

The Science of the Perfect Pitch, and How to Win Candidates over Every Time

You have a list of hot prospects in front of you and you're ready to start cold calling or emailing. But your response rate in the past hasn't been great. How can you cut through in your calls and up those email responses to create immediate interest?

It's all in your pitch.

Recruiting is often likened to the sales process, but we think it's a little like speed dating, too! First impressions count – and you don't have much time to impress. There might be nerves; you don't want to seem desperate, pushy, or worse – stalkery. And, we guess, you're not just after a short-term thing. So how do you hook prospective talent – and increase the chances they'll stick around?

MAKE A CONNECTION.

First, find some common ground to engage them. Don't launch into a rehearsed spiel. Get them on side with something that links you both – whether it's people or past employment in common, the same college, or LinkedIn groups.

People respond to connection. It establishes trust and credibility, and they're more likely to listen if you have something in common.

Pro Tip: Use a tool like [Charlie App](#) to quickly glance a candidate's latest online activity in a flash – what they've written, posted on Twitter, and what interests you both share.

ASK, DON'T SELL.

It's not about you, it's about them. Just like successful sales and marketing focuses more on what the customer needs than a brand's products or services, effective recruiting must start with finding out what a prospect

wants from a role and employer. And it's not just a better salary. So, once you have their attention, it's time to ask – then listen. What does their ideal role look like? What does it *feel* like? Tapping into emotions is a great way to hook a lead.

Consider asking questions like:

- Do you feel your current role is your dream job? If so, why? And if not, what's missing?
- How would you describe your dream job?
- Are you still challenged in your current role, or just going through the motions?

“Job satisfaction” is often touted as what drives people seeking new opportunities – but this is meaningless unless you put it in context: For the career mom who wants flexible hours so she can still pick up the kids from school, extra-curricular courses might not be as important as they are to the millennial, who wants to fast-track their skillset.

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

After gauging your prospect's needs, their current role and experience, they're likely to be asking *you* some questions. And you can bet they're listening: for how your offer might meet their needs, how well you answer any of their concerns, where they'd fit into the organization – and yes, the salary/benefits package.

At this point, you really need to refine your pitch. According to the co-founder of Fundable.com Wil Shroter, a successful pitch has a simple structure: problem, solution, and market size. Starting with this applied to your company, in no more than a few sentences, will set a strong foundation as they think over the opportunity.

Then you can go into detail, covering things like:

- Outline what makes the role exceptional and why they'd want to work with you (without gushing!)

- What's the scope for room to grow/ professional development? Do you have incentives and rewards for achievement?
- Describe the work/life balance
- Where is the company is headed and how does that affect their job security?
- How they'll matter – does their role have a greater meaning?
- What are the company values/mission/purpose?

Again, research pays off here – by knowing who you're talking to, you can deftly deal with a “what's in it for me?” query, only giving relevant answers, and keeping the candidate engaged.

GET YOUR BRANDING IN CHECK

It's a no-brainer that psychology plays a role in recruitment. So use it! We're not talking aptitude tests and personality profiles, but a sales-style approach.

Let's start with brand awareness and perception. What's your company's public image? You can be sure that in a market where candidates have the upper hand, they'll be actively looking for signs to reassure they're making the right call. The better your organization is represented in the media, or by word of mouth, the more attractive it is to potential employees.

So if your prospect is aware of your company, use that advantage to highlight any recent media coverage or even name-drop well-known brands or clients.

TAKE A CRASH COURSE IN NEUROSCIENCE

Like it or not, gender matters. Neuroscience shows that male and female brains *are* wired differently, which has an obvious impact on recruitment. A male prospect will respond differently than a female talent to your pitch, so tailor your language accordingly:

- Make a more emotional connection with women

- Talk more ‘nuts and bolts’ with men

Studies also suggest that the intonation and pitch of your voice reveal much about your intellect. While these studies specifically looked at job candidates pitching to employers, it's bound to work both ways. The greater the variety in your voice tone, pace and pitch, the more enthusiasm and intelligence you convey, making you more appealing and engaging to a prospective hire.

LOOK BEYOND LINKEDIN

Social media is fast overtaking cold calls and emails as a way to contact and engage with top talent. But broaden your efforts – and approach – beyond just InMails and Twitter @replies. Cosmetics retailer, Sephora, uses Facebook to sell the employee experience and recruit new talent. Their fan page keeps it fun and entertaining, which reflects their brand.

