

The background of the entire page is a light blue color filled with various white line-art icons representing business and technology concepts. These include lightbulbs, gears, speech bubbles, Wi-Fi symbols, a magnifying glass, a laptop, a calculator, a bar chart, a location pin, a megaphone, a document, a shopping cart, a star, a cloud, an envelope, and a line graph. A large white speech bubble with a dark blue outline is centered on the page, containing the main title and subtitle.

How to:

Pitch & Present

Your Small Business

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A note from

Trynka Shineman

Vistaprint CEO

As CEO of Vistaprint, I spend a lot of time talking to small business owners and learning directly from them about the challenges they face and how we as a company can help them achieve their dreams. I'm inspired by each and every business and always impressed by their understanding of what makes their product or service unique. However, I regularly hear that despite believing that their business is one-of-a-kind, they often have trouble articulating their offerings to prospective customers or clients. The ability to pitch your business and clearly state what makes you unique is an imperative skill for all business owners alike.

That's why we created this eBook. We wanted to create a resource to help small business owners clearly and succinctly pitch and present their business. This eBook will walk you through the key steps in understanding what an elevator pitch is, why it's important, and how you can create a pitch of your own and tailor it to the appropriate audience.

Sound like a lot of information to take in? It is. But, we promise to break down these topics in an easy-to-digest format. The goal is that after going through the information and exercises in this eBook, you'll be able to confidently deliver a business pitch that makes your small business stand out from the crowd.

Good luck,

PS: I'm excited to have Tory Johnson participate in this effort as we both share a passion for helping small business owners.



What is an elevator pitch?

A pitch is your opportunity to quickly and clearly summarise the problem your business solves and the benefits of using you over a competitor.

You'll often hear it referred to as an 'elevator pitch'. Are you able to communicate what your business is, what makes you unique and how you serve your customers in the amount of time it takes to ride a lift to the top floor? If this seems like an impossible notion, then keep reading - we have you covered.

Seth Godin, renowned author and entrepreneur believes that,

"The purpose of an elevator pitch is to describe a situation or solution so compelling that the person you're with wants to hear more even after the elevator ride is over."

Think about how this advice translates when talking about your small business. Your elevator pitch should be short, sweet and to the point, while still leaving the listener intrigued to learn more.

Selling in a sentence

By Tory Johnson



As a Good Morning America (a TV show in the US) contributor, serial entrepreneur and best-selling author, Tory Johnson knows a thing or two about pitching a business. As the weekly host of the show's Deals & Steals segment, she must effectively sell six distinct products in under four minutes, which means every second counts towards effectively explaining and convincing millions of viewers why they should buy each product.

Using some examples of businesses she has featured in her segments, Tory explains how she's able to condense the most important information about a business, product or service by keeping the following three things in mind.

1. Keep it simple

You'd think shoppers would take the time to judge a product on its merits, but the truth is that few of us have the time to do the required research. Instead, we make snap decisions every day and getting us to do that requires simple, descriptive messages that describe exactly what your product does. Make it simple, snappy and on point.

EXAMPLE: Meet Mission Athletecare, which makes products used by sports superstars Serena Williams, Dwayne Wade and Drew Brees, among others, who rely on the brand for cooling off after hardcore game play. When thinking about how to quickly describe its signature towels, I told viewers this: "The proprietary technology in Mission Cooling Towels will cool the average body temperature by about twenty degrees. Just wet, wring and snap." Less than two dozen words and you immediately get the idea.

2. Describe the benefit early on



You can't meet everyone in person, so if you're giving your elevator pitch by phone or video, be prepared to convey the key elements you'd include in a face-to-face session.

EXAMPLE: Meet YUMMIE by Heather Thompson, a popular shapewear company, that was featured several times on Deals & Steals. I know viewers can't touch the product, so I must use words to describe what they'd feel if they touched the tops and bottoms. "It's soft, breathable cotton shapewear that slims and smooths without suffocating." You get a sense of the fabric and its benefits without touching it yourself. Those details are all I need to engage shoppers and get them interested.

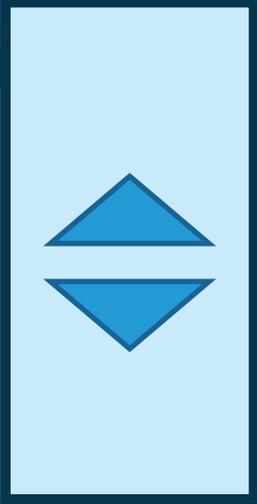
3. Make it interesting



In order to sell your product or service quickly, you need to come up with an umbrella sentence that grabs viewers' attention and encourages them to want to learn more.

EXAMPLE: "This assortment from Perricone MD uses its patented formulas to target a variety of skincare concerns – from acne to anti-aging – with a specific solution for each." Even though I'm not offering a run-down of each individual product, I can give viewers the gist of why this brand may appeal to them. By mentioning that each product offers specific solutions, this simple nugget encourages my audience to learn more online.

