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How to
Write an
Effective
Business
Speech or
Presentation



by John Schroeder



**What does it take to write a speech that will
persuade my audience – perhaps enhance my
career?**

How to Write an Effective Business Speech or Presentation

By John G. Schroeder

The Publisher Says . . . Write a talk that will get you noticed. A professional business writer provides a wealth of practical tips to help you research and write an engaging and persuasive speech or presentation. Learn, too, how you can use the message development process to network with your peers and keep your career on the fast track!

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THE FEAR

Some say the fear of public speaking is more terrifying than the fear of dying. But, if you're like many business professionals, you've probably encountered an even more fundamental fear at some point: the fear of WRITING a speech or presentation that ultimately will be delivered to an audience of your colleagues or business associates.

Your fear may be well founded, because a business speech typically isn't a discrete event in time. It can have a powerful ripple effect on your career – for better or for worse – depending on how well you manage the project. When you write (and deliver) an effective presentation, chances are, it'll get you noticed. But if you drop the ball, or get it half-right, that's going to have an impact on the way you're perceived, too. The bottom line: You can't afford not to be good at preparing a persuasive speech. It's a critically important business skill, and one that your supervisor or mentor may not have the experience or talent to help you develop.

But you don't have to succumb to a career-killing case of writer's block. You can take the pain out of writing a speech – and even have a little fun on the project – if you start with a solid strategy for message development and follow through with a detailed work plan.

While you're at it, make sure you use the speech writing process to enhance your career in other ways, as well. You may find, for example, that collecting raw material is a great way to network within your organization. You can also market the speech after-the-fact, thereby offering a subtle reminder to your colleagues that they're dealing with a sharp cookie – someone who's a real asset to the team.

Note: This article provides a few tips on speech delivery. However, its primary focus is on writing the speech, for a

couple of reasons: 1) Writing is an essential, but often overlooked, first step in managing a speech project. If you're like most people, you may find that anxiety over delivering the speech can get in the way of your ability to craft a good message. When you put first things first – message, then delivery – you increase the chances that your presentation will be a success.

2) If you're a presentation "rookie," you probably don't know how or when to begin the speech development process. Chances are, the total project – message preparation and delivery – will be more time-consuming than you first think. By focusing on just one part of the task initially – the writing – you can break the assignment into manageable chunks, and schedule your "total project" prep time accordingly.

MANAGE THE PRELIMINARIES

So, how do you begin? Like any key business task, a good speech or presentation always starts with an effective plan of attack. The first step: Do a basic situation assessment. Find out the answers to these key questions: Who? What? When? How long? Where?

Who?

Actually, this is a multipart question. For starters, you need to know about the audience. That's the most important "who" – because knowing something about your audience will help you craft a message your listeners will find interesting and compelling.

Usually, the best source for information is the person (or persons) who extended the invitation to speak. Ask your contact for as many details as possible: How many people are expected to be there? How were they invited? What are their backgrounds? What are their expectations? What (if anything) have they been told about your presentation?

In some cases, your contact may not know much about the audience. But there are still ways to find out. If you're speaking at a trade show or before an industry organization, visit their Web sites or look through their brochures and magazines. Often, these sources will tell who's been invited and what they're expecting to see or hear. If you're addressing an internal audience – the company's sales force, for example – ask someone who has talked to the audience before to give tips about the tone and level of detail you ought to provide.

The second part of the "who" question: Who are the other speakers? This is essential, because it helps to create a context for your remarks. If you know something about the other speakers and the topics they're planning to address, then you can adjust your message accordingly.

Last, but not least, find out if the meeting has a producer or content manager. Or, in the case of an internal meeting, a chairman. That's the third component of the "who" question. Spending a few minutes with the producer can save you a lot of time and effort. Chances are, he will be able to answer questions about the composition of the audience – eliminating the need for further analysis. In addition, the producer is likely to have a broad vision of the message you're expected to present. Hit the producer's target, and it will pay dividends for you not only at this meeting, but in garnering future invitations to speak.

What?

Many of the important "what" questions will be answered as you analyze your audience. But if it's not clear from the invitation, ask about the purpose or mission of the event at which you've been invited to speak. Is it a business meeting? A strategy session? A sales meeting? A technical or professional conference? A civic or community leadership venue? An industry association?

