

# The Five C's

The NIRI Rocky Mountain chapter learned about the must-have ingredients of C-suite communication.

By Jennifer Almquist

**I**ROs play a key role in ensuring the right message is conveyed in C-suite communication, according to Virgil Scudder.

A veteran media trainer, author, and regular contributor to the *PR Strategist*, Scudder recently spoke to the NIRI Rocky Mountain chapter to share his “secret” recipe for ensuring a presentation’s success: the “five C’s.”

“An organization has no more valuable asset than its credibility,” he said, “and credibility requires that every presentation meet the following standard: Was it clear, concise, candid, credible, and delivered with confidence?” Scudder says the same framework should be applied to earnings calls.

So how do you, as an IRO, ensure a presentation given by senior management meets the “five C’s” criteria?

## Preparation Counts

It starts with preparation. “Know your audience,” Scudder advised. He cited an April 2012 Rivel Research Group study called “Earnings Calls: A Global View,” which revealed, among other things, that the main attraction of the earnings call for investors is access to top management and insight on management’s strategic perspective; the financial update, while important, did not rank as high. There’s a reason for this, says Scudder: The earnings call is more than just a financial progress report. “It’s how people size up the leadership of the company,” he explained.



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To prepare for earnings calls, he emphasized the importance of the rehearsal, both for the prepared remarks and the Q&A, saying “if a call is properly prepared for, you should never get a significant question” for which you aren’t ready.

He even recommended recording the earnings call rehearsals and replaying them back to the presenters before doing a second round of rehearsal. He has found this practice particularly benefits the Q&A portion of the earnings call because presenters have the opportunity to ensure that their answers sound just as they intended, and oftentimes the answers become clearer and more concise on the second run-through.

## Start at the End

The approach is important, too, says Scudder. When writing the script, or any other presentation, he recommends starting with the end. “Instead of starting with ‘here’s what I want to say,’ ask yourself

‘what do I want them to take away?’” He added that the most effective speakers are straightforward and direct, keep sentences short and to the point, illustrate points with examples or anecdotes, have a sense of humor, and exercise humility.

Delivering bad news? Set the framework for the discussion up front and exercise candor and humility, he says. “Don’t try to sugarcoat the bad news. Leave them with the feeling that you’re giving it to them straight.”

Sometimes that means admitting things didn’t turn out the way you’d hoped. “People will forgive mistakes if there’s an admission of the mistake,” observed Scudder, “and a plan for doing something about it.”

Clear. Concise. Candid. Credible. Confidence. Sounds like a winning recipe. **IRU**

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