

Crafting Your Message – The “IT” Method™

By Bob ‘Idea Man’ Hooey, AS

The IT! Method™ is an exercise to help you **develop the content** of your presentation.

In computer jargon ‘I.T.’ usually indicates information technology. In that same sense, when you are speaking, you are imparting or transmitting knowledge or information. Let's use that same acronym to help build the components of your successful presentation.

The IT! Method, as I envision it, has five basic components or sequences to follow.

- **Thunder Think™ IT! (See Bob’s ‘Why didn’t I THINK of That?’)**
- **Re-group IT!**
- **Fine-Tune IT!**
- **Spice IT up!**
- **Do IT!**

Thunder Think IT!

This is your chance to brainstorm: capture ideas, concepts and information. Brainstorming is a method for developing creative solutions to problems -- your goal here, is to think freely, putting everything that you may want to say down on paper or on your screen.

You can brainstorm on your own, but often a small group brainstorming together can really augment this creative process. Over the years I have found the power of combining brains to be an effective tool in problem solving, business planning and development, and lately in creating customized, effective presentations for my various audiences across North America.

Yellow sticky notes, such as Post-its™, give the creative process great fertility. You can brainstorm more freely when not hampered by a linear outline or a sequentially generated form.

With your topic identified, and the yellow sticky notes in hand, capture any and all:

- Ideas
- Facts
- Related stories
- Examples
- Jokes or funny connections
- Personal experiences
- Miscellaneous

Yellow sticky everything and anything that relates to your subject perhaps flavored by the particular audience. Don’t be concerned about relating all of your ideas or whether you even plan to use all of the generated ideas. Just capture all of the ideas – one per yellow sticky! Collect the ideas and stick ALL of them on a flipchart.

Try to keep your left-brain (your internal editor) out of this brainstorming process. This activity is strictly a right-brain function – pure free-association, idea-generation.... **FUN!**

TIP: Brainstorming works best when a time limit is established.

Re-group IT!

Now step back mentally from this field of yellow sticky notes and do what you might naturally do – put the notes in-groups!

Group your ideas on the notes according to the natural associations you see in the material. Do not force every idea into a category: some will be left over. If you've ever done Mind Mapping this is very similar in process. What parts (notes) relate to each other and form natural groups?

TIP: If you find that a category has more than 10 notes, consider whether it should really be more than one category!

After you group the sticky notes, give each group a name or title.

Next, ask yourself the question: “Given this particular audience, which of these groups do I want them to hear about first, in the body of the presentation, second, third,” and so on. Try to keep the number of groups relatively small. Many people believe that three is the ideal number of points around which to organize your presentation. this is not an absolute! Just try to keep it simple.

Save the unused groups. They may provide input for other parts of the presentation. These groups also can provide a source for the question-and-answer period of the presentation and may be used in future presentations on the same subject to other audiences. They can also form the foundation for additional presentations or articles – works for me!

Look at all of the sticky notes generated from the brainstorming and see what categories or groups you can come up with. Write these in large circles on the flipchart. Ask the group to help decide which ideas go into which group.

Fine-Tune IT!

Applying sound simplicity principles, trim the ideas within each group and put them into a logical order. Remember, even though many experts believe three is the ideal number, you are not bound to it.

Go back to your presentation strategy and review your position, desired actions and listener benefits. Make sure you define these items in your presentation.

Usually, the desired actions and listener benefits should be stated and restated in the introduction and in the conclusion.

Spice IT up!

You are now ready to add some ‘spice’ to your presentation framework! The purpose of spice is to add memorability, en-liven, aid retention, and otherwise provide interesting relief and reinforcement of your program or message. Use it wisely – but use it!

Spice it all! Don’t forget to spice the beginning or the ending or conclusion– remember that the opening and the closing thoughts or statements are the most important items in the presentation. And, given my understanding, are the items most likely to be ‘remembered’ by your audiences.

Identify where the “peaks” and ‘valleys’ of the presentation are, and what type of spice could be added to the “new” or ‘improved’ presentation.

These are the contents of your “**Spice Cupboard:**”

- **Stories** – that convey emotion and grab their attention and encapsulate the lessons. Make sure to use your own stories. If you share something from another source – credit it!
- **Quotes** – that reinforce or remind them of your message
- **Facts** – to substantiate or reinforce your credibility on the platform
- **Props** – that help illustrate or command attention
- **Costumes** – if they enhance your presentation and illustrate your point
- **Handouts** – that give solid value and follow up information, or are a part of the session
- **Audio** – sound bites and background music to assist in lesson or setting moods
- **Video** – illustrate a point, introduce another concept or expert into the mix
- **Slides** – overheads, or PowerPoint that are used as a tool to reinforce, remind, or help the audience visualize something you as the speaker are saying.

Remember, and thing you use from your ‘Spice Cupboard’ is only there to support and make what you say more impact full, easier to understand, or more memorable. If it overshadows you as the speaker – reduce its use or eliminate it entirely. **The audience wants to hear and see you, not a slick slide show.**

Do IT!

Now that all of the planning work has been done, the presenter must write, and edit, edit, edit before developing the visuals or other aids to accompany the presentation.

Building the foundation and organization or structure using the IT method is the start. To bring your presentation to fruition and effectively present it takes additional thought and polishing as you flesh it out and prepare it in its final form. **Good luck in your quest.**

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