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Perfecting Your Pitch

Guest was Marie Perruchet

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Creating a Perfect Pitch

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Transcription of Interview

Joe Dager: *Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Marie Perruchet. She is a former journalist and news correspondent for the BBC and other international media outlets. A communications and media expert with extensive experience in storytelling, public speaking, presenting on stage and in front of the camera. Marie is the founder of the agency, 'One Perfect Pitch,' which also happens to be the title of her new book. Marie welcome to the podcast, and tell me, coincidental or not - the name of the book and the company? Why so?*

Marie Perruchet: *Well, you know about the Rule of 3, right? The IBM, CNN, the color of the flags, the 3 Musketeers, the 3 little pigs... So as I advise it to some of my clients, I went to this Website, which is a cloud sourcing name company to find your business name, and I wanted a name with a component of 3 words. Because I'm very competitive, I wanted to have the number 1, and because I work with many entrepreneurs to help them on their pitch, I wanted to have the 'pitch.' The cloud sourcing people helped me to find that name and then when McGraw-Hill pitched the book project to me, they really liked the name of the company of my consulting business, so they suggested we use it for the book. And it's been great because it's a name that really sticks with people to get back to the perfect word for the pitch. You only need one pitch that's perfect once.*

Joe: *Your book combines storytelling with the pitch and the vernacular of sales and marketing, maybe we should start the podcast out by hearing your definition of a pitch.*

Marie: My perfect definition of a pitch, of a perfect pitch, is how to tell about an idea in a very simple, clear, and precise way.

Joe: *It's not necessarily that sales pitch.*

Marie: What do you mean by the sales pitch, you know? You're always selling yourself. You're selling your skills. You're selling your time. You're selling yourself, your product, your business, your idea. You're always selling in a way, and it can mean in a very soft way or in a very conversational way. But as long as it's simple and it helps you to get an introduction to land a new business or promotion, yes, that's a sales pitch.

Joe: *Well, how does storytelling fit into it? I mean how does that differ when you're pitching or does it at all?*

Marie: What I usually say is that the pitch is the snapshot of your bigger story. So you are a business owner, as an entrepreneur, you've been creating your business, and you've had many struggles or you get to that position and it took you so many years, so you want to explain your entire story but you don't have the time or the luxury to spend 4 hours next to the fireplace. How can you just say it in a few seconds or under a minute, just one piece, one snapshot of that story? And what is storytelling? It's a technique that everybody should use, and you're only using it when you're going to your family's dinner place, or you're telling your friend what happened last week when you got that parking ticket. So, it's telling a story. Every day is telling a story. Except that when you're telling it for

business, it needs to be very, very short and in a very short format that will get people's attention.

Joe: *Everybody says we learn by stories. I mean we all know that, right? But it is tough to craft a story, okay? I mean, not all of us are storytellers, or are we?*

Marie: Yes. Everybody's a storyteller. You know you started out, when you go to the American public school system or even private system, you start with the show and tell. You're a kid; you're in kindergarten, and you have to bring a plush toy and tell why this plush toy is interesting to your classmates. Because they have a very short attention span, you better make it quick. As I was saying, at dinner parties, cocktail events, networking events, you're telling about what happened to you, what you did during the book. So it's a story, and you are trying to make it exciting because nobody likes to hear when you ask the question, 'so what's up with you,' and people say 'nothing.' It's not fun.

The mistake that I've seen working business executives, recent graduates from Stanford, from Yale, from Harvard, and startup entrepreneurs, the mistakes, the mistakes they do whether they're from Jordan, from Chile, from Japan, from France, from the U.S., they don't have a story or they think that they need some time and effort, so they overlook it, and they don't do it. Or they forget that their audience is a person, and they think, oh we are selling a very techie product so we cannot find a story. Yes, you do. Because behind a product, there's a team, there's a person that went through different phases of iteration to come up with the perfect product that they want to sell to a specific audience.

So, how do you do it? First, you need to know whom you need to convince. Who's your target audience? Because you cannot serve the same pitch, the same story to everyone. We want an audience to feel special; very special. The story, why it's so hard to craft is

because people think that they need hours and hours. No, a story can be told in under a minute. When I used to work for the radio, you had to write and craft a story in 40 seconds, or in 60 seconds, so there's so much you can say. And how you do it, you need to love what you're doing because the passion that you have, you will convey in a much better way if you like what you do. One question I could ask you, Joe, is, to craft your story, what prompted to start the Business901 Podcast?