Each type of meeting will require that you include a different amount of detail about your subject. Each will have an impact on the tone of your remarks, as well. It's appropriate to include "motivational" comments in a speech delivered to a sales force, for example, but such comments would be out of place in a talk delivered to a technical conference. Ask the meeting producer (or the person who invited you to speak) for guidance.

Find out, too, whether the meeting or conference has a designated theme. In many cases, the theme can serve as an effective starting point or framework for your remarks.

When?

Asking "when" may seem like an obvious question. But there's more to the answer than you might first think. Don't make the "rookie" mistake – checking only to see whether you have the specific date of the speaking engagement available on your calendar. You also need to consider the time it will take to prepare well. Writing takes time, and it takes time to gather input from your colleagues, too. So, look at the weeks leading up to the date of the speech – and start plugging key dates and milestones (e.g., input conference calls, script review, slide development, practice time) into your schedule.

How Long?

For most speakers – and most business meetings – the ideal presentation length is 20 to 30 minutes. Any longer, and it gets tough to maintain your energy level at the podium. So whenever possible, set the expectation to meet your comfort level as a speaker: If you're invited to fill a 45- or 60-minute presentation slot, tell the producer that you'll be happy to give a 20- to 30-minute speech, and then use the rest of your time for questions and answers.

Remember: The longer you talk, the more important it is that you have a well-prepared script. If you know your subject really well, you may be able to speak lucidly for 10 or 15 minutes with just an outline or a few notes as a reference. But you should never attempt to "wing it" at the podium for 30 or 45 minutes or more. You should prepare a full script – and stick to it. Your audience will thank you – and they might even remember most of what you had to say.

How Much Prep Time?

If you don't write speeches very often, you'll probably be surprised at how much time is required to get the job done. So here's the first rule of speechwriting: Don't procrastinate!

For a 30-minute speech, you'll need to prepare 3,500 to 4,000 words of text. That's 10 pages, single-spaced. And, you can expect to spend anywhere from 20 to 30 hours on research and development – even more for a longer speech. Chances are, you have a real job besides writing the speech. That's why it's important that you get to work on the text right away, so that you can budget time effectively and balance both the writing effort and your other responsibilities.

In a pinch, you can contact professional speechwriters for assistance. However, keep in mind that they're writers, not magicians. Even the best speechwriter probably won't be much help if you're just getting started a day or two before you're scheduled to speak. So plan ahead, even if you expect to use the services of a professional. Budget ahead, too, because professionally-written speeches can run \$100 per finished minute (e.g., \$2,500 for a 25-minute speech) or more.

Where?

You also need to ask about the venue. Get answers to questions such as, how big is the room and how large is the audience expected to be? In addition, ask whether you can use audiovisual (a/v) aids (overheads, slides, etc.) and what's the deadline for submitting your a/v materials?

CHOOSE A TOPIC

Now, you're ready to start focusing on your message. In many cases, the meeting producer or the conference organizer may assign a topic. (Note: Often, even an "assigned" topic can be tweaked to better fit your expertise, so don't take it as a given. Ask for the latitude to put your particular spin on the topic and increase your opportunities to shine!)

Sometimes, only the "slot" is assigned, and the topic is left completely up to you. So, how do you zero in on a subject that your audience will find stimulating?

Sources of Inspiration

Unless you have a high threshold for pain, it's best if you don't just stare at a blank page, waiting for inspiration. Get the creative juices flowing, by looking for ideas in a variety of media.

- Read or scan mainstream business publications (*The Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Fortune*) to learn what topics are currently in the news.
- Skim through a stack of industry newsletters or technical publications in your field.
- Pick up a good book or two (especially from the "current" business bookrack at the bookstore or library).

Take brief notes as you read, including details that will help you remember where to find particular facts and figures. But use your time carefully at this stage: You shouldn't spend more than two or three hours on a literature review. The goal is to get you ready to write, not to make you an expert on current affairs.

Next, write a speech abstract: In 100 to 150 words, describe the main point you want to make – the "take-away" message.

