



ANDY STAUB

INTEGRATED MARKETING INTERN

Disney ABC Television Group, Burbank

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/pub/andy-staub/2a/162/ab9

Twitter: @AndylsTweeting

In today's world, we're used to getting information in 140 characters or less. In fact, by the time this sentence ends, I'll have passed that character limit and be at risk of losing your attention.

Still with me? Now more than ever, it's difficult to capture people's attention for an extended period of time. According to the Associated Press, in 2000, the average U.S. adult had an attention span of twelve seconds. Today that average has dropped to eight seconds, one second less than that of a goldfish. With advances in technology, our attention is constantly being divided among multiple tabs and devices.

This is why, when it comes to making presentations, I try to think outside of the box. As a college student, there are only so many times a PowerPoint can hold my attention. Even poor uses of the presentation tool Prezi, which entered the ring in 2009, are starting to grow stale. In any presentation environment, it's likely that at least some of your audience is zoning out or uninterested in what you have to say. By engaging the audience in unique ways, I believe the challenge of keeping your audience interested can be completed.

Creating interesting presentations is always a difficult task, but it becomes a much more formidable undertaking when participating in a course focused specifically on creativity. Throughout the Breakthrough Thinking course, we were given tasks that had a prominent presentation component. In every single

one of these situations, over twenty students would make presentations based on the same prompt, occasionally with the prompt having slight variations for each student. One of the main aspects of the projects we were graded on was how “sticky,” or memorable, our presentation and main ideas were. If the class remembered and felt positively about your idea once every student had presented, you were successful.

In my early academic years, I struggled with making presentations. I’d frequently try to memorize a “script” for myself and fail miserably or I’d convey my ideas through a hastily made PowerPoint and lose the attention of my audience seconds into my introduction. During the creative thinking course, I was presented with similar challenges yet again. Except this time, due to the creative nature of the class, I wasn’t afraid to let loose and be myself. The challenges were tougher and required much more thought than what I was used to. Putting together a project the night before was not an option, if you wanted to succeed. I frequently had to write down one hundred-plus ideas before deciding on an idea that I thought people would respond well to.

It all comes down to understanding others. All of my projects were designed to be visually affecting, somewhat funny and engaging on an emotional level. While I usually tried to connect with people by making them laugh, engaging others through any emotion can form a stronger bond between you and them. The more I knew my classmates as people and understood what they’d respond to, the more successful I think my projects were in their eyes.

One project in particular I’m very proud of was a presentation I did about the creative history of the band OK Go. In many of the band’s videos, they collaborate with machines. While I don’t have the choreography expertise to develop a four-person dance routine on treadmills like they did, I was able to use a projector to create an extremely visu-

ally interesting presentation. Using prerecorded footage I was able to present side by side with another version of me. I presented my information in person, while a prerecorded version of myself was able to interact with graphics behind me. At one point, I even faked a snafu in my presentation that led to me “entering” my projected video from our classroom’s exit.

For another project, we were challenged to convey the journey from our home to our classroom in no more than twelve images. Instead of creating a map or taking photos of my commute, I instead chose to come into class wearing twelve T-shirts, layered over each other. Each T-shirt represented a part of my journey, whether it was the people I encountered or the music I listened to, and as my T-shirt shell shrank, the class knew a little bit more about my life.

It’s easy to make a bad presentation. It doesn’t take much time and you can usually convey some sort of idea, although it’s unlikely that concept will stick with your audience. I don’t know if I’ll ever be a master presenter, but I’ve certainly improved since starting my education at Emerson, and I attribute that to the creative skills I’ve gotten to foster over the course of the last three years.

We live in a world where people can tune out in an instant. Don’t rely on the tools you’re used to when it comes to presenting your thoughts. Chances are, that if you present in a fashion similar to everyone else, you’re not going to stand out or get your points across. This pertains to presenting ideas in class settings, business settings and even in your personal life. I think it’s important to take risks, connect with people on some kind of emotional level and understand what you’re talking about. Always try to roll up your sleeves and put the work into anything you create. If you’re able to develop a strong emotional connection with your idea, people will take notice.



Key Insights

1. Have a good time. Life's short, enjoy every second of it.
2. Understand your audience. Whether you're presenting an idea to your boss, a project to your classmates or a thought to your friends. Craft your main ideas based on whom they're likely to connect with.
3. Don't fall victim to the primal part of your brain that's afraid to take risks or work outside of preconceived constraints. High risk can sometimes equal high reward.