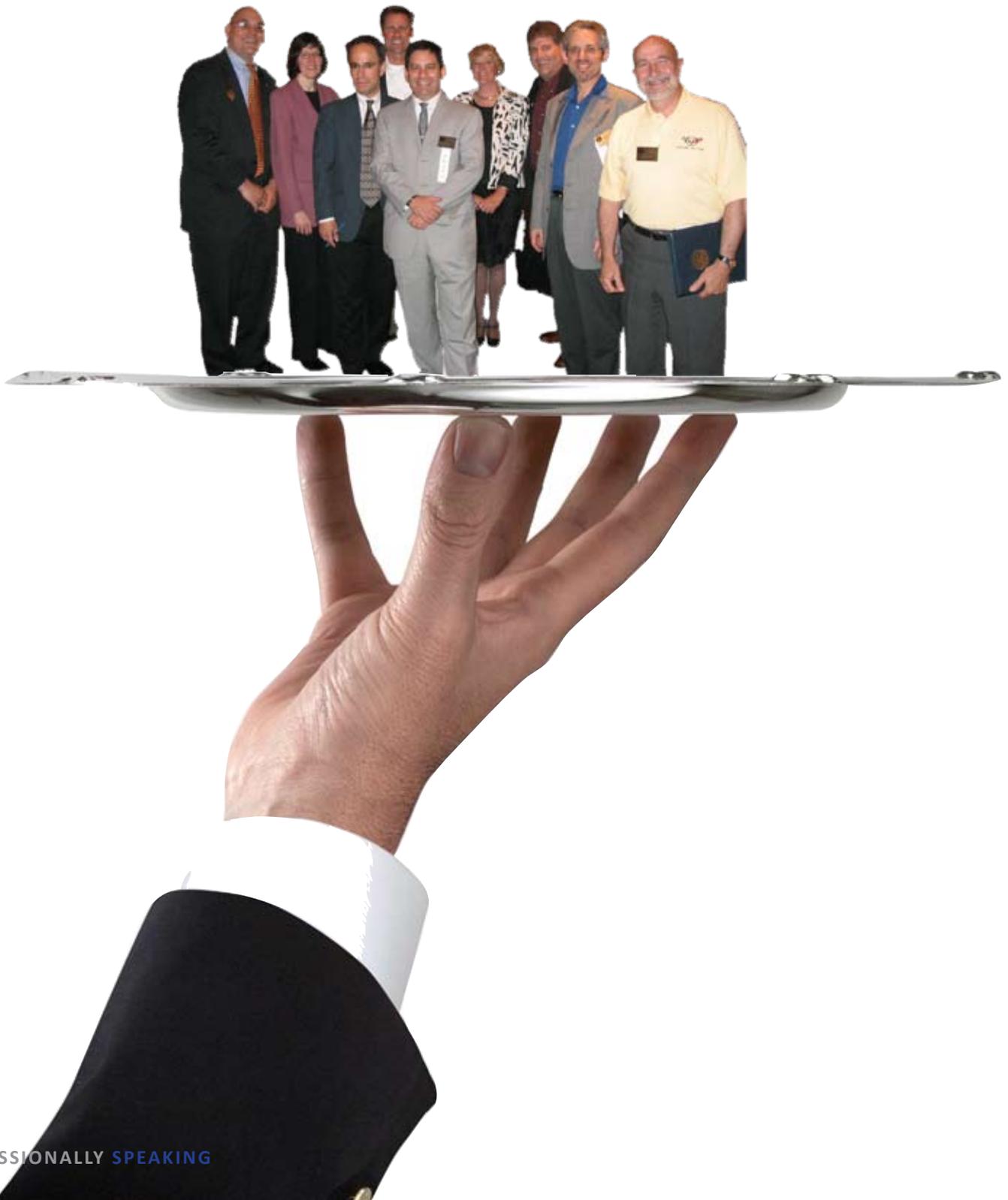


# PROFESSIONAL SPEAKER... AT YOUR SERVICE!

*Customer Service For Speakers 101*

*By Craig Harrison*



You don't have to speak on customer service to be service-oriented as a speaker. There are ample ways you, as a service provider, can separate yourself from the competition through your service orientation. Meeting planners, bureaus and other decision-makers will greatly appreciate your attention to customer service. Your reward: more hirings!

Customer service is about ease and flow. Make it effortless for people to find, remember, hire and work with you.

### Are You Easy?

First, they have to be able to find you. How many ways do you appear to the world of potential clients? In the phone book? Via websites — your own as well as NSA's and NSA/NC's? Through associations, partnerships, web portals, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace and sites specific to your clients? Through articles, advertisements, or frequently read electronic bulletin boards? Do you produce a column, recurring webinars, teleseminars, e-zines, or blog entries? Visibility and consistency are key. The more regularly you are seen, the easier it is for people to contact you when they're ready.

### They'll Never Forget What's-Her-Name

Is your company name easy to spell or remember? If you rely on your last name and it's hard to spell, use a mnemonic, acronym or other device to implant your name in peoples' memory banks for easy retrieval. For example, speaker Dilip Abayasekara explains: "Dilip sounds like Philip; the first three consonants of Abayasekara mimic the first three letters in Spanish or French: Ah-Bay-Say, to which one can add Kuh - Ruh."

Does your toll-free number spell something memorable and relevant? What about people who can't spell? Consider meta-tags and registering domain names that mimic popular misspellings of your name or company name (and that redirect to your primary site).

