

## Sorting out your “elevator pitch”

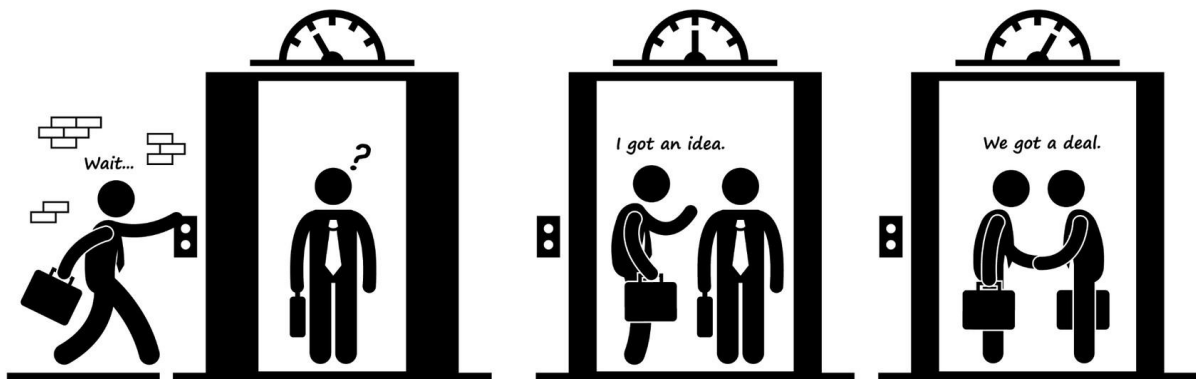
Sue Spiller, Sobus CEO

The concept of a “elevator pitch” isn’t new. The idea is that a slick salesperson can persuade or win over a client in the time it takes a lift to go from the ground to the top floor with an exciting, compelling or persuasive pitch – but it’s not something that we in the voluntary and community sector tend to always do well, or think is the right approach for us.

### Networking or pitching?

It’s not the case that your elevator pitch should be trotted out every time you meet someone. Quite the opposite in fact. Pitching is something you do when you know a person is interested in your offer and you need to grab their interest and get over the key points of your offer quickly. Networking is about building relationships for the long term.

The best example I can provide for you is Daphine Aikens, the founder and former CEO of Hammersmith & Fulham Foodbank. Daphine would often be invited to meetings or events where she would come into contact with other organisations, business people, notable and high net worth individuals. At those events, Daphine never spoke about what support HF Foodbank needed – instead, she focussed on sharing straightforward stories about the people the organisation was supporting and what they had experienced that brought them to Foodbank. Time and time again, this resulted in individuals reaching out to Daphine afterwards to ask how they could help or work together.



### So when do we need an elevator pitch?

Elevator pitches are useful when you have an opportunity for a 1-2-1 meeting with a potential supporter or collaborator. At this stage, it’s been made clear that they are interested in talking to you about an idea you have.

Think about an elevator pitch as a summary of your proposal or idea – a Dragon’s Den approach if you will! All too often, groups open a meeting with a long introduction about when their organisation started, the background of the community they’re supporting, before they get on to the issue they’re hoping to address with the support of the person in front of them.

History and background are important – but so is building a trust relationship with the person, and being able to demonstrate that you understand how this proposal or idea would also help to deliver both parties priorities and objectives.

I remember some years ago, an associate of mine who worked in a Conservative led local authority was frustrated at not being able to persuade the Leader of the Council to invest in a new service proposal. I asked her how they had gone about introducing the concept, and they quickly showed me a lengthy PowerPoint presentation, starting with the legislation under which the proposal was being introduced. To their dismay, the Leader of the Council quickly shut down the presentation, as he only had 10 minutes on his busy agenda for this item, which needed to include round-table discussion. She never actually got to the part of her proposal which set out what the service was, how it would be delivered and what the benefits to both residents and the local authority would be.

In that situation I advised her that she should have opened with “How this will save you money and increase customer satisfaction”. A bit cynical perhaps, but the point here is that you need to understand what the priorities are for the person or people you are pitching to. If I were pitching a new service proposal to a group of children and young people, I would focus with the fun element. If I were pitching the same proposal to their parents, I would focus on the health, wellbeing and educational benefits first.

### **What to include in your elevator pitch**

You should of course prepare for meetings - and come with more detailed information – perhaps a written proposal that you can either go through at the meeting or leave behind for their consideration, leaflets about your services, evidence of impact such as photographs or testimonials, that can be very persuasive in selling your idea.

Your elevator pitch might come in handy in different scenarios. Perhaps it's an event that decision makers are attending where you'll have a few minutes to get across your idea – or perhaps its something you use at the beginning of a longer 1-2-1 meeting.

- Start off with introductions of course – name and job title, not your educational background, experience of working in this field etc. That would come later as part of the conversation.
- Then a 10-20 second overview of what your organisation does (we support x people to tackle x problem by offering x)
- Then focus on the project
  - what it will deliver (the outcome)
  - what the issue is (the need)
  - what will be done to achieve it (the how)
  - what support you're asking for from them
- You should include outcomes that will fit with what your audience is also interested in achieving – whether its addressing an acknowledged local issue, delivering their corporate objectives, or could potentially save them money or make their own services more effective/productive/accessible.

If you would like any help in sorting out your elevator pitch, or preparing for a meeting with a new contact – Sobus would love to help, so don't hesitate to get in touch.