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Client Presentations

Best Practices for Creating Presentations That Resonate

■ By **Kris Detwiler, Guest Editor**
Principal, Detwiler Associates

SUMMARY

- Start the presentation with a section covering the client's objectives, assets, and performance.
- Put a "key takeaway" statement on each page that communicates the main point of the page.
- Make the presentation more interesting and memorable by punching up language, adding graphic elements, and including pages the presenter can use to illustrate examples and tell stories.
- Write all page titles, bullet points, footnotes, and other similar items in a consistent style throughout the presentation.
- Align the number of pages in the deck with the time allotted for the presentation, following the guideline that each page generally takes two minutes to present.

Developing client presentations can be challenging. When I was in client service at an institutional investment firm, my colleagues and I referred to the process as being in "book hell." Deadlines are almost always tight, and portfolio managers and client service professionals often have differing opinions about what to include. Plus, firm-wide templates and standards can be inflexible.

Despite these and other issues, providing a high-quality presentation deck to use in portfolio review meetings is critical to retaining and growing client assets. This paper outlines a number of best practices for doing just that — for creating client presentations that build confidence and trust in your firm's capabilities. Some of these best practices may be new to you, while others are probably familiar but worth reinforcement. All of them share a common theme, which is **an unwavering focus on the client**. Most asset managers create presentations that are internally focused — they get into mind-numbing detail, are verbose, and emphasize what the firm (instead of the client) thinks is important. To be effective, a presentation book must demonstrate that your firm understands and appreciates the client's goals, perspective, and interests.



Kris Detwiler, CFA, CPA
kris@detwilerassociates.com

Kris Detwiler has been advising asset management companies on communications strategy for 20 years. One of her primary areas of expertise is developing content for client and sales presentations. She also provides customized training programs that help investment, client service, and sales professionals sharpen their presentation skills.

Please note that the best practices discussed below apply to the development of client presentations for use in face-to-face meetings, either in person or via videoconference. They are not intended for documents that can be sent to clients without the need for additional explanation. Nor are they an exhaustive list, but rather a collection of “greatest hits” I’ve compiled over the years.

MAKE THE FIRST SECTION ABOUT THE CLIENT

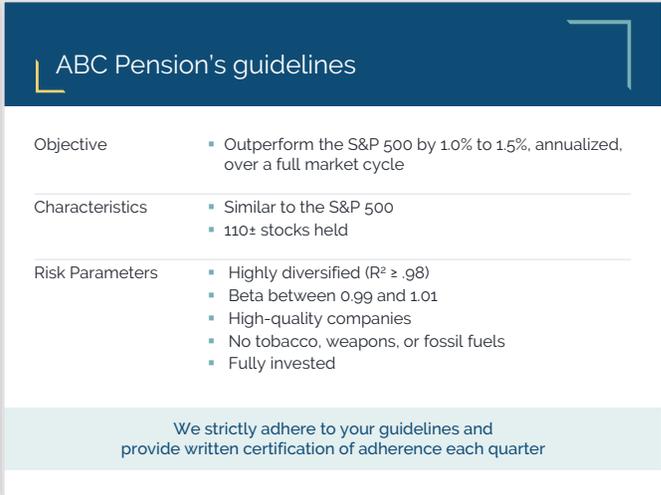
Figure 1: Agenda



Start your client presentation with an agenda page that outlines the major sections in the deck (see **Figure 1**).

Tip: Click on each slide image to view a larger version.

Figure 2: Investment Policy Summary



The first section should be all about the client and include the following pages: summary of investment policy guidelines (see **Figure 2**), total market value of the portfolio broken down by securities and cash, and short- and long-term returns versus the relevant benchmark(s). You could also have a page showing asset growth over a particular period of time to illustrate the value you have generated for the client in absolute dollar terms.

Beginning with a focus on the client gives the presenter the opportunity to ask about potential changes to investment policy, as well as anything else that might be going on with the client. It is a great icebreaker because it encourages conversation between the presenter and the audience. Furthermore, having a summary of performance up front keeps the client from skipping to the back of the book looking for returns, thereby tuning out what the presenter is saying.

ADD A “KEY TAKEAWAY” TO EACH PAGE

I learned the hard way — from seeing clients’ eyes glaze over in meetings — that what seems obvious to asset managers isn’t necessarily obvious to their clients. That’s why I recommend including a short statement on each page that communicates the main message you want the client to take away from the page. It’s possible that the main message for a couple of pages may be apparent to even the least sophisticated audience. But for consistency, put a key takeaway statement on every page (excluding the agenda page up front and a meeting summary page at the very end).

If you struggle to come up with the key takeaway, the page may not have a clear purpose in the deck. Alternatively, the page might be trying to make too many points, in which case you should probably split the ideas it contains into two or more pages.

USE FRESH LANGUAGE, GRAPHIC ELEMENTS, AND PAGES THAT ALLOW FOR EXAMPLES/STORIES

Read through your presentation looking for opportunities to punch up the content by replacing tired, overused language with fresh, active language. In addition, cut as many words from the presentation as possible. The best presentations balance a few well-chosen words with charts, tables, and other graphic elements that communicate information and capture attention — while maintaining ample white space to avoid clutter.

