How to Write an Elevator Pitch

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8:57 AM Wednesday April 1, 2009

What's an elevator pitch?

An elevator pitch is a brief e-mail summary of your business. Or a short story that you can tell in the course of a elevator ride.

You use the elevator pitch to get meetings with prospective investors. Typically, you ask someone whom the investor trusts to pass along your elevator pitch with a thumbs-up.

And if you don't have an introduction, an amazing elevator pitch is critical to a successful cold e-mail.

Your elevator pitch is more important than a business plan or executive summary. In fact, with a good introduction and elevator pitch, you don't really need a business plan or executive summary.

We crafted this annotated elevator pitch using information we gleaned from one of Marc Andreessen's blog posts about Ning (Marc is also the founder of Netscape):

Subject: Introducing Ning to Blue Shirt Capital *[A useful subject line!]*

Hi *[Middleman],*

Thanks for offering to introduce us to Blue Shirt Capital. *[Reiterating the social proof of the introducer.]* I've attached a short presentation about our company, Ning. *[He attached a deck.]*

Briefly, Ning lets you create your own social network for anything. For free. In 2 minutes. *[What's the high concept pitch? What does the product help the customer do? Who is the customer?]* It's as easy as starting a blog. *[What's the metaphor?]* Try it at: http://ning.com *[Link to the product, screencast, or screenshots.]*

We built Ning to unlock the great ideas from people all over the world who want to use this amazing medium in their lives. *[What's the big problem or opportunity?]*

We have over 115,000 user-created networks, and our page views are growing 10% per week. *[Traction.]* We previously raised $44M from Legg Mason and others, including myself. *[More traction and social proof.]*

Before Ning, I started Netscape (acquired by AOL for $4.2B) and Opsware (acquired by HP for $1.6B). *[Team's past successes.]*

Blue Shirt's investments in companies like Extensive Enterprises tell me that they could be a great partner for Ning. *[Why are you interested in this investor?]* We're starting meetings with investors next week, and I would love to show Blue Shirt what we're building at Ning. *[Call to action and subtle scarcity.]*

Best,

Marc Andreessen
xyz@ning.com
415.555.1212 *[Contact information -- how thoughtful.]*

Notice the email uses good grammar, punctuation, and capitalization, as well as short paragraphs and sentences.

Your e-mail should be no longer than this example, which is already too long. Challenge yourself to keep the pitch under 100 words. And keep the product description brief -- this pitch describes the product in one paragraph with 29 words.

When in doubt, follow this template exactly. It doesn't matter if you don't have Marc's past successes, just explain the success you have. The rest of the pitch should be devoted to your traction, team, and social proof.

Babak Nivi likes helping entrepreneurs succeed. He's helped start companies like Songbird, Grockit, and Kovio that have been backed by firms including Sequoia, Benchmark, and Kleiner Perkins. He's also worked at venture capital firms such as Bessemer and Atlas.

He has an S.B., M.Eng., and Ph.D. dropout degrees from MIT in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, with a minor in Math. He was also a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow at the MIT Media Lab.

He has two patents and has published a paper in *Science*. He used to rock with The Nitlings. He helps run the site VentureHacks.com, and is the coauthor of Pitching Hacks