Joe: *Oh, I mean really what started it was I wanted to reach out and learn from some people and it was actually a market... Well, I take that back. It was actually the first podcast was a marketing campaign that I ran for someone for their speakers in a trade show, in a conference that was coming up and I interviewed 4 or 5 of their speakers. I enjoyed it, and I had a lot of fun doing it.*

Marie: And why did you enjoy it?

Joe: *I enjoyed the learning where I was going before with it. I enjoyed the learning aspect of it. It gave me the opportunity to talk to wonderful people that I would never have the opportunity to talk to without the podcast, such as you.*

Marie: Yes. So that's a kind of story that makes us relate because we understand where you're coming from and what you've observed going to that trade show and realized that yes, I love it, I like to learn, I like to highlight speakers who have expertise. Then because maybe myself, I've had the idea of starting a podcast inside my company, or I've been to many trade shows, and I found that the people I was talking to are so interesting, so I've juggled a few ideas to find a way to put them on the stage or write a blog post about them. What you're sharing now, lots of people can easily relate to your work, and that helps us to remember what you do and the value that you bring to your audience.

Joe: *I think you do that so well in the book because what you do is you make creating that perfect pitch is really, you make it a personal experience by asking people to get their friends involved, to tell an experience about even their childhood and kind of a story about themselves. And at the end of the book, it seemed to be a story about their business. Is that kind of how the book's laid out?*

Marie: Yes, because when you think of the beginning of the century. So 16th century in France, one of the greatest fairy tale tellers in Europe was actually in the king's court, and he was telling stories about what was happening in the villages. So the story was meant to be shared; to educate a specific audience, the population, and entertain them. In the US, you have many festivals, you know in Johannesburg, or around storytelling. You have this initiative that I love which is called 'story corps.' And so family tells their story to a journalist and then it's being kept and that time you can share their own story with other members of the family. So a story, if it's just to be kept to yourself, it's not a story. It's probably a monologue or maybe a rambling. But there's warmth, there's a hospitality thing, there something that I like in the storytelling that is meant to be shared.

You have your own story, and because you go through many professional experiences in your life, the struggles that are universal and we were talking about how you created the Business901 podcast. You think your own story is so unique, so personal; you're so special because probably that's what your parents told you since from a very young age. But no, you're facing the same struggle. Finding the name for your company, finding your first client, you cannot pay the bills at the end of the month, you get a fine, or you get a parking ticket, you cannot find the exact location for your vacation because you need to find a compromise. How do you overcome that struggle? How do you find a solution? It's very universal, and when you're looking at for example the Cinderella stories, the first

Cinderella story was found back in 5th Century in China. Cinderella starts with the death of the mother and we can all relate. We all know somebody in our family who lost their mom at a very young age, or people of friends of friends. What are the choices that Cinderella is making after? That's why you start with yourself and see through the different experiences in your professional life, what you experienced, how you overcame, and how it translates into a business story. Because behind a business, behind a product, behind a service, there's a team of people, there's a person who's trying to grow what they believe in.

Joe: *Should I try to master like one story structure? I mean like a heroes' journey or something like that and repeat it and repeat it until I get good at it? How should I do that?*

Marie: When you're telling a story, what's great is to have the foundation and that's what the book 'One Perfect Pitch' provides. There's structure. There's a hook, there's development, and there's an end. That's the typical narrative. But what's important is because we now have to communicate in shorter and shorter formats, you know you're pitching at a networking event, and suddenly you're maybe 2 minutes into your story, and somebody comes and steals the attention of the audience. That's why you need to be able to tell your story in chunks, and you need to have those chunks very, very much repeated, and rehearsed, and practiced.

The method I like to use is the 'Lego.' You know, you're on 5th Avenue, you go to this Lego store, those incredible structures and monuments from all around the world, so each piece by itself works. But together, it's very beautiful. Your pitch is the same. Each part should be rehearsed is that you can practice them and tell them in any situation, under pressure, on the spot.

Joe: *We should practice these stories. We should practice them within the organization.*

Should we have a storytelling hour?

Marie: Yes, you should. I know it's hard to organize because there are a lot of misconceptions about the myths of storytelling. You don't need to turn on the fire pit and grill the marshmallows.

Most people think they have no story, but they just need to look under the carpet because they have a story. A story is always true. You don't need to invent. You just need to look and reflect and find it. There's the method in the book too, to find it. Doing it in an organization, it needs somebody who can moderate it and offer feedback.