I can’t tell you how many presentations I’ve seen that are nothing but page after page of bullet points, often written in full sentences. Not only is this visually unappealing, it can cause inexperienced presenters to use the bullet points as a crutch, and they end up reading the presentation to the client. It is perfectly fine to have a couple of pages of bullet points, but bullet points should not dominate the presentation.

Figure 3 is a “before” and “after” showing how you can transform a page of bullet points into something more engaging.

Figure 3: Bullets to Visuals



Make sure to include pages that allow the presenter to provide specific examples and tell stories, as examples and stories make presentations more memorable. For instance, consider having a page with the best- and worst-performing positions in the portfolio that lets the presenter call out a few to talk about in more detail. Or a page about an exposure the portfolio management team added and one it eliminated, which the presenter can use to illustrate your investment process in action. Maybe the markets became volatile during the review period and you want a page showing how the portfolio performed before and after the volatility hit (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Attribution Drill-Down

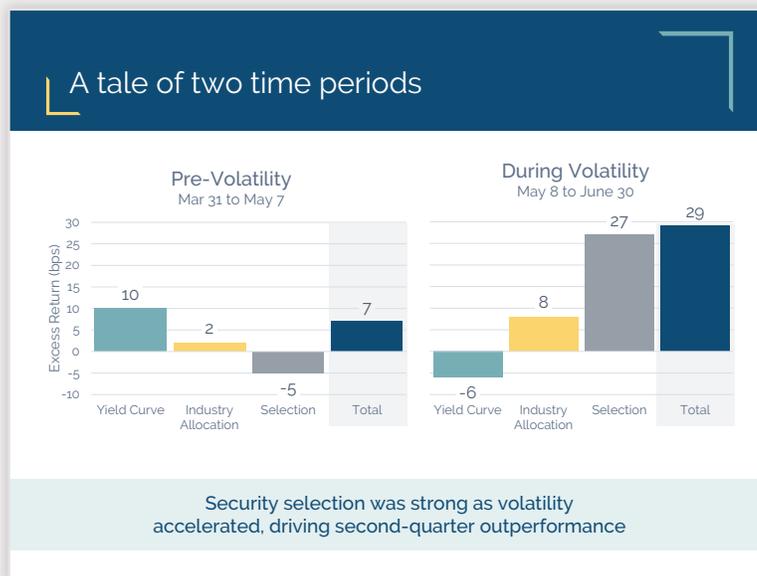
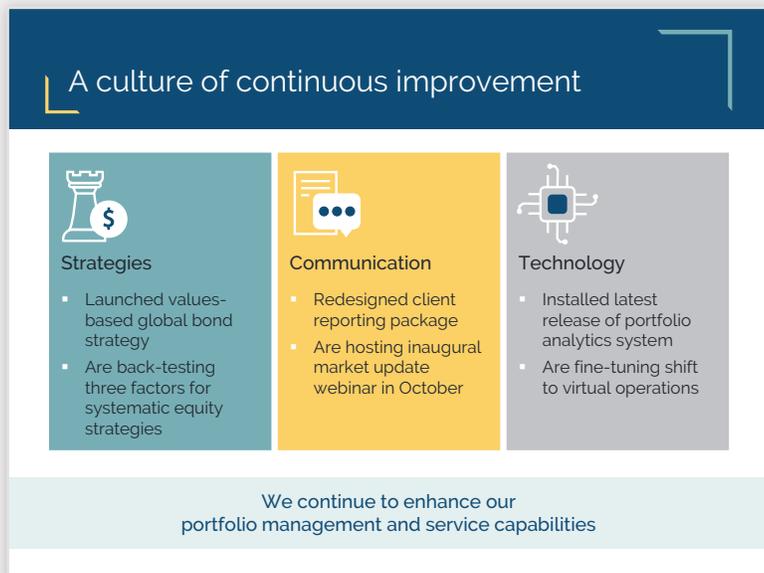


Figure 5: Firm Initiatives



Years ago, to wrap up an annual review with the investment committee of an endowment fund, I developed a page similar to **Figure 5** that outlined several initiatives which were underway at my firm. It sparked a great conversation that turned out to be the highlight of the meeting, and I ended up using the page in most of my subsequent meetings. The idea is to get creative with these types of pages since they will bring your firm and investment strategy to life for clients.

USE PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION WITHIN, AND ACROSS, PAGES

Treat “like” items consistently throughout the presentation. If the title of one page starts with a verb, all page titles should start with a verb. On the few pages where you use bullet points, write them all in the same structure — don’t start some bullets with verbs and others with nouns. Phrase takeaway statements in a similar fashion and be consistent in how you source data for charts and tables.

DETERMINE PRESENTATION LENGTH BASED ON TWO MINUTES OF DELIVERY TIME PER PAGE

The rule of thumb is that, on average, each page of a presentation takes about two minutes for the presenter to deliver. So if a deck has 20 pages, the presenter will have around 40 minutes of material to cover. This is a good length for a one-hour meeting because it leaves time for questions and discussion. That said, don’t get too hung up on the number of pages since the presenter doesn’t have to speak to every page in the book. And remember to put pages of detailed information, such as granular portfolio characteristics and a listing of individual positions, in the appendix.

I hope these best practices make it easier for you to create presentations that resonate with your clients. And I’d love to see samples of your best practices or hear what challenges you have. Please send your comments to admin@purcellcom.com.