

Cover Article

Defining Our Association:

The NPMA Elevator Pitch

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We as NPMA members might understand who we are and the value we bring to our employers through the many educational opportunities available but those “on the outside” need for us to more clearly define who we are and what we bring to the table.

Business travel sure isn't what it used to be. Longer lines, packed flights, fees for your bags, fees for snacks and just about anything else the airlines can charge you for—they will. For all of the challenges associated with business travel, it also presents us with many unique opportunities.

Recently I was on one of those brutal week long trips—you know, where you leave home at o'dark thirty for the airport on Monday morning, experience the joys of having your "body clock" thrown for a loop through visiting multiple time zones before finally arriving back home late Friday night (or to be completely accurate, early Saturday morning). Part of this trip included my participation at an NPMA seminar where I committed to developing an "NPMA elevator pitch" through which I could clearly articulate the mission of NPMA to anyone who asked. While creating the framework of this "pitch" and beginning to use it in practice, I soon realized there is not and should not be a one-size fits-all elevator pitch for our association. Here's what I learned.

The Soldier

On one of my flights during this five-day trip, I had the pleasure of sitting next to an Air Force sergeant who was returning home from a nine-month deployment in Iraq where he served on a security detail. During the flight he was excited to share his experiences with using retinal scans and fingerprint technologies to capture terrorists. In fact, he detailed a story of when he detained a man entering a secured area whose fingerprint (actually, it was just a partial fingerprint) matched one found on fragments of an exploded IED (Improvised Explosive Device) several months ago—pretty impressive.

The sergeant then asked where I was going. Since I was flying to an NPMA seminar, I thought this was the perfect opportunity to try-out my new NPMA elevator pitch on him to describe our association. I started with:

"NPMA is an association of persons responsible for managing the physical assets and material of an organization..."

Before I went any further with my canned rant, I realized this soldier, based on his experiences, could easily relate to our mission so I quickly ditched the canned speech and followed with something he could relate to:

"Our members include many DoD contractors who build and service products for the military from planes, communications devices, IT equipment, material and other support services. Our members have responsibility and ultimate accountability of all assets throughout the life-cycle from procurement, utilization, maintenance, all the way to disposition."

He nodded his head, and asked a couple of follow-up questions which demonstrated he truly understood what we (as an association) do. *Eureka! The key to any elevator pitch or really any communication in general, is to communicate your message in a way the audience will understand!*

At the end of the flight he was proud to show me his Iraq Campaign Medal. I shook his hand and thanked him for his service. I was then amazed by what he said next, "Well thank you for what you and your association does in support of our mission—we rely on having the best technology available and in the hands of our units."

At that point I realized how proud I was to be part of an association where many of our member organizations are developing

cutting-edge technologies to support our war fighters, space exploration and other research that benefits humankind as a whole. NPMA members help save lives? Absolutely! What if the logistics team screwed up and didn't get that fingerprint scanner to this soldier's checkpoint? Could that terrorist he apprehended possibly slip through on an intelligence gathering mission preparing to return to plant more IED's within the confines of this secured area? You bet. Or, what if the asset management team failed to notify the maintenance group to service a tool used to manufacture this fingerprint scanner resulting in faulty device readings so the terrorist wasn't detected? NPMA members really do play a vital role in support of our military.

The Ticket Agent

The rest of the week went very well and it was finally time to head home. Just before midnight while standing at the ticket counter, the ticket agent noticed my NPMA shirt and asked what it stood for. My first thought was there was no way I was going "old school" on her saying the "N" was for national, but wait, we're an international association so it really doesn't make sense anymore or "P" was for property—I shudder to think about having a lengthy conversation about who we are not and explaining I'm not a real estate professional or know anything about tenant/landlord rights.

Instead I seized the opportunity to give another NPMA elevator pitch, but this time I again tailored the message to what I believed she could easily understand and relate to:

"NPMA is an association of persons responsible for managing the physical assets and material of an organization. Our members have responsibility and ultimate accountability of all assets of

an organization such as your computer, your radio, and the scanner at the jet way, the jet way itself and all of the tugs and baggage carts. Through the utilization of best practices, our members track all of these assets to know where they are, who has them, and when they need service or replacement so your airline utilizes the assets you have on hand to the fullest in order to avoid the costly purchase of assets your airline really doesn't need."

Another success! Even in the wee hours of the morning people can appreciate the goals of our association if they can understand the message!

The Maintenance Mechanic

I boarded my flight but my mind was racing with other scenarios—what kind of NPMA elevator pitch would I deliver to the maintenance mechanic who just left the flight deck?

"NPMA is an association of persons responsible for managing the physical assets and material of an organization. Our members have responsibility and ultimate accountability of all assets and material of an organization such as your tools and spare parts while also helping ensure that routine and preventative maintenance schedules for all of your assets are adhered to. By helping ensure you have the assets you need, you'll have the right tools and materials available to keep your planes flying."

Seemed to make sense (or at least it did to me)—have to try that one out on my next trip.

The CEO

Just as I was about to doze off as we readied for take-off, I had one more scenario run through my exhausted mind. What would I say if the person sitting next to me was the CEO (or other executive officer)

of a corporation who had ultimate responsibility for all of the assets of the organization? To make that work, I'd have to put another spin on the previous messages so he could understand the importance and value our association delivers to our members:

"Our association members are responsible for the management of hundreds of billions of dollars of physical assets and material used to accomplish the strategic goals of the organization. We promote the use of industry leading best practices through the creation of standards, training and certification, and even partner with a college that offers a bachelor's degree in business administration with an emphasis on property management. Through the use of optimal asset management business processes, some of our members have documented millions of dollars in savings and increased their organization's return on assets in addition to ensuring compliance to key government regulatory requirements."

Do you think I would get his/her attention by saying our members are responsible for hundreds of billions of dollars in assets? Yep. Do you think he/she would be interested in learning more about these best practices so the company wouldn't be at a competitive disadvantage? Absolutely. And, what about the millions of dollars in savings, increased ROI (Return On Investment) and helping to ensure compliance? Depending on how the conversation progressed, I could certainly further discuss the organizational and personal ramifications of non-compliance—huge fines and costly penalties for the organization while personally risking this person's continued employment and professional career. By this time I should have this executive foaming at the mouth to learn more about NPMA.

Conclusion

Communication is a science where information is being sent from a source to a receiver. We as NPMA members might understand who we are and the value we bring to our employers through the many educational opportunities available but those "on the outside" need for us to more clearly define who we are and what we bring to the table. I hope these sample elevator pitches serve as a framework or reference starting point as you tailor your NPMA elevator pitch. Effectively doing so not only communicates the mission of our association, but equally important, the value we bring to the organizations that employ us. ■

BIOGRAPHY

Brian Thompson is Vice President of Solutions, Strategic Markets at Sunflower Systems where his responsibilities include the sales and marketing of Sunflower Systems solutions to key strategic accounts, exploring new markets and enhancing general sales operations. Thompson is a respected executive with a distinguished 18-year career leading software sales and professional services operations for turnaround and S&P 500 organizations. Thompson currently serves as NPMA Western Region Vice President. He is a frequent contributing author to *The Property Professional* publication where in 2007 he earned an Award of Merit for Literary Excellence. He is also a frequent speaker at NPMA educational/regional events. Thompson earned a master's in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Science in Management from Pepperdine University and is a former faculty member of the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business.