

BUSINESS LINE

To Your Success

PERFECT YOUR PITCH

THE MOST IMPORTANT 30-SECONDS OF YOUR BUSINESS DAY

By Kathy McAfee, KMC Brand Innovation, LLC

Your elevator pitch is more than just a foot in the door; it's an opportunity to connect with someone while reinforcing your brand and the value you have to offer. Each time you give your 30-second elevator pitch, your single-minded goal should be to elicit the response:

"Tell me more ..."

You're not trying to tell your life story or to close a deal, but rather you're trying to invite someone to engage with you in a deeper conversation. If you're successful with your 30-second elevator pitch, you will find yourself attracting people who want to get to know you better. This is a great start to your business day.

Most people spend their precious 30-seconds going on in boring detail about what they do. They forget to reveal some of who you are. Strong networkers are also proficient at communicating what a good lead is for them and who they are looking to meet. The whole point of giving a 30-second introduction is to find out who you can help and who can help you. Remember, it's not a transaction or a close, but rather, a beginning.

What would MR. ABE say?

To ensure that your 30-second elevator pitch is strong, it must pass the MR.ABE test:

M - Memorable (something has to "stick" in their mind after you stop talking)

R - Relatable (to what the other person cares about)

A - Authentic (to you)

B - Believable (from you)

E - Engaging (it's all about energy!)

Identify Your Specialty and Communicate it

One of my clients is a real estate agent. When I first heard her give her 30-second pitch, it sounded like a cross between a generic job description and an apology. I could feel her nervousness. She had effectively (or ineffectively) communicated that she did all forms of real estate: residential, commercial, condos, million dollar homes, etc. As a result, she did not position herself as an expert in any area. It was not only unbelievable, but unconvincing and not very memorable.

After spending some time discussing her strengths, experience and passions with her, her boss and



her past clients, we carved out an authentic position for her as one of the hardest working real estate agents in Connecticut. She now communicates her specialty with confidence, energy and has a new ear for listening to what the clients want and need. Who wouldn't want a real estate agent with that kind of work ethic? Equipped with a stronger, authentic and more compelling elevator pitch, she is now

growing her business more each day.

What can you do to sharpen your elevator pitch?

1. Practice. Practice until it feels natural and energizing to say out loud. Practice in front of a mirror or while you're driving in your car. You want it to be conversational, not canned. If you don't feel comfortable saying it, how do you think your audience will feel hearing it?

2. Experiment. Try different approaches to make it more relatable to different audiences. If you go to a regular networking meeting, don't be a broken record. Mix it up, but be sure to reinforce your main branding message every time.

3. Ask for Feedback. Find out what sticks by asking people what they remember hearing. What did they find compelling? What peaked their interest? When did they "tune-out." Give others feedback too. We can all get better at this!

4. Be Confident. What you have to say and to offer is valuable. Hold that belief as you stand and deliver. Let go of your fears and focus on your audience. By being confident and having a compelling pitch, you are more likely to engage with the people you desire to meet.

Kathy McAfee is President of KMC BRAND INNOVATION, LLC, and is known as The Marketing Motivator. Serving as a marketing coach and consultant, she works with ambitious entrepreneurs and small business owners to grow their businesses through innovation and motivation. Learn more about her expertise in branding, communicating and unconventional marketing by visiting her web site at www.marketingmotivator.net

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Valuable information for your business including:

- *Making Tax Time Easier*
- *Don't Forget Those 1099's*
- *Take This Business Protection Quiz*
- *How to Perfect Your Business Pitch*

The contributors to this newsletter are independent professionals providing general information. Business owners should consult an experienced professional for assistance suited to their particular needs.

SCHEDULING REGULAR FINANCIAL REVIEWS

By Annabel Pedemonti, Accounting Software Services

With income tax return time looming, now is a good time to make sure that your accounting records are in good shape in preparation for filing your taxes.

There are several reports that you can run to make sure that your records are accurate before you print the final reports, or back up your company file to send to your accountant.

Using the Balance Sheet, you can check on the following:

- Total assets should equal total liabilities and equity

This is usually a problem within the system, not a user error. You need to get professional help to verify the integrity of your data.

- Bank and credit card balances should match the reconciled statements

Were the credit card charges and payments entered correctly?

- The bank balance on the bank reconciliation report should match the balance on the Balance sheet
- Payroll liabilities should equal liabilities on payroll reports
- Accounts Receivable should match the Aging reports
- Accounts Payable should match the Aging reports
- Inventory Asset should equal the Inventory Valuation report

Did you make inventory adjustments? Did you do them using the appropriate feature?

Using the Profit and Loss report, you can check that:

- Income matches Gross receipts on the Sales Tax report
- Income matches Sales by Customer, Rep and Item reports
- Gross Wages match wages on payroll reports

These are some of the most important reports to help you assess the accuracy of your accounting information prior to tax filings.

