

‘So What Do You Do?’

THE POWER OF AN ELEVATOR PITCH

Every job seeker has heard about the importance of having an elevator pitch ready, in case they find themselves stuck on an elevator with the CEO of their dream company and have only 30 seconds to impress them.



By **Nannette Ripmeester**
and **Sevi Christoforou**

Now, even if you believe this will never happen to you, it is still essential to be prepared and have an elevator pitch ready to use during general networking events, career fairs and job interviews.

Especially in the Netherlands, every interaction can be a great opportunity to network and professionally connect with people. The Dutch value motivation more than experience, so even a casual discussion on the train or at the neighbourhood BBQ could lead to a job interview, and therefore, you need to be prepared! So how do you get a person's attention when you only have 30 seconds?

The Goal

It is important to have a clear idea in mind of what you want to achieve with your elevator pitch. The goal is to sum up your current situation and your future ambitions articulately, precisely, and interestingly in less than one minute and to get as close as possible to the result that you want.

The most important aspects that you want to put across are: Who are you and what are you aiming to achieve? Focus on the 'who' and 'what' and forget initially about the 'how', as this is often too process-oriented (and as a consequence often difficult to follow or simply uninteresting to the other person).

The Structure

Who: You don't necessarily need to provide a detailed analysis, but rather give the other a sense of who you are by mentioning what your current position is and what you are doing within that role. Express in an accurate and attractive manner what you are doing day-to-day, and keep in mind what your added value can be for the person you are talking to.

What: Be able to state what you are looking to achieve in your career, both in the long and the short term. This gives the person you are talking to a sense of scale in comparison to where you are now, and will automatically trigger their thought path towards linking the two.

How: For the initial pitch, the how is often too complicated. However, if the first pitch was fruitful, you need to know the how. You

should be able to detail how you aim to go about reaching your goal. At this point, if you are in a discussion, this could lead to a dialogue, or if you are presenting yourself, you will be spurring the imagination of the listener. In other words, you are encouraging them to think along your lines and to visualise your future as you do.

The Audience

Prepare different versions of your elevator pitch to use in different situations. Depending on the person you are talking to, you might need to change the purpose or the structure of your pitch to ensure you get the result that you want. For example, you might need to shift the focus of your pitch completely, or subtly tailor it to a particular situation, or to any changing goals.

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The Story

People indeed love to hear a good story! So why not turn your elevator pitch into a nice and engaging story that is fun to listen to and doesn't sound exactly like a sales pitch? To do that, you can look back at your history and find experiences that not only illustrate that you possess a certain set of skills, but that also say something about your personality and way of thinking. A good idea is to search your academic or professional history for 'attention grabbing' points that can both serve your pitch's purpose and also pique the other person's curiosity. Storytelling is a gift, but certainly one you can learn. A word of warning though: do not make it sound as if you rehearsed it a 1,000 times!

The Time

An elevator pitch should be short and sharp. In principle, an elevator pitch should not exceed 30 seconds, but feel free to take it up to one minute. It is important to be able to tell your story within this short time

frame, in order to quickly engage the person you are talking to, showing them at the same time that you know exactly what your strengths and interests are. If you can't, that means you need to revisit your pitch, choose the information you include more wisely and cut down on the details or eliminate unnecessary words.

The Moves

When you communicate your pitch to someone, your body posture and hand gestures are as important as the content of your pitch. Things like making eye contact, a suitable facial expression and a calm, yet confident attitude can really work to your advantage. Make your body language work in your favour, but do realise the Dutch are not so keen on close body contact. An arm's length is the perfect distance for the Dutch.

The Preparation

Start by looking thoroughly at your CV and your LinkedIn profile. Single out the information you consider important and break it down into bullet points or short sentences. Underline the points you want to highlight (key experiences, qualifications and accomplishments) and start connecting the pieces to create inclusive and captivating pitches. Begin practicing by yourself and once you find the one you feel most confident with, practice it with your friends and family. Time yourself to make sure your pitch doesn't go over one minute, and pay attention to your non-verbal communication. The more you practice, the more confident you will feel and the more authentic you will sound when the time comes to use your pitch in a real situation!

The Importance of an Elevator Pitch

Having an elevator pitch ready is not only the perfect opportunity to introduce yourself to a new person you meet, but it can also help you answer the interview question 'Tell me a little about yourself' and be a solid base to build up a profile summary for your CV and/or your LinkedIn profile. So if you don't have one yet or haven't thought about your elevator pitch in a while, it is time to get down to work! ✖

Written by Sevi Christoforou and Nannette Ripmeester for Expertise in Labour Mobility