

Creating the best business presentations: A board-level approach

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Simple ideas, project proposals, technical advancements, start-up pitches and well-prepared business plans must all be presented to decision makers. These presentations need to be concise, address the presenter's key points, explain the issue's positives and negatives, stress necessary preparations and implementation actions, highlight deadlines, and clearly lay out financial considerations and expected returns. In essence, a well-formed presentation allows the presenter to gain the attention of decision makers, be they banks, angel investors, potential partners, start-up investors or in-house executive management. Below, the main considerations of a successful business presentation will be explained through the example of a potential board-level presentation structure regarding a new business proposition.



A presentation is a business decision tool

Before all else, it must be understood that a presentation is an outcome or “bottom line” of the business proposition it is ultimately selling. A presentation has to be treated as a guide: it starts with the overall description of the matter, flows smoothly into details (such as technical, organizational, economic, financial, and market knowledge and resources) and ends with a clear summary which facilitates a decision – to grant the potential project the necessary resources or not. Done well, a presentation is a very effective business decision tool.

Structure, formatting and “quality feel”

The industry for which a presentation needs to be prepared should not matter. Though a presentation’s content can vary significantly depending on the target audience, structure, formatting and overall “quality feel” is paramount for all presentations:

- Structure – There should be a logical and easy-to-navigate structure starting with the introduction, progressing into key considerations and ending with a summary that enables a project decision. Concision and familiarity with the audience form the basis of effective presentations regardless of the underlying business case’s complexity.

- Formatting – The slides should not be overburdened with many formatting styles – simple fonts and schemes work best. Font sizes less than 12 should not be applied, as they are hard to read. Ideally, there should be at most three levels of hierarchy, indicated by differing font sizes while retaining a unified style.
- “Quality feel” – There are two aspects to consider. First, a poor-looking presentation will not get serious attention regardless of its content. Second, the presenter never knows who will ultimately see the presentation. Therefore, putting the presentation through a design pass is crucial. This involves adjusting and aligning the text, styles, headings, colour patterns and so on to be professional-looking.

What should be included in a presentation

Board-level presentations do not differ much from other presentations. The content must be structured with a project introduction, a build-up to a clear conclusion, guidance through the preparation and implementation steps, a case for financial feasibility and finally an understanding of the business potential.

Therefore, a solid business proposal should have the following fundamental sections:

- Cover, 1 slide
- Table of contents, 1 slide
- Introduction in text form, 1 slide
- Introduction in graphical form, 1 slide
- Project description – This should cover the main considerations, such as financial estimates, market competitiveness, any significant support or availability of incentives, business and/or technological process descriptions and legal and organisational entity structures (the order may change subject to specific needs), each subsection on a separate slide
- Business partner description(s) with high-level financials, references and portfolios, 1-2 slides
- Altogether, the presentation should not exceed 10-15 slides (including the cover and table of contents pages)

Importance of the introduction slides

The introduction slides are the very first the audience will see after the cover and content slides. The information presented and how well the audience understands it, as well as the presentation’s ability to grab attention, its formatting and the actions it presents will all influence the outcome. Moreover, if the introduction fails to concisely explain the subject matter, the actions needed to achieve the desired outcomes and the value added for both the business and investors, it will be difficult to persuade decision makers.

The following approach can be applied to introduction slides: divide the slide into 3-4 sections and create a second slide reiterating the same information graphically. To be more specific, the following sections are a must:

- 1st section – Introduce the business potential and intended outcome. This can be done in 100-150 words
- 2nd section – Focus on the business potential from technical and financial perspectives. This can be done in 100-150 words
- 3rd section – Highlight income generation channels. This can be done in 100-150 words
- 4th section – Add additional but important information (this slide is often referred to as a post scriptum). For example, this slide can present a key point on available state support or business incentives. This can be done in 100-150 words

The second slide reiterates the above information graphically because the brain absorbs visual information much faster than text and can create visualizations of even highly complex matters. An example of each of these slides is demonstrated below.

Example: Introduction slides

X. Introduction

It is proposed to consider the possibility of **establishing/entering into****XXXXXXX**..... Such potential can be realised **through the****XXXXXXX**..... In order to realise such potential a **EUR XXXXX** investment is required and **XX years** to become fully operational. The return on investments is expected at **XX%** and payback is **XX years**.

Project realisation will allow:

- **To increase****capacity/sales etc.**..... from **XX/year** to **XX/year**, as well as to expande.g. the product range
- **To increase e.g. price competitiveness** from the current **XX%** to **XX%** in comparison with similare.g. manufacturers.
- **To increase e.g. Country X market share from the current X% to X%.**
- **To use as e.g. a material, the local e.g. materials.**.....

Total project cost is set to EUR XXXXX:

- Stage 1 - EUR XXXXX
- Stage 2 - EUR XXXXX

e.g. EBITDA is expected to reach up to XX% and the payback period is XX years.

Main product markets:

- Country X XX%
- Country X XX%

The Country X government actively stimulates industries with high value added through the support related to new working places subsidies, tax holidays, land allocation and priority participation in public contracts.

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X. Introduction – schematically

Present e.g. production Years XXXX to present in Country X

- XX% sale in Country X
- XX% in Country X

Actual financials:

- Revenue EUR XXXXX/ year
- EBITDA EUR XXXXX
- Employment XXX employees
- Market share XX%
- Competitiveness XX% on price

State support:

- e.g. tax incentives

Taxes:

- Income tax XX%
- Dividend tax XX%

1. e.g. Increase in production of e.g. materials from XX/year up to XX/year

2. Introduction of e.g. new technologies (.....insert technology description.....)

Total project cost EUR XXXXX

- Up to XX% State support
- Support through

Payback period is XX years

e.g. PRODUCTION EXPANSION from Year XXXX onwards

- XX% sale in Country X
- XX% in Country X

Planned financials:

- Revenue EUR XXXXX/ year
- EBITDA EUR XXXXX
- Employment XXX employees
- Market share XX%
- Competitiveness XX% on price

State support:

- e.g. tax incentives

Taxes:

- Income tax XX%
- Dividend tax XX%

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Conclusion: The need for professional presentations

A professionally written and formatted presentation can draw strong interest to its business proposition regardless of the proposal's complexity or development stage. Strong presentations have well-thought-out introductions that set the tone for decision makers, solid content, and concise and straightforward text combined with supportive infographics. All in all, presentations are effective business tools when deciding whether to invest in a given project.

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