

**FROM THE
ARCHIVE**

Speak Your Business in 30 Seconds or Less

By Ann Convery

"What do you do?" I'm your next client, sale, or business partner. You have only seconds to answer, and if you lose my attention in the first few seconds, it will take three times as long to get it back ... if you get it back at all. Learn this simple formula to control your message, keep your prospects hooked on you, and avoid the famous glazed-eyeball response.

BROAD MARKET + POWER VERBS + NUMBER HOOKS + A DEEP NEED = INCREASED SALES, MORE CLIENTS, AND FEWER GLAZED EYES.

"Hello, nice to meet you. What do you do?"

I've just met you. In these first eight seconds, I've looked you over and decided your age, your income, your success level, your background, and your heritage. I don't really care what you do — I'm too busy wondering if my boss will give me a raise and whether I should have another piece of dessert. But I'm polite, so I'll pretend to be interested. However, like many Americans, I have a 14-second attention span, so make it quick.

Have you ever told someone what you do and gotten the famous glazed-eyeball response? You know what I mean:

"I'm a designer."

"Oh, really? Wow. How interesting."

Those four little words, "what do you do?," can strike terror into the heart of many business people who are excellent at what they do but just can't seem to get it across.

Do you think you can't possibly

explain everything you do because you have to demonstrate it?

Are you afraid of sounding like you're trying to push a sale?

Do you think, "I'm so good at what I do, why don't people get it?"

Have you ever watched the interest drain from someone's eyes as you begin to talk?

Do you assume everyone understands what you do?

Do you conclude that your job is pretty boring, because no one ever asks you about it?

If you answered yes to any of those questions — would you like to attract more business whenever you speak?

Learn to Speak Your Business in 30 Seconds or Less™, using verbs, numbers and P.R. techniques to widen your marketplace, establish you as an expert, and escape from the world of glazed eyeballs and polite disinterest. Turn listeners into potential prospects, change an ordinary elevator pitch into a subliminal smart bomb, target the

hidden needs of your listeners, and link your product or service to their unspoken desires — in 30 seconds!

Here is the formula to create an irresistible 30-second message to promote your business, without "selling," in any professional or social setting.

YOUR VERBAL BUSINESS CARD

Your "verbal business card" is your response to the question, *What do you do?*

We exchange thousands of business cards, yet we use our verbal business card 22 more times than our paper card. How much blood, sweat, and tears went into designing that paper card? How much time have you spent designing what you say to people in the first 30 seconds, which has an infinitely greater selling power? If you lose someone's attention in those first few seconds, it takes three times as long to get it back. Control your message or it will control you. Your introduction should work as hard as you do.

WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?

The American attention span is shrinking as we speak. We are bombarded with over 80,000 messages and up to 500 requests for our attention a day. Most of us are mentally tuned in to our favorite channel — WIIFM — What's In It For Me? We don't listen so much as scan for useful bits of information.

Suppose I was in front of you right now, talking about this. Chances are you wouldn't be listening all that hard. You'd be thinking, "I wonder how much she makes? When is she going to get to the point? I wonder if the dog's eaten the rug again?" The point at which you will tune in to what I'm saying is when I start talking about how I can solve one of *your* problems.

Our attention span drifts in and out of the conversation about every seven seconds, which is a normal process. Furthermore, we are all wary of being sold. That's why you need a subliminal smart bomb of a message. Your information needs to contain an emotional trigger that will go under the intellectual radar of your listener. If

4 EXAMPLES OF POWERFUL VERBAL BUSINESS CARDS

Before: "I am a mortgage broker. I help people build their dream homes."

After: "I teach people five secrets of equity and finance so that they can leverage other people's money and hang on to more of their own."

Before: "I design and create removable and reusable wall appliques for mothers and children to decorate their walls."

After: "My company designs and creates over 200 reusable wall appliques for kids. Children can change their entire room with no mess and no clean-up, and parents save money on redecorating for 5 to 10 years."

Before: "I help moms make money."

After: "I teach mothers a business development program so they can go from zero to \$55K a year working from home."

Before: "I own a meeting management company. We do association and corporate meetings. We work all over the U.S. and internationally. I can help generate new revenue for cost-effective meetings, negotiate excellent contracts, rearrange expenses, or find better sponsorship programs."

