

Do You Know Your Audience?

Vienna, July 30th, 2018 - In the second part of our exclusive interview with Patti Sanchez, storytelling expert and Chief Strategy Officer at Duarte, we take a step beyond the basics of pitching. She shares more on how to tailor a message to specific audiences, how attending live events can help you bring that message home, and draws learnings from the way her client Hyperloop One successfully positioned itself in a cynical market.

One of the things on which Sanchez lends her insights is how companies with highly technical products or solutions can sell a vision that non-specialists might find dull or overwhelming.

“This is a challenge we face every day,” admits Sanchez. “Tech companies talk about their ‘thing’, instead of talking about why their thing is important and how their thing helps people and organizations.

“Founders can forget, I think, that technology is just a tool used by humans. Yes, you do at some point have to explain in greater detail all the components of the platform. But that doesn’t excuse you from the responsibility of helping people understand how this is actually useful to them.”

Even when you might be talking to an informed audience, says Sanchez, the basics of storytelling still apply. It’s not necessary to show off your technical knowledge in order to be taken seriously.

“I often advise them to use storytelling to describe use cases. For example, what are four scenarios in which a platform can be used? That always helps to make something very abstract tangible. It helps with the sales process too: identifying situations in which the tech can be applied can mean getting a jump start on identifying potential reasons to buy.”

After all, just because you’re selling something like cloud data protection software doesn’t mean you’re not dealing with humans and their decision-making processes.

“You don’t want to go too far with your story and tug at the heartstrings of human impact if that product doesn’t really play a role like that. But you’ve still got something that can make life easier for employees in a business, or help it save money – and that represents an emotional appeal. What does data protection do for the managers of the IT division of that business? Why is it urgent? What pain is it taking away?”

Although the story may well need to be tailored when dealing with B2C communications, the thinking and your goals are still the same, Sanchez says. The basics are universal.

“I believe humans are humans. The fundamental things that drive people to make decision are the same: we feel first and we rationalize later. We are all emotional beings. If you know that, you can create communication that resonates with either businesses or consumers. Because you understand what they’re afraid of and what they’re excited by – and you communicate around that – you’re more likely to be successful.”

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And while a company like Hyperloop One might have been blessed with a product with more eye-catching appeal for the layperson, this Duarte client still had its challenges.

“When they first came to us and explained what they wanted to do, I said ‘Holy Cow, this is going to be hard!’ There are all kinds of potential sources of opposition to something this big.

“But what they did that was brilliant was they positioned this mode of transportation as complementary, not competitive. Their story was that Hyperloop One makes everything better rather than replacing it. They also explained in very simple terms what it is and why it’s going to be good for humans.

“This positioning challenge is a hard thing for startups to do in storytelling. They have to be clear about not just what business they are in, but how they position themselves relative to the other businesses around them.”

One place to connect with other players in your immediate business environment is at innovation events such as our flagship in Vienna, at which Sanchez was a speaker this year.

“People do not value events as much as they should,” she says. “Events are opportunities to create a moment that people won’t forget. They’re a collective experience. We can all be moved to a certain degree when we’re sitting by ourselves, but when you’re in a room full of hundreds of people all experiencing the same thing, it’s a different level of momentum.

“That’s especially important as a vehicle for storytelling, because storytelling is inherently emotional. When you’re trying to get people to see and feel the vision that you have for something that doesn’t exist yet, you want people to be seeing people around them all nodding and saying ‘I’d totally buy into this!’”

Events also offer the chance to show off your vision in a more personal (and therefore memorable) way, such as when Aiva Technologies co-founder Pierre Barreau took to the stage at Pioneers’18 with the first official tech conference theme tune composed by AI.

“I won’t forget that talk,” says Sanchez. “It’s a fact proven in studies that humans are more likely to remember things we experience with other people than things we experience on our own. And sure enough, I’ve told that story a few times to people: the moment when I saw and heard music composed by a robot!”

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