

31,262 views | Nov 23, 2012, 11:29pm

# Every Entrepreneur Needs to Master Public Speaking



**Martin Zwilling** Contributor ⓘ

*I provide pragmatic advice and services to entrepreneurs and startups.*

As a mentor for aspiring and early-stage entrepreneurs, I talk to a fair number who may have a great vision and a strong engineering background, but have a negative interest in the role of public speaking in business. In fact, they often claim to be part of the survey group that fears public speaking more than death, but I'm not sure how anyone could validate that survey.



Steve Jobs at Stanford, 2005, via Facebook

Beyond the fear, many really don't get the value of being willing and able to communicate effectively with team members, investors, customers, and a myriad of other support people, both one-on-one and one-to-many. I'm not suggesting that all have to be on the professional speaker circuit to succeed, but let me assure you that public speaking is a required business skill.

Thus, if you are like me, with no real background or experience in public speaking, I encourage you to start early with some traditional training, like a [Dale Carnegie](#) course, or read a good book on the subject, like the one just released by successful businesswoman and speaker Jan Yager, Ph.D., "[The Fast Track Guide to Speaking in Public](#)." After that it's practice, practice, practice.

Dr. Yager outlines in her book just a few of the reasons why an entrepreneur needs to overcome the fear, and master the art of speaking in public, and I've

taken the liberty of adding a few occasions from my own business experience:

1. **You need funding, and have to address a group of investors.** As an investor, I sometimes see CEOs who negotiate to send their VP of Marketing to talk. Those requests will always be rejected, since investors invest in people, rather than ideas, and want to look the top decision maker in the eye and gauge their ability and conviction.

## YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

---

2. **You have the opportunity to appear on a panel of experts.** As a startup, you as the entrepreneur are the brand, the brand builder, and the major lead generator. You can't afford to turn down the honor of being visible and showing your expertise, no matter how small the forum or indirect the role.
3. **You are asked to explain your vision in a television interview.** Believe me, talking in front of TV cameras requires all the skills of public speaking, and more. The implications to you and your company are also large, so be prepared. In her book, Jan devotes a whole chapter to speaking to the media, as a key aspect of public speaking.
4. **As your company grows, you have to host customer seminars.** You may think it's too early to worry about this requirement, or you can hire professionals for customer user group meetings, but even meeting with your first potential customer will likely have a better outcome if you handle yourself like a professional public speaker.
5. **You will be the key speaker at employee update and reward meetings.** In a small startup, it may be cool to have a CEO who wears a hoodie and communicates via text messages. But it won't be long before employees expect to hear and see their executives exercising the sensitivity and communication skills of other industry leaders.
6. **Need to represent your company at industry association events.** How you speak in public is even more important outside your company than inside. Your skills will be implicitly critiqued by industry analysts,

potential strategic partners, your competitors, and the media. Their perception will determine the reality of your company and your career.

Dr. Yager asserts that being able to speak in public is one of the five key business skills that can make or break your company, whether you are a new startup or an entrepreneur who's been around for many years. The other four are: new product development, writing, time management, and sales/marketing. Many would argue that Steve Jobs impact at Apple came more from his public speaking ability than the other four skills put together.

Fortunately, the ability to be an effective speaker is based on communication skills that can be taught. And with practice, you may find you are not just a good, but a terrific speaker. If you used to fear speaking, you may find yourself not just tolerating it but enjoying the experience as you understand the source of your fears and how to overcome those fears.

You can't win as an entrepreneur working alone, and without speaking in public, just like you can't build a business from your invention without good business skills. The good news is that both are learnable, so the earlier you start, the better prepared you will be when you need them most. For an entrepreneur, the need arises as soon as you have your initial idea. Are you there yet?

*I am the Founder and CEO of Startup Professionals, a company that provides services to startup founders around the world. My background includes a 30-year track record as an executive in general management, computer software development, product management, and marketing. ... **MORE***