After: "I own two meeting management companies, and I've developed four revenue strategies to save my clients up to \$150K in expenses or make up to \$400K in new money."

your message contains emotion, it will trigger a different part of the brain, the limbic system, create a different type of memory, and stay there longer. That's how you stay top-of-mind in your prospective listener. Emotion sells. Data doesn't.

Another barrier to being heard is that most of us like to tell our "story" — that's the how, why, and what of our business. Having spent 15 years in public relations, training people to speak in front of the media, I know that the media don't have time for stories. Why not? Because *we* don't. If you can't give me the gist in 30 seconds, I'll click to another channel. When you speak to the media, you have to speak in headlines. It's the same in the business world today. Do your prospects a favor and keep it short and sweet.

Your 30-second message is a hook, not a description — it's about the results you can produce for them. Its sole purpose is to provoke a call to action. When done correctly, it makes people want to do something — ask for your card, question you more closely, call you up.

Here's an example of a 30-second message before and after the formula.

Before: "I am a mortgage broker. I help people build their dream homes."

After: "I teach people five secrets of equity and finance so that they can leverage other people's money and hang on to more of their own."

There are four big differences between these two sentences.

BROADEN YOUR MARKET

In the first statement, if you don't need a dream home, you don't need him. He's just labeled himself right off your radar. Remember, your listener is looking for an excuse not to listen to you so you won't cost him money. If you use the verb "am," you are helping him silently think, "I already have a mortgage broker. I don't need you." Your listener has just wrapped you up in a nice little package and tossed it out. It doesn't matter if you're an attorney, a dentist, a Realtor, or a web designer. If you use the verb "am," you will help to close off the conversation. You will also allow your listener to silently define you, and dismiss you.

Notice how the second statement widens the marketplace? It uncovers a huge market excluded from the first — everyone who's interested in money.

Do you have a sleeping market you could be targeting?

POWER VERBS

The second statement also leverages a much more powerful verb, *teach*, and teachers are perceived as experts. We tend to identify each other with our verbs. People who help are helpers. People who assist are assistants. You want to be perceived as a colleague, a peer, an expert they can trust — not a

"Turn listeners into potential prospects, change an ordinary elevator pitch into a subliminal smart bomb, target the hidden needs of your listeners, and link your product or service to their unspoken desires — in 30 seconds!"

helper. Think of verbs like *teach, create, design, reorganize, manage, develop, establish, boost, generate*. Use one of these verbs to describe what you do. It makes you more of an innovator and an expert in your profession.

NUMBERS HOOK

Another difference between the two messages is that he has *five* secrets designed to create curiosity. Numbers are a great way to hook attention. People love numbers because numbers sound like statistics, and statistics are real. Numbers carry a remarkable credibility that descriptive words don't. Numbers also generate a little anxiety, because we judge ourselves by numbers all our lives. Age, weight, income — we're all either on the right or the wrong side of 30. Most of us are on the "wrong" side of a million dollars, or perfect SAT scores. Most women are on the "wrong" side of size two, a fact which magazines capitalize on daily.

If you have five secrets about money and your audience doesn't, it sets up a kind of irresistible urge to know what those secrets are. Numbers create urgency, and urgency prompts action. If you specialize in stress reduction, how many techniques do you use? Count them and use them. Everyone has a number of techniques, formats, methods, secrets, tips, formulas that he or she can refer to. Another great way to use numbers is to survey your clients and see what kind of results you produce for them. How many? In how much time? How often? These percentages are extremely useful to drop into the con-

versation. They make your results that much more believable. For example, "I've developed *five* techniques to stop back pain within *three* months."

SOLVE A DEEP NEED

The last difference between the two messages is that the second sentence directly addresses a deep need in everyone who hears it — he or she can help you hang on to your money. This is the most important part of the 30-second message. This is where you speak of the value you offer your clients. Tie that value to the deepest needs people have — more money, better relationships, or better health. If you're a graphic artist, don't just tell me you do excellent graphics for people. Tell me how your clients increased their

customer referral rate or bottom line because of your designs. If you don't have these figures, get them. Conduct a survey of your customers and find out how much money and/or time you have saved or made for them. If you're in the relationship business, find out how quickly relationships can improve, or how many couples you have helped toward a happy marriage. If you are in the health field, don't tell me how great your products are. Tell me your greatest success stories.

