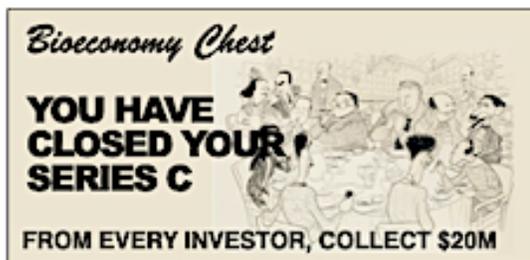


How to Make Attention and Influence Strategics



By Steve Weiss,
Principal, Grey Heron
Special to the Digest

The key to your pitch is your opening line.

Note to readers: A more timely piece could not be written. With the industry awash as never before with opportunity, the skills of gaining attention from the right people in the right way has never been more in demand. Here, from the Zen Master of Gaining and Maintaining Attention through Very Big Ideas that Come in Small Packages, the incomparable Messaging Deconstructor from the Due Diligence Wolfpack dispenses worthy advice to all.

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Cover slides and subject lines and social media – oh my. These might not sound very ‘strategic’ but it’s pretty important for capturing and focusing the attention of the audiences you care about – like potential customers, investors, employees and the press.

In this article, I’ll focus on how to start your pitches off on the right foot, with examples you can apply to your own presentations and emails.

Zero in on your main message or desired outcome, and connect to your audience

In other words – figure out what you’re really trying to say, and what’s in it for them; then, capture those ideas in plain English (or other language, as appropriate). Are you trying to get a first meeting with an investor based on a warm introduction? Are you offering a potential strategic partner a way for them to meet their targets, whether production, financial, or sustainability-related?

Applying this discipline can be hard. I’ve seen many smart, experienced executives develop long, content-heavy emails, documents or presentations and then introduce them with generic opening lines, like “[MyCompany] Overview”.

Start your presentations strong: say why it matters

You’re always competing for your audience’s attention. So start by highlighting why what you’re doing is important; or how big an impact you can have; or what the benefit will be to your audience, in their terms, and with respect to their priorities. Make it clear that you’re tackling a big problem – and even better, stir their emotions. Do that, and your audience will stick with you.

Think of it this way: why should the NY Times write about you? Or an investor invest? Or an employee join? Make your cover slide answer that.



Here’s a good example of doing it right. The image above is the cover slide from a presentation by Rebecca Boudreau, Ph.D., CEO of Oberon Fuels, at Jim Lane’s ABLC conference (disclosure, I’m an advisor to Oberon). She makes it clear why someone should care: she asserts she can decarbonize a giant industry; is relevant to the hot topic of renewable hydrogen; and can deliver environmental benefits while working with current infrastructure. It’s not overly technical, and it’s well-matched to the audience. Jim spotlighted the strength of this approach, with comments including “start with the problem you’re trying to

solve... [this is] a model for how you present a company” (listen to Rebecca’s full presentation [here](#)). This presentation marked a change for the company, having previously focused on technology; and this new approach has spurred a more focused way of speaking with customers and investors.

More generally:

Put the focus on the **audience**, not on you

The diagram illustrates a shift in focus. At the top, the text "[MyCompany's] Technology Overview" is shown with a large red 'X' over it, indicating it is the old, self-focused approach. A blue arrow points downwards to a new title: "Helping [YourCo] Achieve its Sustainability Objectives". Below this title is a subtitle: "Replacing your raw materials with our renewably-sourced products". At the bottom of the diagram, there is a grey bar with the text "we grow value and build leaders" on the left and "GREY HERON" on the right.

Everything flows from your cover slide; and slide titles make your point

If you nail the cover slide (or Subject line of an email, or headline of a press release), the rest of your story should flow naturally from it. That’s why I always start there, rather than with a hierarchically-developed outline. A story starts with a title.

Next come the titles of the rest of your slides. Follow the management consulting discipline where a title delivers a conclusion or assertion, sometimes supported by a subtitle. For example:

Market to triple to \$xxB by 20xx

We will capture xx%

rather than “Market Size”. The body of the slide exists to validate and support the title’s assertion. If you do a good job, then someone could just read your slide titles and follow your story perfectly, whether or not they read the slide content, or have you to present it. But also remember to concentrate on the issues or metrics most important to your audience.

