

Opening and closing

VIDEO SCRIPT

Mark

To give a successful presentation, they say you need to have a good beginning, a good ending and keep them close together! And, sure enough, research shows that audiences remember the first and last few minutes of a presentation long after they've forgotten most of what was said in the middle. Psychologists call this the primacy-recency effect.

But you might prefer to think of your opener and your close as two bookends holding up your talk.

To do their job they both need to be strong.

Now, starting off by saying good morning, introducing yourself, thanking your audience for coming, apologising for a small technical problem with your audio-visuals and asking if people can hear you at the back is clearly *not* a strong opening.

But neither is this ...

Presenter

I want to talk to you today about the kind of world we in the business community are passing on to the next generation.

Mark

What's wrong with it? It's short, direct and boring! Let's see how it might have sounded ...

Presenter

Environmental degradation ... A declining economy ... Crippling taxes ... Chronic disease ... A life expectancy shorter than that of their parents' ... And thirty thousand dollars of debt for every man, woman and child ... This is the nightmare world we're passing on to our kids.

Mark

Now that's a good opening. Watch how these presenters gain their audience's attention right at the start ...

Presenter

Good morning. Sometime in the early 1980s a business traveller phoned a low-cost carrier called People Express to reserve a flight. He was kept on hold for so long, he thought to himself: 'Either this airline is incredibly busy or incredibly inefficient.' Needless to say the flight was never booked and People Express went out of business in 1987. The name of the business traveller was Richard Branson, who, recognising a great business opportunity when he saw it, went on to launch Virgin Atlantic Airlines. And the rest, of course, is history. But my question to you is: just how bad does your customer service have to be to turn a potential client into a competitor?

Presenter

There was a great book published a few years back called *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki. In it he refers to the popular TV quiz show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, which I'm sure you've all seen. As you may know, contestants can get help with questions they can't answer by either phoning a friend or asking the audience. As you might expect, calling an intelligent friend helps – sixty-five percent of the time, in fact. But here's the interesting thing. The studio audience isn't selected on the basis of their intelligence. So how often do you think *they're* able to answer the question correctly?

Audience

Forty-eight percent?

Twenty-five percent?

Thirty-three percent?

Presenter

The answer is ninety-one percent of the time. Statistically, that's just amazing. And it proves the power of teams.

Mark

From your audience's point of view, the end of your talk might be even more important than the beginning. These are the words they will be left with after you stop. If you've ever been to a firework display, you'll know that the biggest, brightest fireworks are usually saved for the end. This doesn't mean you have to finish with a bang. But you do want to leave a lasting impression.

Watch these presenters clinch the close ...

Presenter

To summarise, whenever we have offered bonuses to incentivise our staff in sales, HR and the manufacturing divisions, productivity has increased – in some cases, quite dramatically. But, as we saw in R&D, introducing pay-by-performance has had precisely the *opposite* effect. Incentivised research units were, on average, only *half* as productive as those working without added incentives. What are we to make of this? Well, quite simply, it seems bonuses really *do* make you work harder when your job is pretty routine. But when your job is *creative*, incentives just stress you out and actually make you less creative, not more. Clearly, we all need to go away and think of a fresh initiative for motivating our most mission-critical employees. Thanks a lot.

Presenter

As you know, it's a tradition in Asia to quote words of wisdom. So I'm going to be totally predictable and do the same. An ancient philosopher once said: 'A man who chases two rabbits catches neither.' In our research, we've been chasing too many rabbits for far too long. It's time to stop – to prioritise. If there's one thing we now need to do, in a word, it's this: focus. Thank you very much.

Mark

At the preparation stage, a lot of presenters like to create their close first, so they know where they're going, and then work backwards, finishing up with an attention-grabbing opening. But whichever way you plan your talk, make sure you always give priority to the first and last three minutes.