There are also reports that you can generate to get the information you need to manage your business more effectively. These reports, depending on the needs and goals of your business, may include:

- Job Costing
- Income & Expense per profit center, department or location



- Sales volume by Product or Service
- Profitability of specific Products or Services
- Actual expenses vs. Budgets or Estimates.

To ensure that the information generated in these reports is correct you can create reports to determine if:

- All costs are applied to jobs for the Job Costs reports
- All income and expenses are applied to a profit center or department
- All receipts and disbursements are applied to invoices and bills

Reviewing these reports will ensure that your information is accurate and will highlight any errors as either user or system errors, which can then be corrected. These reports can be customized and their format and parameters memorized, making them easily generated. This will ease preparation for tax time. It will also allow you to review important reports on a regular basis, enabling you to identify problems and trends before they become a serious threat to your business.

DON'T FORGET THOSE 1099'S

By Yvonne Bruno, CPA

Now that the holidays are behind us, business owners can turn their attention to the new year. It is important to remember, however, that January is also the time for annual reporting to the IRS on certain activity that took place during the past twelve months. Even if a business does not have any employees, there may be filing requirements for certain types of payments made for expenses. For instance, did you pay anyone for services as an outside contractor? Does the company pay rent for the space it occupies? Were any legal fees paid during the past year?

Payment of any of these expenses could require the company to send a Form 1099 to both the recipient of the payment as well as to the IRS. This is a multi part form that is sent to the IRS, the entity receiving the payment, and in some cases the state where the services were performed. In addition to the Form 1099-Misc, the reporting is summarized on Form 1096. These Forms must be mailed to the recipient by January 31 of the year following payment, and sent to the IRS by February 28.

Although this reporting can be time consuming, there are steps that can be taken ahead of time to make this requirement easier.

Firstly, become familiar with the types of payments that require annual reporting. In general, reporting is required for the payment of services provided to your business if the total amount paid during the year is \$600.00 or more. Form 1099 must be submitted if the entity providing the service is a sole proprietor, a limited liability company (LLC), a partnership, or an estate. Payments made to a corporation usually do not require reporting. The following list provides some examples of reportable services, but is not all inclusive:

- Computer consulting
- Equipment or other repair services
- Design services
- Temporary help
- Administrative services
- Janitorial services
- Bookkeeping services
- Accounting services
- Director fees
- Rents paid to a landlord
- Officer loan interest (Form 1099-Int)

Annual reporting is also required for payments larger than \$600 for legal services. In this instance, payments to all types of entities must be reported, even if the entity receiving payment is a corporation.

Second, get in the habit of having vendors complete a Form W-9 prior to providing the service. Form W-9 is an informational form that requests an entity's legal name, address, tax identification number and entity type. The completed form is returned to the company receiving the service, who keeps it on file. Once completed, this form contains all the information necessary to prepare Form 1099 except the amount paid. Having vendors complete this form avoids the scramble in January of calling to obtain addresses and tax identification numbers.

Finally, utilize your accounting software, accountant or your payroll service to assist in the preparation. Most small business accounting packages like QuickBooks and Peachtree have the ability to accumulate 1099 information and generate the annual forms. In order to print the form, it is necessary to be using a current version of the software (usually purchased within the past three years), and have installed the application that generates the form. This usually requires updating the version for a small fee, so that the current form format is available on the software. Alternatively, each 1099 vendor can be coded when initially setup. This allows a report containing the required information to be printed, which can be given to the accountant or payroll service for preparation.

By implementing a few simple procedures when hiring vendors, a sometimes tedious requirement can become streamlined and completed with very little effort.



January is the time for annual reporting to the IRS on certain activity that took place during the past twelve months

ARE YOU PROTECTED FROM PERSONAL LIABILITY?

TAKE THIS QUIZ AND FIND OUT

By Attorney Judy Gedge

Filing the organizational documents with the Secretary of State is not enough to provide you protection from personal liability. You'll need to comply with all the legal requirements including maintaining thorough records for your entity. Failure to do this can expose the owners of a corporation or an LLC to personal liability under the doctrine of 'piercing the veil'. In deciding whether to impose personal liability, Courts look closely at the way the business has been operated. Why not take this little quiz to see how you score on this issue:

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have a separate checking account for my LLC
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	My checks have the full name of my LLC printed on them
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	All the business income is deposited in LLC bank accounts
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Only valid business expenses are paid out of LLC accounts
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	My LLC has its own tax ID numbers
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	My business letterhead, invoices, business card, website and all marketing materials reflect the full LLC name
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have an Operating Agreement for my LLC (even if I'm the sole owner of the LLC)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I sign all contracts in the name of the LLC and reflect my proper title when signing
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I file my annual report with the Secretary of State every year

If you answered 'No' to one or more of these questions, you may be exposing your personal assets to the risks of your business under the doctrine of piercing the veil. The first quarter of the year is a good time to review your business practices to make sure you're maximizing your protection from personal liability.



Judy - can you give me a callout in the form of a question for this space?

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