Better yet, don't settle on a single take-away just yet. Write two or three abstracts, and ask for feedback – from the meeting organizers, from your supervisor, from your peers, or from others whose opinion you value. This is an effective way to compress (and improve) the topic development process, because it lets you draw on your reviewers' expertise without requiring substantial additional research.

Speech Abstract: Two Samples

For a speech to be given to an association of hardware industry executives, you might write abstracts like these:

Abstract 1:

The emergence of big box retailers has had a profound impact on hardware manufacturers. Our best customers (Home Depot® and Lowe's®) now have become the source of our worst "leadership" nightmares. Because these customers move so much volume, they've encouraged us to develop tunnel vision: We've come to think of them as the only places to sell ... and the only way to sell. In truth, the big retailers represent just a third of the market. To reach the remaining two-thirds, we need to develop a deep understanding of our business and use that knowledge to create opportunities. In a word, we need to market.

Abstract 2:

The single biggest change to occur in the hardware industry over the past three decades is the focus on innovation. At one time, you could make and sell the same basic product for years at a time. Today, there's a much higher standard: You have to keep the new ideas coming – big and small. You also have to think beyond product innovation, and innovate in everything you do. But the more you grow, the tougher it gets to keep innovating. As leaders, you can't assume it's going to happen. You have to make it happen.

ASSEMBLE THE RAW MATERIAL

Once you've selected a topic, it's time to load up on the raw materials needed to drive your point home. If you already know a lot about the topic, you may be able to assemble all the background from your own computer's hard drive. But that's not always the best approach for writing an effective speech. You may find that rounding up raw material gives you a great way to network with coworkers or with colleagues from around your industry.

It's a simple concept: You don't have to be an expert, as long as you can recruit a TEAM of experts to help you flesh out the points you want to make. But, you have to follow a disciplined plan.

Start by using your speech abstracts as a way of inviting coworkers or colleagues to participate in the message development.

The Input Team

In essence, you're creating a project team: Ask three or four SMEs (subject matter experts) to join the team, and let them know exactly what you need from them. You should limit the number of SMEs you invite. If it gets to

six or more people, you'll probably find that the input process becomes unwieldy.

Make sure the SMEs know that you're after a very focused contribution: You want them to participate in an initial input session, and then one or two follow-up review sessions. Define your expectations precisely, and you'll increase the chance that busy colleagues will agree to clear time for you. There are other things you can do to make it easy for them to participate. For example, get the team together by phone – using a conference bridge line – rather than gathering everyone in a conference room. That helps to minimize the disruption in the SMEs' day.

The initial input meeting should last 45 minutes to an hour. Start the session by briefly reviewing the "who, what, where, when" details of the speech.

Then shift the discussion to the abstracts you've prepared. Ask the SMEs to critique and build on one or more of your messages. Look for opportunities to ask probing questions – to pick their brains on an aspect of the topic that you may know little about. And don't forget to request background materials, including copies of speeches they may have given, articles they've written, brochures or Web sites they're familiar with, and so on. If possible, make an audiotape of the input meeting, and have it transcribed. This will help to ensure you don't miss details that could add interest to your presentation.

Expand Your Search

The information you gather during your input session (and the additional background materials your SMEs provide) should provide more than enough raw material for a 20 to 30 minute speech. But you can expand the search to include other readily available sources of information simply by logging onto the Internet.

Popular search engines such as Google.com and Yahoo.com can often get you pointed in the right direction. Or, you may find it's more productive to focus on specific Web-based resources, such as your own company's Web site or a competitor's Web site. In either case, head to the "Investor Relations" page or the "Media Relations" page. You'll probably find that speeches have been posted there – speeches that can provide broad strategic themes to support, or specific messages to counter, in the remarks you're preparing. In fact, you may save a lot of time and effort by getting permission to "repackage" topics (or even entire speeches) that you find on your company's Web site. Don't assume you're free to reuse material that appears on the Web site, though. Ask for permission, and check to see what attributions or acknowledgements are required.

WRITE AN OUTLINE

By now, some broad themes or topics should be taking shape in your mind. Use an outline to help you get those thoughts down on paper and to help identify the gaps that still need to be filled.

Introduction, Exposition, and Summary

In most cases, your presentation will have three main sections: Introduction, Exposition, and Summary.