To your question of how can we do that in an organization, yes you need practice, practice until you get it. The image that I like to use, like when you're driving. The first time you learn how to drive, you're maybe earlier than 16, if you do it with your parents or a member of your family on a parking lot or in any parking lot, or if you're 16 or 18, at the beginning, you're very stressed. You're around the wheel and of course, your parents are very stressed because they're scared. But then, after many, many miles or many, many kilometers, at our age, we are doing things that we're not supposed to do when driving that I won't mention, but we all know what they are.

When you're pitching, it's the same. You should be able to pitch and then react to what the audience is feeling; if they're taking out their phone, checking their Twitter feed, and then making sure that you're really talking about them. Also, why it is important to practice is because you're creating those reflexes and then it boosts your confidence, and you're able to really think about the audience and be much more convincing.

Joe: *How can I give a storyteller good feedback? Paying attention would be one thing,*

right?

Marie: When I arrived to the US 8 years ago, when I started giving feedback to entrepreneurs, I think I was very tough on them, quite harsh even, because I was going directly for the kill and I would tell them exactly what was wrong, and I've learned how to do it in a very soft way which is not belittling the person, but finding out their strengths first and then offering negative, constructive feedback in the middle, and then finishing with let's look at the bigger picture, and that's how you did it. But why is it hard to give feedback is because you have to be on the outside of the problem. Many times, I've observed when you're working with a line of 30 entrepreneurs belonging to an incubator or an accelerator startup, it's a program where entrepreneurs spend 2 to 3 months, and they get feedback, and they get resources. The problem is that when one person gives feedback, they're trying to resolve their own problem, and I find it wrong because when you're giving feedback, you should entirely have this empathy to really focus on the problem that the person or the entrepreneur is facing, so that's why it's really hard. And being a journalist, being a former journalist really helped me because you're always on the outside. You want to create your story, but you don't want to be involved. You're trying to find the elements that are great and are going to help the person progress in their story.

What's also hard, besides many people are not on the outside and having this perspective is when you're giving feedback, you need to be extremely, extremely precise. First, because you don't want a person to take it personally, if you're very precise in your feedback, let's say, okay so you wasted your first 15 seconds rambling and excusing yourself, but if you started by seeing hey I'm Marie, I'm the CEO of One Perfect Pitch, and I'm here to tell you my story. Yes, that's very powerful. So instead of telling, oh yes, your first 15 seconds were not convincing... You have to tell them, okay this is the word that you used, this is the filling word that you used 3 times, and then for 5 seconds, you lost me

because you're not using the title of your company saying all those precise words that help the person understand where they can improve.

Another way to give feedback is using the video recording. It's very powerful. I know most of us hate it. We hate seeing ourselves because we are the worst judges of ourselves and there's always a difference between what your brain receives and the image that you're watching on the screen. You're thinking, oh I'm not doing great, but that's the best way to improve and seeing in terms of content, so the story and the pitch, but also in terms of body language, how you're doing.

To summarize it, to give feedback, it's skill. It takes time. But if you're really willing to help the person, and it's important, and crucial, and fundamental to be as precise as possible and name the moment, the exact details where the person should have and get better and should have improved.

Joe: *You mentioned that you work with a lot of startups, and when we think of a pitchy anymore, we think of it more of like a pitch to investors? What's the takeaway a startup can take from the book?*

Marie: A startup can get many valuable takeaways from that book; depending on the level they're at. It can be a startup, an entrepreneur, a business executive, a CEO, a non-native English speaker, or somebody who was born overseas. And I've identified 3 levels, depending on your investment on the pitch. The first level, you have no pitch. The second level, you have no story. The third level, you need to refine both your story and your pitch. That's usually the 1% of the population because they've been pitching so many times, their pitch is good, but they still need to refine it.

If you're level 1, and you have no pitch, what's the one takeaway you should remember is that you need to hook your audience in less than 10 seconds. Because even though your story after that is bad or you're rambling, at least you have their attention. And why those first few seconds are important, because your audience, the person you're talking to, your subject is going to be seduced if they think that your beginning is great, and they want to pay attention for the next hour. But if you don't polish those first few seconds, they will think that maybe it's not worth their time pursuing the conversation. If you're a first timer, if you have no pitch, at least start right away. Don't waste some time thanking people or telling about what you've been working at. Start straight and you hook what's important for your audience.

Level 2, if you have no story, what's the one takeaway that you should remember is that you need a structure when you're pitching. A structure, so it means what's your hook? There's an image that I like to use. A story has a narrative structure. You start with the storm was the struggle the solution is the rainbow, and then the pot of gold. What is this transformation here? And I like the transformation effect because, for many, many entrepreneurs, they're trying to change an industry. Storytelling is about your struggle, and then you find a solution, and then there was a transformation that impacted a whole ton, a whole industry, an entire family, customers, users. The takeaway for level 2, when you have no story, you need to be able to structure it.