If you keep your conversation solely on your clients and in the third person, you will not sound "salesy" but confident. Pick a verb that sets you apart from the competition. Use numbers to raise curiosity. Figure out which deep need your business satisfies in your clients and describe how you answer that need. When they ask you for more information, resist the urge to tell your story. Keep hooking your listeners with headlines about your business such as a brief testimonial, a range of your results, or a one-sentence success story. It's perfectly all right to say, "My clients have been thrilled. It's very gratifying." This does not make you sound like a blowhard, and it's a great testimonial. Above all, make sure your 30-second message is not about *you* but about the results you can produce for *them*. ■

ANN CONVERY, M.A., is the VP of Anthony Mora Communications Inc. Ann has prepared clients for interviews in all major media such as CNN, 60 Minutes, ABC's 20/20, Fox News, MSNBC, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Vogue, USA Today, People, Self, and other outlets. To learn more about Ann Convery, visit www.AdvantEdgeMag.com/Convery today.

3 Ways to Answer 'So, What Do You Do?'

It seems like a simple question, but what you say when casually asked about your profession can open up new relationships or shut them down. Here are a variety of ways to use the question to your advantage and some pointers for integrating prospecting into social events.

Advisors think of the “elevator speech” as a three-sentence statement used to position yourself and gain the interest of others. A lot of thought goes into these three phrases. And you probably know it if your self-description doesn't sound quite right.

Words are like clothing; they need to fit properly or they will make you feel self-conscious. If you are a 44-long in suits and you walked down a busy street wearing a size 52-short, you're not going to feel on top of the world.

Often people feel awkward responding to the “What do you do” question because it gives the person asking a measure of power. We may feel they are trying to pin us down with a single question. People want a simple, sincere answer, and they know right away if they're hearing a packaged marketing statement. It can be an uncomfortable challenge.

To improve your performance in this little verbal duel, you've got to look beyond the surface. What are people really getting at with this question? And what do you really want to communicate?

When someone asks, “So, what do you do?,” there is often a more specific question behind it. There's something they want to know. Some ask as a rating question to determine (in their own minds) if you are important or not. Some people may be genuinely curious about what you do for a living. Some may be looking for career ideas for themselves. Other suspicious types might be wondering, “Why are you talking to me?” And if they are nosy, they really may be wondering, “How much money did you make last year?,” figuring they can deduce your income from that point.

Regardless of their intentions, what message do you want to convey? Probably something along these lines: “I'm interesting. You want to know me. I may be able to help you. I may be able to help your friends.”

What message do you want to avoid sending? Topping the list is: “Now that you've asked, you just became a prospect.” You also want to avoid overselling or talking too much. A common mistake FAs make is assuming a casual interest in what you do is a buying signal. You also don't want to be pigeonholed into whatever their perception of what a “broker” might be, if they equate “financial advisor” and “broker.”

Answering “So, what do you do?”

The first thing you want to do when tackling this question is to avoid redundancy. You may be proud to offer financial planning and professional money management, but so are lots of other FAs. When you use a couple of canned sentences, the listener may get the impression he's heard the same answer, word for word, from your competitors. His conclusion? All FAs sound the same, so they must all be alike. We know that's not true, so let's look at three ways advisors structure their responses.

Single-sentence response: “I'm a Marketing Director with WFG and IAI.” This answer is popular among senior FAs. The designation is based on the title at their firm. Why do these senior producers have such a straightforward answer? Often they feel that this simple statement conveys an important, trustworthy role and distances them from sales.

Two-sentence response: “I'm a financial advisor with IAI. I work with a small group of senior executives in Atlanta.” Following up with a little more information may prompt the question, “What do you do for these senior executives?”

Three-sentence response: “I'm a financial advisor with IAI. I work with a small group of senior executives in Atlanta. [I teach people the 6 steps to financial independence and give them access to the same active money management as institutions and the wealthy.](#)” Adding a third sentence brings the response to “elevator speech” status. You've highlighted an exclusive group by saying “small group of senior executives” and noted an area of your expertise.

Use the right keywords

Certain words conjure up deeper meanings in the mind of the listener. Consider the statement, “I'm a financial advisor with IAI. I work with a small group of successful business owners and families in the local area.” “Small” implies exclusive. These words are effective.

Be careful as you refer to “high-net-worth individuals” or “wealthy people”. Lots of people, even millionaires, don't identify with those words. To them, it sounds like more money than they think they have. Try “successful” instead. Most people feel they are successful at something.