THE BOTTOM LINE: an elevator pitch doesn't have to seal the deal on a purchase, but like the lead sentence in any story, it should grab enough attention so that your intended audience wants to learn more. A confused prospect will always walk away or tune out, which means complicated pitches are a turnoff. Practise your one-liner until you're confident that your single sentence sells your product, service or brand so the intended audience is hungry to hear more.



How to write an elevator pitch

Now that you know what an elevator pitch is, here are six steps to enable you to craft your small business pitch.



Company:
Top Shelf Cookies

Founded:
September 2014

Industry:
Bakery

Before we get started, meet
Heather Yunger

owner of Top Shelf Cookies

Heather knows how to make your mouth water when pitching her business. She understands that as a bakery owner, it's crucial to know what sets you apart from the countless other options, and to clearly communicate your differentiators. As you work through the exercises below, we'll show you how Heather implements these steps in her pitch.

Step 1:

Describe the problem people faced before your business existed

This is essentially your reason for being. Often referred to as your **why**. Did you directly suffer from the lack of a service or product in your area and decide to do something about it? Maybe you heard from others how difficult it was to find skilled professionals in a certain field and realised someone with your experience would be the ideal person to tackle their problem.

Not all businesses are born out of identifying a complex problem. Problems can be simple, and that's fine. For Heather from Top Shelf Cookies in Boston (USA), it wasn't a problem at all, instead it was a passion for baking and an understanding that there weren't any bakeries quite like hers. She liked to experiment with unique flavours, which was something that she had never seen other bakeries in her area offer.

Before Top Shelf Cookies existed:

- Not many bakeries specialising in only cookies in the area
- Lots of cake and pastry companies that focus on creating beautiful, artful designs
- Lack of bakeries with major Boston ties and pride
- Cupcake companies on the rise and becoming the go-to treat to gift to someone for a special event. Could there be a cookie equivalent as an option?



Step 2:

Introduce the solution

Many people make the mistake of starting their pitch by diving right into talking about the solution their product or service offers without first describing the problem it solves. This approach doesn't offer the person you're talking to any context for what your business is trying to achieve.

It's also easy to talk about features when you go straight to the solution. The danger of talking about features is that you assume the person you're talking to is familiar with your business area. This often isn't the case, and you run the risk of alienating them if they don't have much understanding of similar products or services to make a comparison.



For Heather, her business focused on solving the previous problems from above by:

- Offering cookies that were focused purely on the flavour and ingredients
- Providing customers with a bakery with an edge
- Creating unexpected yet delicious flavours of cookies, that offer customers something unique
- Showcasing deep roots in Boston with an uncommon choice of ingredients, such as Boston Lager and hot sauce from a fellow Boston-based business
- Creating the perfect gift option to bring to a sports party, or to celebrate with a friend on their birthday – especially for a Boston lover!

Step 3:

Back it up with benefits

There's an old saying that goes "Features tell, but benefits sell". People need to know why they should choose one product or service over another.

Here's an example of the difference in the context of a small business:

Feature: Massage therapy on-the-go

Benefit: You never have to leave your house to get a massage

Getting a massage is considered a luxury for anyone, but to make it even more desirable, imagine having a massage come right to you. That would be a dream! By explicitly calling out the benefit beyond the service provided helps the consumer understand the greater context of what you're offering with your business.

To be clear, benefits answer "what's in it for me?" In this case, it's a relaxing back rub that arrives at your doorstep.

What are the three main benefits of Top Shelf Cookies?

1. Unbelievably tasty cookies with really unusual flavors
2. Strong connection to Boston with themed cookies and local support efforts
3. Unique gift idea for a special event at a reasonable price





What are the three main benefits of your business?

1.

2.

3.

Step 4:

Demonstrate what makes you unique

Showcasing something unique about your business helps you stand out. But finding something special to say about your business is not always easy. If you're stuck, try to think about your business in different terms:

Heritage: Is your product made using a secret family recipe or process?

Efficiency: Does using your service cut waiting times for users that switch to or use your products or services?

Convenience: Do you relieve people of a tiresome chore?

Exclusivity: Are you the only business that offers this product or service in your area?



For Heather:

Heritage: Cookies are made using inventive flavours that Bostonians love, like Samuel Adams lager and hot sauce. Our name is derived from a hockey term because I started my business after baking cookies for Bruins games with my friends.

Efficiency: Cookies come in stacks of varying amounts so we always have what our customers want.

Convenience: Offering a delicious treat without having to bake cookies yourself. Ordering can be done in store or online.

Exclusivity: Cookies appeal most to those in the Boston area, with names like Green Monster Mint and local beer flavours that Boston locals love. They are primarily sold at our location south of Boston, and at various public markets in the greater Boston area.

