those who like factual information supported by data — are people who want real examples and statistics. They don’t necessarily want all the emotional information of a narrative. They just want the relevant information of the real-world examples proving your point and helping them understand what’s going on. Similarly, statistics that help illustrate the size and scope of your topic help content listeners connect with your presentation because they can identify what they need to hear in order to be convinced by your presentation. If you say 80% of people are affected by a problem in the attention getter, they know they need to listen for how the problem affects that 80% of people, how that number was gotten, and what needs to be done to fix the problem.

Action-oriented listeners — those who want quick, factual information — like statistical openers that, similar to content listeners, tell them exactly what they need to know from the start. They don’t need the fluff of personal stories or examples, just the facts and what those facts mean.

Time-oriented listeners — those who care more about how long the presentation will last rather than the content — want your attention getter to be direct and to the point. Rather, they don’t want you to have an attention getter. A time-oriented listener has already given you their attention, just not for long. Rather than try to get them to pay attention, they want you to convey all of the relevant information as quickly as possible. Your attention getter, therefore, should be an introduction of your topic and how it personally relates to the time-oriented listener directly.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
A video explaining how to use humor in a presentation opener
   ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6sm47j-Am4

A video explaining how to use stories in a presentation opener
   ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujw_21AuU5k

The start of a video series teaching about constructing attention getters
   ● Link to resource: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISn4Fip9aH8
Lesson Glossary

attention getter: the beginning of a presentation that is designed to make your audience interested in the content of the presentation

narratives: personal stories about a circumstance

statistics: quantitative data from a scientific study

examples: explanations that provide specific possibilities of your topic

Check Your Knowledge

1. Attention getters should be relevant.
   a. True
   b. False
2. Attention getters should be understandable.
   a. True
   b. False
3. You want your audience to pay attention so they can learn.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:
1. A  2. A  3. A

Citations

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