1) Introduction

Purpose: To establish rapport with your audience; to briefly identify the main point you want to make.

Length: 1-3 minutes (of a 20 to 30-minute speech).

2) Exposition

Purpose: Represents the "body" of the speech; contains three to five sections of material, with each section

providing specific detail, or information to support or illustrate the main theme of your remarks.

Length: 15 - 25 minutes.

3) Summary

Purpose: Provides a recap of the "take-away" message – the main point you want the audience to remember.

Length: 1-3 minutes.

Drawing on the research and background work you've already done, write an outline of your speech using detailed bullet points or sentences under each main section or heading.

You don't have to start completely from scratch: The "Introduction" bullets can be drawn from the speech abstract you've already written, but remember to revise the material to reflect the suggestions provided by the input team.

Follow the same process as you continue through the outline: Identify the topics you plan to cover in the Exposition, and write a couple of detailed bullets under each. It may help to think of these bullets as "mini-abstracts": Your goal is to come up with a few key points that support each section in the outline.

The Summary section brings it all together: You'll restate the main point introduced at the opening of your remarks, and quickly recap how that point is supported by the research or background materials you've presented.

Outline Review

Next, ask the SME input team to review your outline.

If there are specific areas where you'll need additional input, highlight those bullets and, if possible, assign questions to specific SMEs. Give your team a deadline –

usually a week or so – for getting their comments back (if they're responding via e-mail). Or, pick a date, and set a follow-up conference call when team members can discuss the outline together. Remember to make an audio recording of the follow-up call. It will simplify your note-taking and keep you free to participate during the conference call.

WRITE THE SPEECH

Tone

When you start drafting your presentation, keep in mind that it's intended to be an ORAL communication. You're writing words to be SPOKEN, not read – so use a conversational tone.

Here are some tips to get you started:

- Use the first-person ("I," "we") and second-person ("you") forms of address.
- Write in the active voice ("this technology will fuel explosive growth," NOT "explosive growth will be fueled by this technology").
- Vary the length of sentences – and even use sentence fragments from time to time – to sprinkle conversational cadences into your remarks. ("Why invest in bonds? Simple. They're a solid alternative to ...")

If you've done a thorough job on research, and if you've written (and revised) a detailed outline, you'll probably find most of the tough stuff is done. The message is there. Now, it's just a matter of bringing it to life for your audience. A few tricks of the speechwriting trade can help make that process relatively painless, too.

Opening Secrets

You'll want to open well, of course. But don't get bogged down by the idea that you have to entertain the audience. You simply want to ENGAGE them by establishing some common ground.

There are lots of ways to do that:

If you're a good story-teller, you can open with a joke. But be careful: You may think the joke you heard just last week is as fresh as bread from the oven. But more than likely, it's been around the block a few times (or around the world, thanks to the Internet). And if the audience knows the punch line a full minute before you get around to delivering it, they'll start to tune out before your presentation has even begun. (Tip: Often you can inject new life into even the most ancient of old yarns by turning it into YOUR story. Instead of starting out "Have you heard the one about the traveling salesman who ..." say "That reminds me of my first sales job, when I was fresh out of college ...")

In most cases, do yourself a favor and resist the temptation to start with a joke. Instead, incorporate a brightener or a series of one-liners up front, to help set a friendly tone for your remarks. Here are a couple of proven techniques:

- You can flatter or compliment the audience ...

"I'm happy to be here ... because I find it invigorating to mingle with the up-and-comers in our industry."

OR

"I appreciate the opportunity to address this forum ... and to meet some of the talented people who are tackling the issues surrounding school reform."

- You can use the location of the meeting as a starting point ...

"New Orleans is a great city. But I have to say, I wonder a little bit about the timing of your conference. I mean, really: Who makes plans to arrive in the Big Easy two weeks AFTER Mardi Gras?"

OR

"San Diego is the perfect place for our meeting: It's just far enough down the road from Hollywood ... and Disneyland ... to keep us all from being labeled 'impractical dreamers.'"

- You can even do a little of both ...

"Not to take anything away from Wayne Newton or Siegfried and Roy ... but to me, the real headliners in Las Vegas this week are all of YOU – ACME's customers."

