Pitching Project Ideas

Pragmatic Programmer Tip:
It’s Both What You Say and the Way You Say It

There’s no point in having great ideas if you don’t communicate them effectively
Outline

- When do we make pitches?
- What makes a successful pitch?
- “Elevator Pitches”
- Value proposition statement

References:

Pragmatic Programmer, Hunt/Thomas p18-23 (recommended)
http://www.see.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/Management/art1.html (optional)
philip.greenspun.com/seia/writeup (optional)
When do we make pitches?
When do we make pitches?

All the time!

To colleagues:
  - to argue for a technical direction

To management:
  - to convince that your idea/project/approach is of value

To customers:
  - to purchase your product, to fund your project, to change their requirements ....
What makes a successful pitch?

• Must be exciting to your audience
• Clear objective
• Justification… why is it important
• What will your audience get/gain out of this … why do they really need it

E.g. Pitching yourself to prospective employers!
What makes a successful pitch?

1. Know your objective
   Motivate your idea
   Provide a focused, succinct, statement of the value
   Differentiate yourself from others who offer the same (or similar) value
   Include how, specifically, you can provide it
   Justify the ability (and cost) of your team to do the work
   Make it look good

2. Present at a level appropriate for your audience

3. Predict and answer the audience’s (unspoken) questions

4. Leave your audience with something positive they can remember
Knowing your audience...

- **W**: *What* do you want them to learn
- **I**: What is their *interest* in what you have to say
- **S**: How *sophisticated* are they
- **D**: How much *detail* do they want
- **O**: Whom do you want to *own* the information
- **M**: How can you *motivate* them to listen to you
“Elevator Pitches”

• “Okay, we're going to the 75th floor. You've got a minute and a half. What is this thing of yours supposed to do anyway?"

• Covers *the most* essential parts from the point of view of your listener
  - No one cares about details and no one will remember them anyway.

• Use your time wisely
  - You are *not* marketing something that's already been made
  - You *are* trying to figure out if there is a need for this that is being proposed
Common Mistakes When Making Pitches

1. Misjudging your audience (their interests, background, requirements, etc.)

2. Not adequately motivating your idea
   Not helping the audience understand the “big picture” of the area in which your product fits

3. Not covering existing alternatives and what specific novelty you are offering

4. Not presenting a realistic picture of how the cost of the project justifies its value
Value Proposition Statement

Your audience, after listening to your pitch, must be able to at least fill out the following template reasonably accurately.

For (target customer)
who (statement of need or opportunity)
the (product or company name)
is a (product or company category)
that (statement of key benefit / compelling reason to buy).
Unlike (primary “competitive” alternative),
our product (statement of primary differentiation).

From “Crossing the Chasm” by Geoffrey Moore
Example

For users of the “pine” email client software on Unix who need to easily find content in their past email correspondence, the “pine+” product is an email client software that is backwards compatible with “pine” and also free. Unlike “pine” or other similar Unix-based email clients, our product provides an intuitive way to annotate email messages with keywords of the user’s choice in order to facilitate subsequent searching by using one or more keywords in addition to the search functionality that “pine” offers.

Can you make a Value Proposition about your project?
Example

Can you make a Value Proposition about your project?
Fact or Fiction?

THE NEW PRODUCT BROCHURES HAVE ALREADY WON DESIGN AWARDS!

THAT'S GREAT, BUT OUR PRODUCT WON'T DO ANY OF THE THINGS YOU CLAIM HERE.

WELL, WHO SHOULD WE BELIEVE — THE AWARD-WINNING DESIGNER OR THE GUY WHO CAN'T STOP COMPLAINING?