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# “Bring the Funny”

# WHEN YOU

When I started attending networking breakfast sessions a few years ago, I was good with the breakfast, but bad with the networking—especially when it was my turn to stand in front of the group and introduce my graphics business and myself. At these meetings, I would uncomfortably rattle off my elevator pitch, sweating through it and hoping that the other attendees didn't start throwing bagels at me. It was awful; I was awful.

I realized that I performed no better and probably far worse than anyone else in the group. I couldn't even outshine the guy who rambled on about how he “helped companies optimize their top and bottom lines by creating systems and streamlining interdepartmental communications...blah, blah...” Too many pitches like that at a networking session and I'm zoning out, playing the movie *Goodfellas* in my head.

Attending networking meetings costs time and money, so as a businessman I knew I needed to stand out at these sessions; to perk up some ears, and to make sure my

## Tips for a memorable elevator pitch:

- Know your audience
- Be topical and relevant
- Know your stuff but don't be arrogant
- Keep it short—no more than a minute
- Keep it focused
- Emphasize what makes you or your company the best choice
- Be friendly
- Be positive
- Be funny, but don't try too hard
- Rehearse to the point that you don't sound rehearsed
- Be yourself

name and message stuck with people. At morning meetings, I began to distribute promotional postcards with original graphics. It was a good start, but still it was like treading water. (Well, so I'm told, because I can't swim and know more about sinking than treading.)



HP Chamber Networking Meeting

If I was lucky enough to grab someone's interest at an event, I actually would do all right. I'm a good salesperson and passionate about my business. So, when networking one-on-one, I could shine, but in groups, I continued to bomb. So, I studied up on “the perfect elevator pitch” in the hope of

Photo Credit: HP Chamber of Commerce



# Spread your wings

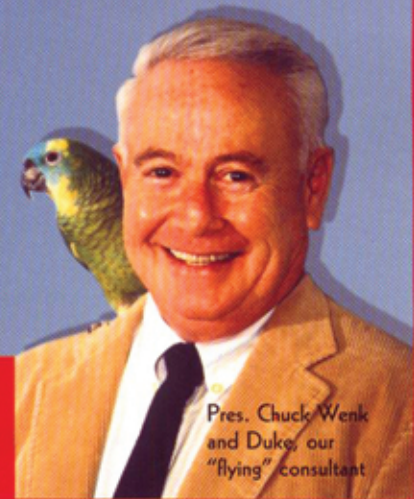
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# NETWORK

finding inspiration. No luck. But then I had kind of a funny idea: I decided to be funny in presentations.

So I came up with a humorous opening pitch line—one that was a little off color, so you're not going to read it here. Even though it was just 10 words, I rehearsed the delivery of that line in the shower, in front of the mirror, and in front of my beagle (Bagel is always a good audience), until it was just right. When it was my turn to stand up and pitch the next morning at the networking session, I delivered the borderline inappropriate line. When I finished, the room went dead silent. Then two seconds later (though it felt like five minutes), the entire audience of about 50 people exploded in laughter.

I had killed. But more importantly, I had discovered a way to get peoples' attention. In fact, the killer opening line has become kind of my trademark, and regular attendees expect me to "bring the funny" to my pitches at networking meetings. Now the group pays attention to me before I even say anything!

Since those awful, early days of attending networking events and delivering embarrassingly bad introductions, I have become a dedicated networker and member of several valuable networking groups. Now an evangelist for the power of networking, I even co-founded BizNetExpo with J.D. Gershbein, Amy Spitzer, and Chad Coe. BizNetExpo is an event that I describe as "an exercise in good networking," but that the event's website-- <http://www.biznetexpo.com/about> -- describes as "a unique opportunity for Chicago area entrepreneurs, business leaders, and companies to showcase their products and services (and gain) valuable business connections." At the most recent BizNetExpo, I even moderated a panel discussion on networking.

When I talk about the key to good networking, I always tell people it is saying something memorable in a 30-second pitch. Now that I do just that, more people come up to me before leaving an event. That gives me an extra minute or two to talk to them about



Larry Bloom

what I do and how I can help their business. And that's something I never joke about.

Larry Bloom is the owner of ATI Graphics, Inc., a Highland Park-based graphic design and Web development firm that focuses on online strategy, marketing, and branding. For more information, call 847-748-7490 or email [imaging@atigraphics.com](mailto:imaging@atigraphics.com).

Bring your own funny—or just come hear Larry bring his—to the next Highland Park Chamber of Commerce's Networking meeting. Breakfast meetings are held the first Wednesday morning of every month. Go to [www.chamberhp.com](http://www.chamberhp.com) for the location and additional details.

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