Structure

As you head into the body of your remarks, remember to write so that the structure of your presentation is obvious to listeners throughout. Start by previewing your "take-away" message.

"I'm going to focus today on some recent advances in software and semiconductor technology and how they're combining to make seemingly impossible dreams come true."

It's helpful to provide an audible roadmap for listeners, by using ordinals ("First," "Second," "Third") each time you introduce a new section. If your speech runs 25 minutes or longer, consider briefly recapping some material at strategic points throughout the script. ("We've seen, then, how 'a' and 'b' are true. Now, let's turn to 'c'.")

While you'll certainly want to use facts or examples to bolster your argument, remember that one or two well-chosen statistics are always more persuasive than a laundry list. And present the facts crisply, editing out unnecessary details about the attribution. Say, "As *Business Week* reported last month ..." rather than "As the senior technology writer for *Business Week* noted in the cover story of the June 28 issue ..."

As you look for ways to add interest, don't overuse writing crutches such as famous quotes or dictionary definitions. In most cases, they'll actually detract from your goal. They'll keep the audience from recognizing YOU as an authority on the subject at hand. Instead, sprinkle your remarks with stories – especially stories that stem from your personal experience.

"I wish you could have been there, when we sat across the table from our legendary founder and CEO, trying to convince him that a TV ad would be a couple of million dollars well-spent. I got to be the point-man for that particular bit of wisdom ..."

The Internet can be a timesaving resource when you're looking for ways to spice up your speech with colorful stories. The key word here is "spice": Use material gathered from online resources sparingly – to add flavor, not to serve as the main course.

Conclusion

Last, but not least, make sure you provide a proper conclusion to your presentation. Often, it's simply a matter of recapping the main points you've made.

"I hope you're as intrigued as I am by the challenges and solutions I've outlined here today: First, that consumers will continue to demand smaller and smaller digital devices; second, that their demands create significant technical challenges for the electronics industry; and

finally, that new semiconductor technologies provide a very promising way for companies like ours to deliver the goods."

In other cases, you may need to close the sale ... or include a call to action.

"Your positive attitude will make a big difference in the ultimate success of this pricing initiative. And all of you have an important stake in making it happen. We need the support of the entire sales team. We're counting on your cooperation. And I can't wait to see the results of the transformation we achieve together."

The same principle applies whether you're writing the closing or the opening to your speech. Your primary goal is to engage and persuade the audience, not to entertain or motivate them. Unless you're a very accomplished speaker, you'll probably be better off leaving the pep talks to the pros. So keep your conclusion brief ... keep it conversational ... and above all, keep it friendly and professional.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

Prepare Audio-Visual Support

With the proliferation of Microsoft® PowerPoint® and similar presentation software programs, it's rare to see business presentations that aren't accompanied by on-screen visuals. Unfortunately, easy-to-use presentation software programs have encouraged many speakers to trip themselves up by concentrating on visuals before they crystallize their message.

A good rule of thumb: Put first things first. Write the speech, then prepare the visuals. Doing so will help to ensure that your message can stand on its own. That, in turn, will enhance your credibility as a speaker. Your audience will know that you have something important to

say, and that you're not just acting as a soundtrack for the visuals that appear on the screen.

When you create visuals, be careful to avoid these common "PowerPoint traps":

- Remember that less is more: Resist the temptation to recap your entire talk on the screen, providing slide after slide of "read-along" bullet points for your audience.
- Instead, use visuals (photos, graphs, charts) to help explain complex concepts or novel ideas.
- Limit the use of special effects. Sound effects, fancy "wipes" and "builds," animations, and other presentation features are more likely to distract your audience than to help you drive important points home.
 - Be careful when displaying copyrighted materials (comic strips, photos, movies, etc.). In almost every case, you must have the written permission of the copyright holder to use such materials. In many cases, you'll be required to pay royalties or usage fees in order to obtain permission.

If your speech is part of a larger business meeting or industry conference, check with the meeting producer to see if a presentation template is available (or required) for visuals. A template often includes specific design elements such as the meeting theme or logo. In addition, it may provide a suggested or required color palette for your slides, and suggested or required fonts, type sizes, and slide formats. Check to see if the meeting producer can assist with the creation of your slides or visuals, or direct you to a professional producer.