Google's approach to the short and snappy pitch is, well, typically Google. One employee was lured into applying for a job while he searched for a specific programming term!

PUT YOUR PITCH IN CONTEXT

Your pitch approach depends on the context and setting. Emails are prone to misinterpretation; while on the phone, voice is your primary gauge – and theirs. Face to face is the most immediate and revealing approach. If you're approaching a prospect at a networking event or conference, you have to consider body language, facial expressions and personal space. Rehearsing some scenarios with a colleague or friend can help finesse your approach.

DON'T GIVE IT ALL AWAY!

The purpose of your pitch is not to give everything away from the get-go. So don't reveal everything about the opportunity. Creating a sense of intrigue

can have the prospect probing for more answers, which keeps them engaged.

Don't oversell the role/or gush about it either – be real, upfront, balanced.

Which brings us to...

BUSTING THROUGH BLOCKS

You can't avoid dealing with objections from prospects, but you can turn them to your advantage. When a prospect says "I'm not looking to move", it's a great opportunity to ask them why – and then scope for referrals.

Tech recruiting dynamo, John Vlastelica has some excellent scripts for handling objections.

Remember that your first contact with a prospective candidate is rarely going to result in a "Yes! Where do I sign up?" response. You're building a rapport and relationship here, and these things take time. But armed with these tactics above, you can increase your prospect engagement and your chances of success.

The perfect pitch has a specific framework – problem, solution and market size – in that order. If you can address those three concerns in just a few sentences, you're golden.

The goal of your pitch isn't to wow people with long verse. This isn't the "I have a Dream" speech. Famed venture capital firm Sequoia says they like to partner with companies that can fit the company's purpose on a back of a business card.

Here are the key elements to address in your perfect pitch:

The Problem

Every great company starts by solving a painful problem. Most entrepreneurs get so excited talking about the solution that they forget to illustrate that it solves a problem at all.

Explaining the problem should be simple, singular and specific.

If you were a young Mark Zuckerberg the problem you communicated may have looked something like this:

“Staying in touch with all of your friends is incredibly hard to do.”

It's not complicated. That's the point. You don't get points for making the problem complicated. You get points for explaining the problem in a way anyone can understand. If people believe the problem is real, and more importantly, they understand it personally, then the solution will be wonderful.

The Solution

The problem should be so painful, yet simple to understand that the solution feels like a godsend.

You may solve a ton of problems, and that's great. But for the purpose of your pitch, only focus on the most important solution you offer. Microsoft Word has a ton of features that solve various problems, but at the end of the day it's a word processor. If you can't address your main problem well, the other features don't matter.

If we hop back in our time machine to a young Zuck, he'd probably pitch the Facebook solution as something like this:

“Facebook creates a central place where everyone can update all of their friends at once.”

The solution should be something that people can easily envision. Try to keep it short and sweet, and as directly related to the problem as possible.

Total Addressable Market

When pitching investors in particular, they want to know that if you solve this painful problem, there will be a big market opportunity that will allow you to build a huge company.

The total addressable market is how many people would likely use your product. If you were selling Coca Cola, your market isn't six billion people on earth. It's the number of people who would likely buy Coca Cola.

In our example, the market for social networking has proven to be enormous. But even before knowing what the market could be, young Zuckerberg may have used a prediction like this:

“There are more than one billion people that struggle with staying in touch with friends and family.”

That prediction would take into account the number of people with access online as well as the number of people who would likely use a service like this.

Pulling it together

Your perfect pitch simply grabs the three elements of the problem, solution and market size into a few sentences. The perfect pitch for Facebook would have been something like this:

” More than one billion people struggle to stay in touch with their friends. Facebook creates a central place where everyone can update all of their friends at once.”

Notice how in just a couple sentences we know exactly what business Mark is setting out to build, and if he's right, how big of an opportunity this could be. Although the formula is easy, actually shortening it may be a lot more difficult than it looks.

Pitch.Refine.Repeat.

The best pitches aren't perfected on the first attempt. They are crafted and honed non-stop.

The best way to hone your pitch is to pitch often, and listen closely. What are people responding to? Are they asking the same questions? Keep refining until it flows beautifully.

Arming yourself with the perfect pitch may be one of the most valuable tools your young startup creates.