Writing a thought leadership article? Do the same thing...

Again, focus on the audience and what's in it for them. Here's one I wrote about fundraising for Biofuels Digest, tailored for a bioeconomy audience – note the title, the use of informative subheads, and the assertion-focused titles of illustrations throughout the article.

Similarly, here's a cover story for Chemical Engineering. Note the 'harnessing biotechnology' opening. It's not about the company writing the article; it's about helping the reader get familiar with some new approaches and how to put them to productive use.

Harnessing Biotechnology: A Practical Guide

Biotechnology is increasingly proving its ability to address chemical industry challenges. An engineering-focused approach — bioengineering — is vital to successful industrial application

Steve Weiss
Genomatica

IN BRIEF

WHOLE-PROCESS
DESIGN

EXTEND TECHNO-
ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

RETHINK ECONOMICS

BIOENGINEERING IS
DIFFERENT

EVALUATE SERVICES

CLOSING THOUGHTS



FIGURE 1. At Cargill's biorefinery in Blair, Neb., companies such as Corbion, Evonik and Natureworks produce bio-based products

For those undertaking overall process design and implementation for intermediate and specialty chemicals, the incorporation of biotechnology-based processes has become a viable option for the chemical process industries (CPI). Bioprocesses have the potential to deliver benefits in cost, quality and sustainability.

Many well-known chemicals are already produced biologically. For example, Cargill Inc. (Minneapolis, Minn.; www.cargill.com) produces lactic acid for polymer applications at petrochemical scale at its Blair, Neb. site (Figure 1) using a proprietary, low-pH, yeast-based fermentation process. DuPont Tate & Lyle Bioproducts Co. (Loudon, Tenn.; www.duponttateandlyle.com) produces 1,3-pro-

panediol biologically, after DuPont determined that bio-based production would cost less than chemical routes to that product. BASF SE (Ludwigshafen, Germany; www.basf.com) produces vitamin B2 (riboflavin) biologically and has replaced its established chemical route. Lysine is another example of a large-volume chemical produced biologically. And 1,4-butanediol (BDO) is the next bio-based commercial process on the horizon: BASF and Novamont Sp.A. (Novara, Italy; www.novamont.com) have licensed technology from the author's company to produce BDO biologically.

This article is not intended as an introduction to biology, nor a recap of bioprocess advantages or case studies (see *Chem. Eng.*,

Note: Chemical Engineering is the exclusive publisher and distributor of this article.

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For emails... start with the Subject line

Talk about tough: you only have a handful of words to get someone's attention, competing with hundreds of others in their inbox. This really puts a premium on getting to the point.

For example: let's say you're trying to create some urgency with an investor, and you have the benefit of some positive, relevant news. Which of the following do you go with?

Subject: company update; schedule a call?

or...

Subject: [MyCo] update: closed first \$xM of bridge from strategic; pls confirm your \$ and timeline

Similar thinking applies to your social media updates. People just don't have the time.

Scrutinize what you're saying, keep improving, and see the results

The approach I've outlined takes work: a willingness to really hone your message. Like any skill, it benefits from practice, but that's something you can do every day, on a continuing basis. But used skillfully, this approach can help you connect more effectively with the audiences you care about.

Steve Weiss is co-founder of Grey Heron, a management and strategic marketing consulting firm. For 29 years, the firm has helped executives and investors at 140 companies build value and become leaders in their sector, through strategy, fundraising, positioning and partnerships. Fields include climatetech, food, advanced materials, cloud/SaaS/AI, and the Internet of Things. Within biotech and renewables, Steve has helped build Genomatica, Oberon Fuels, NovoNutrients, Beta Renewables and Liquid Light (acquired by Avantium), and is a proud member of the Due Diligence Wolfpack. Contact Steve at ; see Steve's LinkedIn profile; listen to his "Science of Yes: Positioning and Messaging for Success".