
Excess Returns

Insights for Investment Marketing and Sales Professionals

Presenting with an Interpreter | September 2024

Lost in Translation is a great movie about two strangers who meet and forge an unlikely connection while living in a Tokyo hotel. Lost in translation also is something you want to avoid when working with an interpreter. This issue of *Excess Returns* provides guidelines for success when presenting to investors from another culture not fluent in your language.

With best wishes,



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Founder

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Alpha Partners is an investment marketing firm offering custom research, marketing communications and presentation coaching. Our goal is to create alpha (excess returns) by helping investment firms win, keep and diversify assets under management.



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Achieving Connection

During a meeting in Tokyo some years ago, a client asked me if I would like to give an impromptu presentation to members of his staff. My presentation started well enough ... until the sea of impassive faces in the audience caused me to become nervous and hesitant. I invited questions. But nothing. Had I been a better student of Japanese culture, I would have forged onward with confidence, knowing that Japanese audiences tend to be highly reserved, especially in a formal office setting.

Increasingly in my coaching work, I encounter questions about how to present successfully to a non-English-speaking audience or an audience representing a different culture. The following specific suggestions reflect my own advice and a distillation of information discovered online:

Know your audience. My Tokyo experience offers a classic example of the number one rule of presenting: Seek to learn everything you can about the audience. How familiar is your audience with the topic? What cultural norms might affect their response to your content? Given the nature of their responsibilities, how can you help them excel in their work? What specific examples might attract or repel? Even if you cannot use such information explicitly, audience knowledge will help you be more confident.

Conduct an advance site check. Whenever possible, check out the venue the day before your presentation. Confirm how you will interact with the technology, the screen, your interpreter and the audience. Where will your slides appear to the audience? Will there be a screen with subtitles for non-English speakers and where will you be in relation to the screen? Will the interpreter be seated next to you or in the back of the room? Will you advance your own slides or will you cue someone? Whenever I'm presenting, I always try to do this the day before so as to practice with this precise context in mind.

Establish rapport in advance with your interpreter. Do everything you can to assist the interpreter before the meeting. You should be able to confer with your interpreter and provide your presentation and scripted speaker notes well in advance. Along with any material sent to the interpreter, you may wish to consider providing a list of scripted answers to frequently asked questions. Ensure you familiarize the interpreter with any technical language specific to your topic. Practice with the interpreter before the meeting, seeking to establish a measured and comfortable back and forth.

Provide a clear structure. For example, state up front that your presentation covers three key topics, then briefly define and cover each one. Structure confers clarity in any language, making it easier to remember a few important messages.

Cut your presentation in half to allow the interpreter to catch up. For example, if you are allotted 40 minutes, plan to finish in 20. Avoid overly long sentences and prepare to pause frequently to allow the interpreter to stay in sync. Also, be prepared for a slight delay in audience response as the interpreter catches up to you, keeping in mind that some in the audience who do speak your language may respond sooner.

Slow down. Even with an English-speaking audience, speed-talking can be a handicap. If you have a tendency to speak rapidly, take particular care to modulate your pace.

Emphasize pictures, illustrations and data. Consistent with the truism, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” select presentation exhibits that will allow you to make key points without using a lot of words. For the benefit of the audience and your interpreter, use fonts, shapes and colors that are legible and clear even in the far back of the room.

Provide guidance via the printed material. To facilitate clarity when presenting to a non-English-speaking audience, you may wish to rely more than usual on the printed materials. You also should reference any information sent ahead or left behind, ensuring that the audience has another resource to complement your spoken remarks.

These suggestions are particularly important when presenting to an audience who does not speak your language. But virtually every suggestion applies equally when presenting to any audience. All of your presentations will benefit from intense preparation, learning about the audience, doing a site check, brevity, structure and written information that enhances understanding.



Every presentation sparks multiple ideas, interpretations—and, possibly, when the audience does not speak your language—misinterpretations. Through thoughtful preparation, you can excel when presenting with an interpreter.

Being Clear

Every presentation to any audience also will benefit from being careful with language. Avoid or clearly define any acronyms. Stay away from potentially confusing jargon. And exorcise the tendency among investment professionals to use gambling terms such as “making bets” or “taking chips off the table.”

Additional Resources

You also may find the resources at the following links to be helpful: [Six Tips for Working with an Interpreter While Public Speaking](#) and [Tips for an Interpreter-Friendly Presentation](#). The latter article, provided by the American Translators Association, provides suggestions for every stage of the process: before, the day of, during and after your presentation.

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