

# What makes a successful pitch?

Are you an entrepreneur? Maddyness has compiled a toolkit to help you create, grow, and even sell your own startup. From recruiting a team and protecting your brand to financing your innovation, you will find tips, tools and advice to help you navigate the entrepreneurship labyrinth. In this article: several recommendations for making a memorable pitch.

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## **Too long? Here's the key takeaways**

The people you are pitching to are very busy, so organise your time well! The most common and successful pitch formats last between one and five minutes and rarely more than 15. For a second round, however, you might land meetings that could last between one and four hours.

A successful pitch should be short but speeding through your content in order to cover all the details won't get you anywhere. A rushy pitch could cause you to lose your audience.

It's on you and your team to make sure your listeners can follow. So, tell

your story, prove your value, and reassure them that the ties that link you and your partners or collaborators are strong.

The investor should be able to visualise, you need to be as precise as possible: “If you know your project to the core, words will come easily,” said Nicolas Boileau.

Investors are looking for future leaders. Explain to them how you plan to have the upper hand over your competitors.

Show the figures that prove that your model has potential.

A good summary is better than a long speech. Your slides should be simple, visually pleasing, and minimalistic. Have less details in your presentation and explain more through your responses to questions.

There is no secret. You must practise, over and over again, until it is perfect. Start with an internal pitch, in front of your friends or family members.

Messing up doesn't mean that the business or the founders aren't up to scratch. If your pitch didn't succeed this time, persevere. There will be other opportunities.

## **Pay attention to timing**

Incubators, startup accelerators, investors, and venture capitalists see hundreds of pitches a day and can't possibly remember them all. You should be able to pitch your startup in the allotted time. The most common pitch formats last one, three, or five minutes and rarely more than 15. For a second round, you may land meetings that could last between one and four hours. If you know your pitch by heart, make sure you are able to adapt it to your audience and setting.

Pay attention to your timing! Too many startups don't finish their pitch before the end of the allotted time and forget to talk about essential points, leaving the audience dissatisfied.

Don't forget to smile and thank the audience at the end of each pitch. This makes a good impression. Most people don't remember your presentation, but they remember the first and last impressions. This will help ease into the discussion.

*“The people you are pitching to are very busy, so organise your time well!”*

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[A beginner's guide to Web Summit – 7 tips for trade fairs' newbies](#)

## **Don't talk too fast**

Even though a good pitch should be short, speeding through your content in order to get through all your details won't get you anywhere. A really fast pitch could cause you to lose your audience. “A good pitch is concise overall because it is well structured,” notes [Éric Salomon](#). The general rule is that you should speak two times slower than you normally do in order to allow your audience time to take in the information that you are giving them.

*“Pay attention to the flow of your presentation: too slow and you lose your audience, too fast and you confuse them”*

## **Learn how to sell yourself and your team**

In the beginning, most businesses don't have anything very impressive. By observing you, investors evaluate if your startup has or doesn't have the potential to create or enter into a market, with something better than the competition.

Try talking about the biggest challenge that you have had to overcome, professional or not. Prove that you aren't afraid to work hard in the long term and show that you know how to be efficient.

Don't think that the story of how you created your startup isn't important. It's actually crucial for understanding your vision and investors put a lot of importance on it. It is even more important if you are in the early stages of your project and don't have that much data to show. An investor needs to understand how you became an entrepreneur and why you decided to go all in.

Don't put yourself down! Present yourself professionally, have confidence without being arrogant. Concentrate on your success. Don't talk about your failures unless it's regarding what you learned from them.

Just as with music groups, founders of a startup often split up. Reassure your investors by explaining what holds the team together and how you complement each other. If there are shortcomings in one area or an imbalance in another, explain how you plan on finding a solution.

*“Tell your story, prove your value, and reassure investors that the ties that link you and your partners or collaborators are strong”*

## **Talk about concrete elements**

Describe your offer concisely and precisely. Explain where the profit is. For an investor, if you don't manage to describe your project in detail, you won't have any chance of moving forward. Be rigorous and clear, especially if you are working with a fashionable concept. You should quickly establish that you aren't a follower simply piggybacking the latest trend.