Format Your Text

Formatting is an often-overlooked step in the preparation of an effective business speech. You can actually increase

your comfort level and enhance your chances for success by taking the time to format the script properly.

There is no single best way to format a speech. The "correct" format is whatever works well for you. But here are some tips to get you started ...

- Increase the point size of the text – to 14 point, 18 point type, or larger.
- Narrow the margins, so that each line of text is no more than 3 to 4 inches wide.
- Double-space the text.
- Avoid ALL CAPS. The speech will be much easier to read when you use both uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Underline key words or phrases, as a reminder to present with inflection.
- Include pacing reminders such as ellipses (...) or non-spoken instructions (Pause) in the text. Use a different font or style for the pacing reminders (e.g., boldface and/or italics) to help set them apart from the words you intend to say out loud.
- If you're using visuals, then include the slide cues in the text but in a different font or style (e.g., boldface and/or italics).
- Include no more than three or four paragraphs on each page ... and insert page breaks at paragraph breaks. This helps to ensure that you've completed a thought before you try to turn the page.

At first, you might think all this "white space" is a waste. But paper is cheap – much less expensive, in fact, than the damage you might do to your career if you stumble over key phrases, or lose your place on the page, when you get up to speak. So be extravagant when formatting your script and give your words room to breathe on the page!

Edit by Practicing Your Speech

One key to writing an effective speech is to recognize that it's intended to be an **ORAL** communication. It's fundamentally different from the reports, memos, or letters you write on the job.

To fine-tune your presentation, you need to read it out loud. That's true, even if you're writing the speech for someone else (e.g., your boss) to deliver. Speaking the words will help you edit the text and prepare for a near-flawless performance.

Here are some ways to use each run-through productively:

- If you find yourself stumbling on a particular phrase, don't assume "practice makes perfect." You may have inadvertently included a tongue twister in your text. When a word or phrase trips you up, re-write it ... with an ear toward making it easier to say.
- Try to present in front of a "practice" audience (e.g., coworkers, your spouse, your kids). Watch for their reaction: Notice when they chuckle. Notice when they nod in agreement. Notice when they start to squirm. Use all those clues to help you tighten and polish your text.
- Time your presentation, to make sure you're staying within the slot allotted. Use the "Word Count" feature on your word processing program to help measure your speaking pace. If it takes 28 minutes to present a 3,500-word speech ... then you'll know you need to cut about 375 words in order to fit your talk into a 25-minute slot on the agenda.

MARKET YOUR SPEECH ... AFTER-THE-FACT

By the time your speech is delivered, it's probably going to have consumed a lot more time and effort than you expected. But remember: You're not just writing a speech. You're making an investment in your career. Most large companies consider public-speaking skills a valuable asset in their employees. You're more likely to get noticed – and get promoted – if you learn how to make persuasive presentations before live audiences.

You can increase the return on your investment in a speech if you do just a little work after-the-fact to market your words of wisdom. For starters, make sure you forward a "final" copy to your supervisor (and her supervisor), with a brief recap of how the audience received the talk. (Remember to create a "standard type" version of the speech, eliminating the special formatting, before you share the text with others.)

The final draft gives you a great chance to network, too. Send an "FYI" copy to everyone on your input team, along with a note of thanks ... and offer to return the favor when the team members are themselves asked to write or give speeches. Send an e-mail to the editor of your employee newsletter, too, providing a brief report on the talk, the venue, and how the speech was received.

To expand the impact of your networking, send a copy of the speech, with a cover note, to the editors of key industry publications. You can also offer the presentation to "speech reprint" publications such as *Vital Speeches of the Day*, and *Executive Speeches*. (URLs for these publications are provided in the "RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET" section.) And, of course, if your talk generates external coverage, be sure to let your colleagues and supervisor know.

Finally, think about ways to use your experience as a successful speaker (and speechwriter) to advance your career. Having written a speech, you now understand the process. And there are things you can do to **STREAMLINE** the process the next time you're asked to develop or deliver a presentation.

Look at each speech as a chance to create or expand your presentation database.