Step 5:

Practise your pitch out loud

All that's left to do is practise. If you can find someone who is not too familiar with your business, that's ideal. If no one is available right away, you can video yourself and study the footage. Although uncomfortable to watch at first, it's a very effective way to polish your pitch. Good luck!

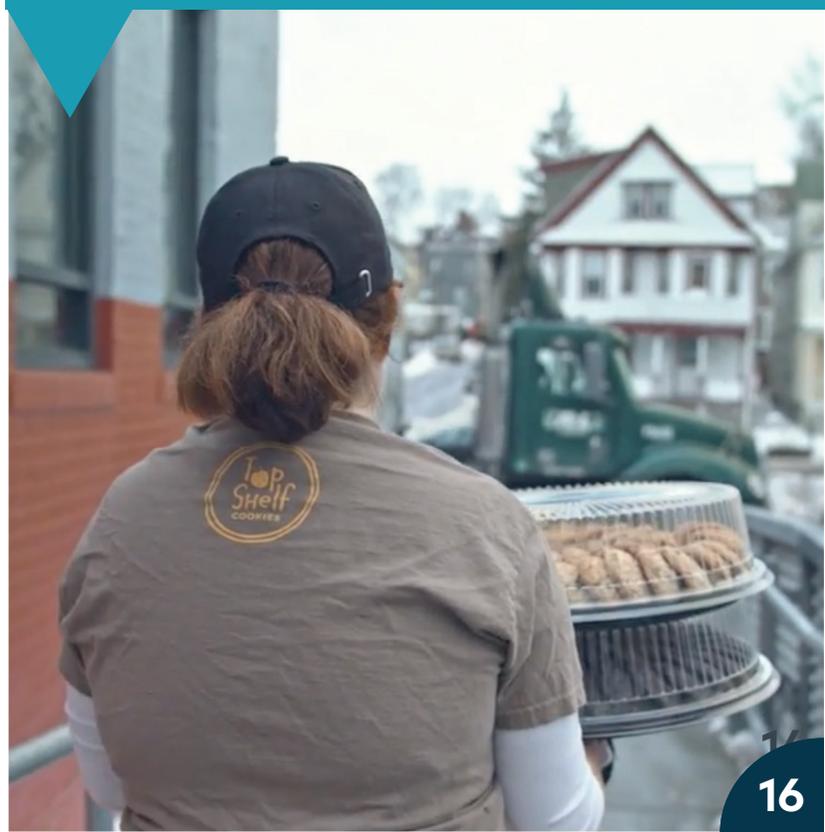


Use our :30 Pitch Timer
youtu.be/1UbcHwp1icY

For Heather, it's boils down to the ingredients and Boston roots that truly make her business unique:

"Top Shelf Cookies makes small batch cookies with elevated versions of the classics. As a business with deep Boston roots, we try to create spins on things that you know, by infusing with other flavours Bostonians love like Sam Adams Lager and hot sauce to create truly unique offerings. As they say in hockey, with our cookies, you're always 'scoring top shelf'.

– Heather Yunger



Step 6:

Personalise your pitch

You should learn to adapt the pitch to cater to your audience. To help you get started, try creating three drafts that will help you communicate the benefits of your business effectively to different audiences. Include the information you added above that seems most relevant to each person below and remember to try to follow the structure from steps 1-4:



Person 1

This person sits next to you at a dinner party. You strike up a conversation, and they ask you what you do. There's a possibility they could turn into a customer as you have friends in common. Since you are in a social setting, you might want to focus more on the story behind why you started your business.



Person 2

At a trade fair, you're approached by someone who is familiar with the sector you work in. They seem interested in the materials on your stand. How would you pitch your business in this situation? As an industry expert, this person might be more interested in what makes you different from the competition.



Person 3

Somebody calls you as they're collecting quotes from local businesses in the area. They don't have too much time to chat but are interested to find someone to work with today. See if you can include a testimonial or other recognition in your pitch.

Successful business presentation checklist

A few things to keep in mind

Remember to:



Speak slowly and clearly

It's easy to rush when you're against the clock, so make sure everything you say sounds clear when you watch your recordings back while practising your pitch.



Project your passion

A smile is the easiest way to express friendliness and enthusiasm, while a strong, firm voice shows confidence in your idea.



Prepare a few variations

Remember to tailor your pitch for different audiences and scenarios. It's good to have one for industry experts and another for those who are unfamiliar with your type of business.



Include a call to action

Let the person you're talking to know where they can find out more and how to contact you in the future.

And avoid:



Going too heavy on data

It's fine to quantify a claim about your benefit, but avoid using too many figures as people may switch off.



Rambling on

Practising as much as possible will help keep you from getting off track.



Sounding robotic

It's difficult to hear our own intonation when we speak, so choose somebody to listen closely to what you're saying and advise where to stress the most important information.



Using technical terms and jargon

You want to be easily understood by anybody, so avoid words that will confuse the average person. If in doubt, leave it out.