Most people know business owners hold lots of the wealth in a community. When you mention you work with business owners, the listener realizes you must do more than “stocks and bonds” because business owners have lots of other needs, such as retirement plans, business lending, and insurance. You have subtly introduced non-traditional products.

When you say “and families,” two thoughts come to mind. They may hear “and their families,” making the connection that many businesses are family-owned. The second

thought is “family values.” Most people have a family or come from one. They want to provide for their parents and/or the next generation. You are communicating you share their values.

Finally, when you say “in the local community,” you are delivering a message to your listener who may be a community leader or business owner. The commissions and fees she pays go to a financial advisor who spends that paycheck in the local grocery, hardware, and clothing stores. If people have an FA 1,000 miles away, their commission dollars are not recycled into their own local community. Community leaders and centers of influence are usually interested in encouraging business in the local area.

Beyond these global notes, here are some other pointers that will help you strategically position your answer to the question, “What do you do?”

Tailor to your audience. While niches are profitable, you may not work exclusively with one type of client. So be sure you bring up aspects of your practice suitable to your listener. If you met a 95-year-old with a walker, oxygen mask, and nurse, it's unlikely you would discuss how to implement naked option strategies. You might talk about wealth preservation and intergenerational transfer. Similarly, if you met a 35-year-old software multimillionaire, it's unlikely you would describe your business as focusing on estate planning. You might highlight helping executives with growth and diversification strategies. You would choose an answer that's going to interest whoever you are talking with. You can be different things to different people.

Highlight your many roles in the community. You are attending a museum reception. While admiring a painting, you start a conversation, and the other party-goer asks, “What do you do?” Notice this person didn't add the words “for a living.” Perhaps you start by focusing on what's pertinent to the event. You respond, “I'm a volunteer at the museum.” The person you're talking to is more likely to be another volunteer than another FA. You may find you have something in common. Later, at the appropriate point, you might add: “In my day job, I'm a financial advisor with IAI.” Your fellow museum volunteer will remember that you didn't try to “sell” them; this sets you in good stead with your new acquaintance, and may be contrary to what he would have expected.

Use a clever example. A CPA has a great response when asked, “What do you do?” He replies, “Have you ever gone to the mailbox and found one of those registered letters from the IRS?” The person involuntarily shudders and says yes. He replies: “We help take care of problems like that.” This clever CPA conjures up a need that brings an immediate emotional response. Then he introduces his profession as being part of the solution to that problem. It's quite a memorable approach.

Answer with a smile. Years ago, a couple of FAs in Southern California used the answer, “We help wealthy people sleep a night.” They smiled as they answered. The listener

might continue the conversation by asking, "What do you do for them?" Keep smiling as you fill in some details.

Speak the listener's language. Some advisors are adept at speaking a client's language. If the people you're chatting with have recently built a new house, they know the difficulties of coordinating all the trades on a building project. An advisor can demonstrate expertise by using a general contractor analogy. Likewise, executives understand the role of chief financial officer in their company and can relate to the metaphor of the advisor as personal CFO. You might also speak the language of the blue-collar millionaire, and you can use this to open up a genuine conversation.

Include spouses in the conversation. Sometimes, in a gross lapse of etiquette, female spouses are not included in the "What do you do" conversation. In a social gathering, husbands may discuss careers but wives aren't asked, the assumption being they run the household and/or have a part-time job. Don't overlook spouses! Sometimes when asked, "What do you do?" a husband might reply, "I run a hardware store. But you should really ask my wife what she does. She has the really interesting job!" When the question is tactfully redirected to the spouse, it's up to you to follow through with questions of your own.

How do you respond to, "So, what do you do?"

Verbal Business Card

Your verbal business card is your response to the question, *What do you do?*

We exchange thousands of business cards, yet we use our verbal business card 22 times more than our paper card. What you say in the first 30 seconds has the power to change your business.

Before: *"I'm an investment advisor. I help people build their dream retirement."*

Not bad, sounds like something we all have said before. How has it worked? Did it lead to a conversation and eventually to a possible new associate or client?

After: *"I teach people the 6 steps to financial independence and give them access to the same active money management as institutions and the wealthy."* Now they want to know more and a conversation has begun. They would like to know if they can solve their own financial problems. Who wouldn't want the same financial advice as institutions and the wealthy? The words of the investment advisor program will lead to more of everything we do.



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START

STOP