

## **Take Your Overview and Skip It**

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Marketing consultant Peter Cohan often hears this question, “How much of a company’s corporate overview should we include in a presentation?” Cohan’s answer, “as little as possible.”

The answer may surprise you, since an overview seems a logical place to start. You’d expect a storyline to unfold chronologically: our company history; the experience we bring to the job; the solution we recommend for your specific problem. A report on a project often follows a similar line: the background for the project; the steps we took; the recommendations that result from the project.

Audience members have no energy around the history of your company or the background of your project. They have no reason to care. While you might think the history evokes credibility or context, it more often evokes boredom, or even impatience. Once a presentation begins on a flat note, it’s hard to recover.

Further, since the focus of an overview is about you, and not your listener, the overview can’t establish the receptivity that makes listeners likely to buy from you or to support your recommendations.

I advise my clients to begin with “hot buttons.” In other words, start with the material that is on the listeners’ minds—the business problems, challenges or frustrations they are currently facing. If you can do this, then audience members know that your presentation will be relevant. You have instant energy and instant receptivity. You’ll find it much easier to sell your solutions to a receptive audience, whether that audience is a customer or an executive in your own boardroom.

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