

## **What You Say Is Not More Important Than How You Say It**

Most buying decisions (99% of them to be exact) are made by the sub-conscious (emotional) half of the brain. It is quicker to react and uses existing rules and experiential biases to process more information than the conscious (logical) half of the brain.

The problem for most professionals when pitching to a prospective client is that the professional is usually pitching with their conscious brain, while the prospect is listening with their sub-conscious brain – which is lazy and uses rules of thumb to make decisions. That's why it is so difficult to change the status quo and dislodge an incumbent competitor.

Do people always buy the best option. Of course not! Their brains trick them into thinking an option is better based on the way they hear the information.

"Framing" is a concept we can use to make our pitch seem better, even though it might be no different to anyone else's in reality. Our brains trick us into thinking something is a better option or deal based on the way they hear the information.

*What you say is not as important as how you say it.*

I was once asked to prepare a proposal for an international law firm who were pitching for a large cross-border project. None of the team had ever met with, or spoken to, the prospect – so we were not off to a great start.

One of the partners leading the project team demanded that he was described in the proposal as being the "third ranked Technology lawyer in the country" (according to a third party ratings agency). My advice was to frame it differently, otherwise all that the reader wants to know is "who are number one and number two, and I want to talk to them".

An alternative would be to say, "one of the top three Technology lawyers in the country". While it still suggests this Partner is not number one (or else we would say exactly that), it is a subtle shift that de-emphasises that there are two better lawyers on other teams.

Another client sells and services fitness equipment. As part of their pitch, they claim to be the best provider of aftersales service in the market. They frame this by saying they "have a first time fix rate of 90%, versus an industry average of 78%". While the opposition's 78% could be very easily rounded up to 80%, there is a big difference in the perception of performance between 78% and 80%. The former just feels and sounds much less impressive than a simple 2% difference. Also, you could state the same difference as the opposition hitting a first time fix rate of 4 out of 5, versus your 4.5 out of 5. Relative performance looks a lot less stark using this frame.

For example, the following statements all say the same thing – but all feel very different:

- 78% buy from us again
- 8 out of 10 buy from us again
- 4 out of 5 buy from us again
- Most buy from us again
- 1 out of 5 never come back

You don't always have to use numbers to create a frame. "Over half" is better than 51%. "Most" sounds better than 60%.

And remember, frames go both ways. For example, saying 78% are repeat customers also implies that 22% don't come back. The reader's sub-conscious brain might not pick up on this, but you should look at your information from all perspectives.

Finally, context is important. When thinking about the best frame for your message, it is important to consider and understand as much of the context as possible.

For example, let's say you are pitching to two corporates, each with revenues in the last year of \$200 million dollars. You might be tempted to tell each one that you are "one of the largest firms globally, with multiple practice groups in many different locations". To many listeners this message might imply you have a high cost base that your fees need to support, so you are likely going to be expensive.

Now consider that one of these companies has slumping revenue and \$200 million is the result of three years of successive revenue reductions. This prospect might be more receptive to a frame that positions you as a "sought after firm with credentials built on successful projects undertaken globally for similar clients."

The key take-away's for you from this lesson should be:

1. Framing matters. There are many ways to present information and you need to be aware of the perceptions created by what you say.
2. Take the time to look at all the possible frames for your message before choosing one – don't just go with the first statistic exactly the way you found it.
3. Consider the context of the listener's situation before choosing a certain frame from the many you might use.