### So You're a Speaker...What's Your Point?

Are the benefits you provide obvious? Telling them you're a speaker, trainer or astronaut is useful, but what does it do for them? If the benefit of hiring you is not obvious, then they're less likely to. It's that simple. What's special about you? Make sure you know — and show — your claim to fame. Learn to speak the language of benefits, solutions and outcomes. Don't make people stop to translate your features into benefits.

People are looking for professionals who can make or save them money, save them time, improve efficiency, enhance esteem, teach new skills, improve their health or even lengthen their lifespan. What solutions can you provide? How clearly are you telling people through collateral materials (business card, one-sheet, article tag lines, phone messages and e-mail signature files)?

### Don't Be a Phonie!

Is your outgoing phone message service-oriented? Care for your caller before you actually speak to them through a well-conceived outgoing message. Is the voice friendly and intelligible? Is the information pertinent? Do you tell them how they can bypass your outgoing message if they want to? Is it obvious who they've reached? What's your call-back policy? Are you honoring it? Let them know you're glad they called, instruct them on alternate ways of reaching you, and let them know the duration of the message they can leave. All of this demonstrates a strong customer service orientation.

### Is Yours a Tangled Web?

Effective speaker websites offer excellent customer service 24/7. They contain detailed information on topics, background, credentials, references and even availability. Some quote fees; some showcase audio or video clips; many offer free downloads of learning tools or articles. Many sell products, or link to sites where their products can be bought, such as through Amazon.com. This content makes your site service-oriented, anticipating the needs of your visitors, providing answers to their frequently asked questions.

There are even more ways your site can be service-oriented:

- Is your one-sheet viewable and/or downloadable from your site as a PDF?
- Are prospects encouraged to forward the link from your website's video to others for viewing?
- Is there a questionnaire to fill out for parties interested in retaining you for their events or programs?

### Service Through One-Stop Shopping

Alternately, is there an easy way to e-mail, fax or call you to ascertain your fees, availability and fit for an upcoming program? Is contact information on all pages of your website? Your speaker calendar can immediately signify your availability. Make it easy for clients to engage you.

Are high- and low-resolution photographs of you available for downloading? Ditto introductions, room set-up requirements, or related equipment needs. Each serves a need for your customer.

A downloadable pre-event questionnaire or survey makes the process very efficient for your clients. This shows your foresight, desire to customize, and professionalism. It also orients them to relevant issues they may not have been aware of. Keep fill-in-the-blanks to a minimum, giving people check-off boxes whenever possible.

As websites become more labyrinthine, does your site have a site map or search engine to help people find their way? Consider the merits of one or both.

## They're Your Customer, Even Before You're Hired

Customer service means more than giving customers what they want. Anticipate what they might want, and help them understand what they do — and don't — want.

Some speakers devote web space to tip sheets for how to pick the right speaker or questions to ask when shopping for speakers. The goal isn't to convert every inquiry into an engagement for you, it's to help inquiring parties make the best decision for their event, which may or may not mean hiring you every time. Service-oriented speakers guide prospects through the process with care and concern. In doing so, they establish trust and earn credibility.

## Walk Your Talk

Your prompt attention to the needs of meeting planners and other decision makers demonstrates professionalism. When customers ask CSP, CPAE and Cavett award winner Patricia Fripp for a video, audio, or other deliverable, she responds in three words: "Consider it done!" Then she makes sure it is done. When you under-promise and over-deliver you exceed expectations.

## Having It Your Way Too

Service-oriented speakers let those who hire them know in advance how best to set up their rooms for success: location of stage, microphones, tables, screens, flip charts, projectors, etc. Your floor plan explains where they need the aisles, audience seating, etc. By sharing this in advance, planners are oriented to the issues of most importance to speakers and are thus better able to insure a successful event by attending to these details.

## Wear Many Hats

Recognize that you are more than "a speaker." There are myriad ways you can help clients off-stage. Show them they have booked a real professional who is their partner in meeting their goals for a successful event — beyond just giving your speech or training.

Help clients clarify overall goals for their event. Ask them questions they may not have thought about, or

articulated to others yet. Help them focus. What is the overall theme? How else can you support this theme? Make yourself available before and after your presentation for additional responsibilities: management briefings, coaching sessions, special presentations, media interviews, photo shoots, and more. Offer to pen a follow-up article for their newsletter, subscribe their employees to your free e-zine upon request, or post supplemental information to their website or yours. Refer other service-oriented colleagues!

## And the Survey Says...

As professionals we should always seek feedback. Contact the meeting planner or hiring contact after your presentation to debrief. The insights revealed help both parties. A commitment to continuous improvement is an important part of your service orientation.

## Last Impressions

Approach every new client with the intention of their being a client for life. Strive to make a great first impression — then make the last impression after each presentation just as memorable. Whether you send a thank-you note or gift, or schedule a follow-up lunch, ensure the aftertaste is sweet!

When you see everything you do through the lens of providing great customer service to your clients, you will delight in finding new and creative ways to do so. Keep it up, and you'll be rewarded with call-backs, referrals, and more!



*Craig Harrison began delivering great customer service at the age of 11 when he went door-to-door in dispensing Used Jokes in the neighborhoods of Berkeley. His firm Expressions of Excellence!™ provides sales and service solutions. For information on keynotes, training, coaching, curricula for licensing and more, call 510.547.0664, visit [www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](http://www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com) or e-mail him at [Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com](mailto:Craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com).*



# PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING



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