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HOW TO HANDLE MURPHY'S LAW OF PRESENTATIONS

By *Renee Houston Zemanski*

You're in the middle of a presentation and everything is going right – the client seems focused and interested, people are asking questions and getting the answers they want. Everything's running smoothly until the power goes out on your PowerPoint. Now what? Diane DiResta, president of DiResta Communications, Inc. and author of *Knock Out Presentations*, shows us how we can make the best situation out of the worst.

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1. Expect things to go wrong. Prepare yourself in case the computer crashes, your material gets lost, the AV material doesn't work or you have the wrong technical configuration. Carry extra handouts, bring along a flip chart and markers and have a backup plan.

2. Prepare. Get to the room where you'll be making your presentation early, whether it is your customer's office or a hotel banquet room. Check out the room and talk to the technical people ahead of time. If it's a banquet room, try to do a run-through of your presentation to make sure everything is configured correctly. Get the feel of the room.

Do your homework. Ask how many people will be at the meeting and who will be there – executives, peers, technical people? Email a copy of your presentation to the meeting planner so you'll have a copy onsite in case something happens to your laptop while you are traveling.

3. Create an action plan. Have a backup plan. If the technology doesn't work, use handouts or start facilitating the meeting and run it as a question-and-answer session. Bring different versions of your presentation, including a short version in case your time is cut short. Remember, the difference in each presentation should be the details, such as the number of examples and the number of stories presented. Don't throw away your most important points and executive summary. Get someone from your company or a local speaker, if you are traveling, as a back up in case you don't feel well the week of your presentation. Taking the time to develop a backup plan now will preserve your customer relationship later.

4. Be flexible. Know how to change gears. If you begin your presentation and notice your audience members' eyes glazing over, you might want to get them to interact through a quick question-and-answer period. Or maybe you're expecting two people at your presentation and 20 people show up. In this case, having a laptop presentation ready and bringing a portable printer with you to make extra copies will help you engage your larger audience. A good rule of thumb: When your audience changes unexpectedly, start with questions instead of launching into your presentation. Do an on-the-spot needs analysis. Know when to throw away your planned agenda.

You also need to know what to do in emergencies, such as a fire drill or someone faints. In these cases you are in a leadership role and should take charge, says DiResta.

Contact DiResta at diane@Diresta.com or visit her Website at www.Diresta.com.

60 Seconds: When you're traveling, always carry on materials relevant to your presentation in case your luggage gets lost.

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