To help your audience understand what you do, show exactly what your service or product does if you can. Your audience might link the success of your startup with the business sector.

Concentrate on the final user experience. The investor should be able to imagine themselves using the product. If you are pitching a product, describe exactly what you have today and what you will have in several weeks. Give a

long-term vision of the market as well to give a better perspective.

*“The investor should be able to visualise, you need to be as clear as possible”*

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[How to write a \(good\) business plan](#)

## **Target an attractive market**

Investors don't like betting on average companies. They are looking for startups that have the potential to go further! Will your market allow that? For some markets it is obvious, but for others not so much. If you are targeting a niche market, give a good argument with reliable data, realistic estimations, or even by describing how doors will open in the future.

Investors target companies that are able to become leaders in their market. How do you plan on taking the upper hand from other existing companies? How do your products or your strategy give you a large enough advantage on potential competitors?

*“Investors are looking for future leaders. Explain to them how you plan to take the upper hand from your competition”*

## **Present yourself as a promising startup, not a multinational one**

Investors know the difference between a young entrepreneur and an already established company. Profitability isn't what they are interested in yet. Focus on growth and sell them growth, and you'll achieve a successful pitch!

Your bandwidth is very limited. Concentrate on what your team is good at. Prove that your model works and don't waste time showing the expanse of your offer, especially if your product isn't quite ready yet.

*“Investors aren't looking for profitability when meeting startups. Sell them growth!”*

## **Know your numbers**

As far as numbers go, there are three fundamental questions for a successful pitch. Do you know the performance indicators that you should follow? Do you follow them? If so, how often? Are your numbers good regarding the time you have invested up until now?

Show that you know the indicators that allow you to evaluate the startups in your business sector or those that share a similar business model. If you still don't have reliable numbers, at least prove that you understand where you need to be and that you will be guided by these indicators in the future.

Your audience is going to study thousands of numbers during the day. No one can possibly remember all these numbers. Show the figures that prove that your model has potential.

The older your business is, the higher the bar will be. Help your audience evaluate your business. If you came up with your idea a couple of years ago but have not spent a lot of time on it, date the creation of your startup to the most recent period of investment. It probably won't help you if you mention the date you came up with the idea!

*“Show the figures that prove that your model has potential”*

## **Create minimal and attractive visual aids**

Once you have crafted and learned what you will say, prepare a visual aid to support your speech. A good summary is better than a long speech. Limit the number of words on the slides and add as many images as possible. For a successful pitch, your slides should be simple, visually pleasing, and minimalistic. Have less details in your presentation and explain more through your responses to investors' questions.

Choose a large text size (around 30), so that older investors in your audience can read your slides. You may have to do your pitch with low-quality materials, so pay attention to your slides and the colours you use. Don't get upset if there is a technical problem. If you are well prepared, you will be able to overcome anything that comes in your way.

*“Your slides should be simple, visually pleasing, and minimalistic”*

## **Practise makes perfect**

There is no secret for a successful pitch. You must practise, over and over again, until you reach perfection. Most of the time you will give the pitch alone, but you should also be ready to give your pitch with your team (venture capitalists often require this).

Start by presenting in front of smaller audiences, where there will be less pressure and challenges. This allows you to try your hand at it and gain confidence. You can also start by presenting to friends and family and then at startup pitch and demo events. The Family and TechHub organise events like this on a regular basis.

*“There is no secret. You must practise over and over again until you reach perfection”*

## **Stay on course, no matter what**

There are many extraordinary companies that investors passed on, even after several tries. A mess up doesn't mean that the business or the founders aren't up to par. If your pitch didn't succeed this time, persevere. There will be other opportunities to make a successful pitch.

Pick yourself up, make progress, improve your pitch and product, and prepare yourself to start again.

*“If at first your pitch doesn't succeed, persevere. There will be other opportunities”*

*Read also*

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[How to make “love money”](#)