Level 3, if you already have a story, you have a good pitch, you're kind of professional, but you need to refine it. But most of the time, what's missing is that you need to convey much more passion that you do. You need to make your stream. You need to make them excited about what you're doing, and you need to connect with your audience. What's important to them, what was important to you that you relate to what's important to them. That's the one takeaway for level 3 when you're already used to pitch, but you need to

refine it.

But if I want to summarize it for everyone, the very one takeaway for everyone is to be very precise in what you're saying because if you're using jargon, we won't be able to first remember, tell about what you're doing to others. Because even if you're pitching to investors, those investors, they need to convince and pitch their limited partners. You're convincing your boss, and your boss needs to pitch to their boss to get your project approved or to get your promotion. It's always about how can you simplify it for someone so that they can tell your stories to somebody else. If you're precise, the person will be more likely to remember and to be precise, I mean giving an exact number given the industry you're in. Instead of saying oh we've built a technology. No, we've built an application. We've built a Website. We've had 100,000 users. No. You've managed to get 100,000 users in 3 days. So that's why you're making it exciting, and that's why people can remember it, can relate, and can share it with others, because what's the point if they're not able to share it with others.

Joe: *If I'm an investor listening, should I be looking for the preciseness or should I be looking for authenticity? I mean how do I know that I'm just not here in a pit?*

Marie: When you're an investor, how do you know if a person is conveying authenticity, is very genuine, and not trying to hide facts or numbers that are not true. The interpreter has done his or her homework. If they're precise if they get very animated, and they show the struggles, their vision, they're showing their dream; the investor will know that the person is worth taking a closer look at. Because investors, they listen. For large companies, they listen to what? 10 pitches per day and they receive hundreds of emails, but you know probably in person, 6 to 10 people per day. They used to know how to read an interpreter. If the interpreter is able to convey the struggles they faced, what they observed and what

makes it relevant to build a business today, yes the investor will know that it's true and authentic. But on the other hand, if the investor in some cases doesn't seem to understand, maybe this investor is not a good fit for you. So, go find an investor that will understand your story.

Joe: *What is upcoming for the One Perfect Pitch platform? Are you teaching this to others?*

Marie: What I'm looking to achieve is to do more straightening for companies. I teach workshops. I lead workshops for incubators, for corporations. I was at Adobe a few weeks ago. I'm going to London Seed Camp next month. So yes, I'm looking to spread the storytelling techniques so that more and more businesses and entrepreneurs can grow their business. Because they're in a transition, they're not able maybe to articulate that story, they're trying to enter a new market, they want to stand out. Storytelling techniques are great to help them grow their business, and that's what I want to achieve in the coming month, in the coming years because I love storytelling. I've been in storytelling from a very young age. You know, growing in Normandy, you get to know about all the Vikings battles. The field trip is you get to the tapestry of the Queen Mathilde. And then you get into journalism, and you get to tell stories for the media. And here in Silicone Valley, that's where I learned that I could change the way people would tell their story and be able to convince an audience of the value of their business.

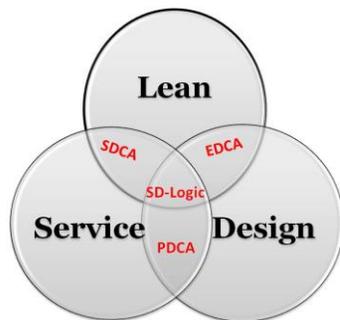
Joe: *Where can someone find out more about the book and connect with you?*

Marie: If you want to know more about the book, you can find it and buy it at Barnes and Nobles, on Amazon, and you can find it at your local bookstore. If you want to connect personally with me, and I would love that, please send me an email at _

marie@oneperfectpitch.com. You can also subscribe to our newsletter where you'll receive lots of tips and video reviews of pitches. And leave us a review wherever you buy the book. I would love to hear from you.

Joe: *Well I would like to thank you very much. This podcast would be available on the Business901 iTunes store and the Business901 website. Thanks everyone for listening.*

Marie: Thank you very much, Joe.



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Joe Dager is President of Business901, a firm specializing in bringing the continuous improvement process to the sales and marketing arena. He takes his process thinking of over thirty years in marketing within a wide variety of industries and applies it through Lean Marketing and Lean Service Design.

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