- Keep your notes on file – especially when you come across references or Web sites that provide lots of useful information.
- Start collecting great stories. When you see an interesting item in a newspaper or magazine, keep a copy for your files.
- As you get more comfortable with speaking, look for more opportunities to present. In fact, you may want to consider developing two or three "stump" speeches, on topics that are valuable to your company (e.g., workforce diversity, employee education, community involvement, etc.). A well-prepared stump speech allows you present the same basic information to a variety of audiences, requiring just minor tweaking or tailoring of the talk's introduction and conclusion.

Remember: Public speaking literally puts you (and your career) in the spotlight. It's a great way to separate yourself from the crowd. So the next time you're asked to give a speech, take full advantage of the opportunity. By following a proven work plan and relying on a little help from your friends, you can write – and market – your talk in a way that gets you noticed.

RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

For Background and Research

Business.com

A business directory and search engine, to help you find information about specific companies or products

<http://www.business.com>

Google.com

Powerful, yet simple-to-use search engine for locating information on almost any subject

<http://www.google.com>

Hoover's Online

Business directory, providing concise summaries and news reports about specific companies (with detailed information available by subscription)

<http://www.hoovers.com>

Internet Public Library

A well-organized online library that includes a reference center, reading room, subject collections, and searching tools

<http://www.ipl.org>

Refdesk.com

A free, fact-finding site that includes a trivia collection, current events topic, and large news section

<http://www.refdesk.com>

Yahoo!

General purpose search engine, also offering Web site directories on specific topics (including Business & Economy)

<http://www.yahoo.com>

For Humorous Stories and Jokes

(Note: You will find some excellent jokes appropriate for business presentations on these sites, but be aware that you will also find jokes that may be offensive to some people.)

AhaJokes.com

Thousands of jokes, cartoons, pictures, and random humor, all searchable by keyword

<http://ahajokes.com>

The Devil's Dictionary

A treasury of sarcastic definitions, inspired by Ambrose Bierce

<http://members.tripod.com/DevilsDictionary>

JokeCenter.com

Jokes old and new, listed in more than 30 different categories, including Business Jokes

<http://www.jokecenter.com>

Jokes? Got Them!

20+ categories of jokes, including a listing of Top-Rated Jokes

<http://jokes.gotthem.com>

For Quotations

BrainyQuote

Over 38,000 quotes by 10,000 authors, browsable by topic

www.brainyquote.com

The Quotations Page

Searchable database of over 15,000 quotations

<http://www.quotationspage.com>

Quoteland.com

Quotation database, searchable by topic and including a "quote identification" engine

<http://www.quoteland.com>

For Definitions and Synonyms

Dictionary.com

Lexico Publishing Group's online dictionary and thesaurus

<http://dictionary.reference.com>

Merriam-Webster Online

Search for definitions or synonyms in either the M-W Dictionary or the M-W Thesaurus

<http://www.m-w.com.htm>

For Translations of Foreign Words and Phrases

FreeTranslation

Get translations of foreign words, phrases, or even entire passages (up to 10,000 characters).

<http://www.freetranslation.com>

TravLang Travel & Language Center

Dozens of languages available for translating words or phrases

<http://dictionaries.travlang.com>

Speechwriting Resources

Internet Reference Desk

Links to resources such as historical speeches and various writing guides, provided by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress

<http://www.cnie.org/nle/info-7/aaspeech.html>

Speech Reprint Publications

The Executive Speaker Company
Speaker's newsletter, reprint journal, and other resources
for business speakers
www.executive-speaker.com

Vital Speeches of the Day
Archives and contact information for the magazine
www.votd.com

Professional Speechwriters

Corporate Speeches
<http://www.uptimeaudio.com/SpeechHome.htm>

CorpWrite Ltd.
<http://www.corpwrite.com>

OverViews
<http://www.speechwriting.com>

Verbal Image
<http://www.verbalimage.com>

RESOURCES IN THE LIBRARY

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Dowis, Richard. *The Lost Art of the Great Speech: How to Write One – How to Deliver It*. New York, NY: AMACOM Books, 2000.

Frothingham, Andrew. *Last Minute Speeches and Toasts*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2001.

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