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A pro pitch deck designer explains 5 key strategies to help you raise money and promote new businesses

JP Mangalindan Oct 24, 2022, 10:15 AM



Pitch deck creator Leah Williams Leah Williams

- Leah Williams, once an aspiring actress, started designing pitch decks for a living in 2014.
- She has designed decks for clients including Equinox and Ogilvy.
- Williams offered five strategies on how to get the most out of pitch decks.

Leah Williams never meant for her work on pitch decks to become a full-time gig. But after trying her hand at acting — and quickly becoming disillusioned with the industry — she decided that the money in pitch decks was too good to turn down.

"I didn't even know people [created pitch decks] professionally," said Williams, who got into the industry through a business connection. "They really don't teach it a whole lot in school."

After getting some initial experience through a PR events agency, Williams reached out to Creative Circle, a recruiting agency that staffs people for presentation work. The agency set her up with work at McCann, a global advertising agency network, which eventually led to work with Equinox, Ogilvy, the Discovery Channel, and dozens of other high-profile clients.

Now, Williams works full-time crafting pitch decks for clients, charging between \$150 to \$200 an hour and juggling three pitch-deck projects at once for many different purposes, including capital raising, keynote speeches, board meetings, new business pitches, and M&A deals.

Designing a pitch deck requires a balance of creative design and business acumen, she said.

"This is like a sweet spot to do business-y stuff, but I do a lot of writing, and I do a lot of design stuff within the pitch decks, too," Williams said. "I'm kind of like a one-stop shop. I can edit it and design it at the same time."

Williams offered five strategies for companies to make the most out of their own decks.

1. Bring your personal story into the deck.

Including your personal story can help show investors how much you care about the company, Williams said. Were you broke when you were struck with a potentially brilliant business idea?

"You may have a really inspiring story, you may think you have a lot of grit, or it may have come out of something that is just very human," Williams said.

"I feel like that people forget to include that, and they go straight to the money," she added. "As an investor, you want to know that the founders are personally invested in the company."

2. Less is more when designing decks.

Think of your deck as an important outline that you'll walk through with people in the room.

There isn't a magical number for the number of slides a pitch deck should contain, Williams said. Instead, the length of the deck will vary on a number of factors, including how long a company has been in business, what financial information an investor wants to see, and how in-depth you want to explain your product or service.

But when it comes to pitch decks, people often suffer from what Williams often calls "fire hydrant syndrome."

"They're like a kid: they get really excited about something, and they just kind of throw up everything on you," said Williams. "They blast people with their ideas."

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Design-wise, Williams warns not to go overboard with textures and graphics.

"I kind of declutter everything," she said. "I will use my editing skills, and I'll usually cut a lot of text too because you don't need every single little bullet point in there."

3. Don't start a deck with an "ask" slide.

Williams recommends keeping the "ask" slide — the slide about how much a company is looking to raise in capital — towards the end of the deck, after slides detailing the vision of the company.

"You want them to catch the vision before they know how much money you need, because you don't want them thinking about dollar signs the entire time," Williams said of investors. "You want them to get really excited about the idea before they look at how much you need."

4. The deck's font really matters.

A good font can really elevate a deck — and a bad font can make the deck a downright eyesore.

"Having a nice, clean font is basically half the design of your deck," said Williams, who favors fonts like Futura PT and Archer.

She says to stay away from Calibri and Arial, which are heavily used.

"System fonts are cheap looking, and you want to look expensive," she added. "A good font will do that."

It's also key that the font in a pitch deck aligns with the branding on a website.

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5. High-resolution photos are easier to come by than you think.

You don't have to pay to access great high-resolution photos. Williams recommends the site [Unsplash](#), which offers over 3 million free high-resolution images from photographers.

If you're going to use personal images of yourself or your teammates for that "Team" slide, use Portrait mode on your iPhone, stick with a plain background with good lighting, and *smile*, she says.

"I've seen a couple of photos where they didn't smile, and they looked really mean," Williams said. "You don't have to look like a dork, but you want to look approachable. You don't want to look like you're going to be this really difficult person to work with."

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