5 Ideas You Should Steal From Uber’s 2008 Pitch Deck



The rideshare unicorn’s first PowerPoint has many clues for pitching in an unstable economy.

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Twenty-five PowerPoint slides were all it took to land Uber its initial $200,000 investment in 2008. Fast forward a decade, and the rideshare company’s IPO ended day one with an $81 billion valuation even after years of PR disasters and scandals. So what the heck was in that pitch deck, anyway?

Co-founder Garrett Camp actually posted it here. He and Travis Kalanick pitched a totally new business concept during a huge financial slump, a time when even the savviest investors might

have been leery of trusting new ideas. The pitch was so good it worked anyway.

If you're mustering up the courage to go after funding in a shaky economy, tight positioning is a surefire confidence booster. Here are five nuances from Uber's deck you may want to steal before your next pitch.

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1. Prioritize ideas over design

Uber's pitch deck is about as basic as it gets with regard to design. The founders didn't rely on special fonts or jazzy animations; they avoided trying to look fancy and only used basic graphics and bullet points in black font on a white background.

We think we need to impress investors with highly branded materials or perfect websites. But in most cases, this isn't true; venture capitalists want to get to the meat of an idea as quickly as possible. By keeping it simple and driving home concepts — pun intended! — Uber was able to focus attention on the most compelling part of its pitch: An opportunity to permanently disrupt the cab industry.

2. Make informed predictions about the future

Uber thought its primary selling point was as a rideshare app with luxury vehicles for American professionals. The real innovation and ultimate reason for its success was the idea of an app for a cab with extra reliability. The original unique selling proposition given to investors turned out to be false.

But investors know that nobody can accurately predict the

future. Camp and Kalanick used this to instead paint a picture of a probable future, pointing to opportunities like the complexity of taxicab medallions as an opportunity to innovate. Looking at their pitch deck now, with the benefit of hindsight, you can still clearly see how any of these possibilities *might* have come true.

The power of Camp and Kalanick's pitch deck wasn't in accuracy – it was in their vision, and how they managed to persuade investors to see the future the way they did.

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3. Provide a realistic worst-case scenario

In a recession, investors are wary of blue-sky forecasts. Kalanick and Camp used their imagination to draw investors in with the possibilities, and they knew investors were probably guarding their checkbooks in the wake of a mortgage crisis.

The founders laid out what they saw as the worst-case scenario, then outlined their progress-to-date to make their pitch feel like a no-brainer.

4. Hitch a ride on other successful technologies

It's weird to remember that smartphones were only just becoming popular in 2008. Back then, smartphones were only 22% of handheld phone sales, whereas today over 70% of the U.S. adult population uses a smartphone.

Uber saw smartphones were the way forward. Camp and Kalanick pitched not only the cab service, but also how it would work as an app, using that as a core selling point.

As smartphones rose in popularity and engulfed households, ordering an Uber became increasingly normalized, allowing the startup to position itself at the front of the pack and seize market share.

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5. Know your competitors inside and out

I mentioned cabs earlier, but let’s be clear: Uber’s pitch deck tore both taxicabs and limousines to shreds. The founders plotted out competitor weaknesses not only regarding consumer perspectives but also the industry’s employee and labor challenges.

By demonstrating an anatomical knowledge of their competitors’ makeup, Kalanick and Camp were able to persuade investors that Uber — or some form of it as an idea — had what it took to capture a large percentage of the market, even during a recession.

Final takeaways

Pitching to investors can always give you the heebie-jeebies. But when you’ve done the work to position your offer well, investors and venture capitalists will see that and take action when they see opportunity. Instead of letting a rocky economy rattle your hopes and dreams, use this time to recession-proof your pitch — then go after your destiny with everything you’ve got.

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