

Tips for Designing an Effective Audience Response System (ARS) Presentation

Tip 1: Keep questions short to optimize legibility

Bear in mind the principles of good slide design (Laidlaw, 1987). The main requirement is legibility. This applies to question design too. Keep your question stem and answer options short and simple in order that the audience can read them easily and respond quickly.

Tip 2: Have no more than five answer options

The second point also relates to the legibility and clarity of the projected image. Most interactive software allows you to include up to nine possible responses to your question. If more than five options are given, the screen becomes difficult to read and, when it comes to displaying the results, it is cluttered and could be difficult to interpret.

Tip 3: Do not make your questions overly complex

If you present your audience with too much information and expect them to read and digest it then, make an immediate decision, either the response rate will drop as they are put off by such a daunting task, or the presentation has to be slowed considerably to allow time to meaningfully complete the task and the natural momentum is lost.

Neither of these situations is ideal as the aim of using such a system is to create a non-threatening environment which encourages the participation of all audience members, and for the session to be active and fun.

Tip 4: Keep voting straightforward

The system gives the choice of several voting options. These range from a single choice to more complex staged voting or ranking of choices. Again, it is usually best to choose the simpler options, allowing no more than two choices. Anything more complex requires considerable explanation by the lecturer, leads to confusion amongst the audience, reducing the number of valid responses, and becomes cluttered and almost impossible to interpret when the results are displayed on screen.

Tip 5: Allow time for discussion when designing your presentation

Invariably, once the presentation is underway the audience quickly becomes involved and much discussion is stimulated as their responses to the questions are displayed. When preparing your presentation, therefore, you must build in time for such discussion.

Tip 6: Do not ask too many questions: use them sparingly to highlight the points you most want to emphasize

It is best not to ask too many questions in one session. Vary your presentation with other slides; after all, you have all the features of PowerPoint available to you. If you present your audience with a series of one question after another, this soon becomes tedious and their enthusiasm

will fall away. Use your questions sparingly, saving them for the points you most want to emphasize, in order that they have maximum impact.

Tip 7: Allow plenty time to set up and try out the system before the session begins

Related to the above is the time required to actually set up the system. It takes some time to connect all the various components and lay out the handsets, this obviously varying with the size of venue and audience. It is advisable to allow at least 30 minutes to set up the system and ensure all the components are working before your audience arrives.

Tip 8: Rehearse your presentation to ensure that it will run smoothly

The interactive system is simple to use but does require initial practice to familiarize yourself with it and to coordinate the timing for a smooth running presentation.

Rehearse your presentation several times, especially the first few times that you use the system, until you are confident with it. Most systems allow you to run a simulated presentation in order to do this.

Tip 9: Provide clear instruction to your audience

You will also have to brief your audience on what is expected of them. Unless they register their response at the appropriate time and press the corresponding button on the handset only once, their response will not be recorded. Clear instruction should be provided before the session begins in order that the maximum number of valid responses to each question is registered.

Tip 10: Encourage active discussion with your audience

The anonymous nature of the responses creates an informal, non-threatening environment and this encourages free-flowing debate between the audience and presenter.

You should encourage such discussion as it greatly enhances the benefits of such sessions for the audience.

Tip 11: Do not overuse the system

Our final tip is not to overuse such a system. As with any novel teaching method, overuse will lead to over-familiarity with it and the potential impact of such teaching sessions will be lessened. Choose your interactive sessions wisely, ensuring that the subject matter lends itself well to such an approach.

To sum it all up...

If you follow the above practical advice, gained from our varied experiences using such an interactive system, you will gain the benefits of a powerful teaching tool which can turn large group teaching sessions into a truly interactive, and fun, experience for both you and your audience.