

**Ricky's Afterthought:****Elevator Pitch****A.C. (Ricky) Metaxas**

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I bet most of you reading this piece would not know what an elevator pitch is. Or do you? Even though you may not know what it means I bet you have exercised it in one form or another in your daily business be it in academe or industry.

Let me elaborate. There are many stories about how the elevator pitch came into being but the one that seems most credible goes like this. An individual who worked as Director of Quality at International Telephone and Telegraph had some radical ideas for changing some functions that were held at the company but could not pin down the CEO in order to inform him of his plans as he was always going from section to section or in and out of the building. So he drafted a paragraph, made up of a few sentences, which described in stark terms what he had in mind. He then decided early in the morning to wait around the headquarters' elevator (lift in English and *ascenseur* in French) knowing that within a span of less than half an hour the CEO would enter the building and head for the elevator to take him to his penthouse office. At a particular day he saw the CEO approach the elevator and luckily he entered it on his own so the Director of Quality followed him in. As soon as the elevator started its upward trajectory he made his pitch to the CEO. By the time it took to reach the penthouse the CEO was so convinced that he asked the Director of Quality to present his ideas to all the Section Managers. So the concept of the elevator pitch was born. It has to contain all the important elements of the scheme, it has to attract and maintain the attention of the listener and it must be anything between 15 seconds and 2 minutes.

Another story which goes around is that a Senior Editor of Vanity Fair, the popular magazine of culture, fashion and current affairs, wanted to

pitch various story lines to the Editor in Chief but could never find her in one place as she was always on the move. So the Senior Editor would join her in the elevator knowing he had up to a minute to put his ideas across. So goes an alternative explanation of how the elevator pitch was created.

Thus, elevator pitch has become the 'go to' catch phrase in many walks of life from engineering to politics and from literature to sporting activities. Assuming you wrote a book and you wish to convince the publisher to accept it. So you prepare a two to three sentence elevator pitch with all the important elements of what you are writing.

Now that you have read the above I bet you have exclaimed, "Of course I used such a pitch at my interview". For example, for university staff, the head of your department may ask how you would convince the students to follow your course and not any of the competitive courses given by your colleagues. In simple terms, you prepare an elevator pitch, which encapsulates all the essential elements of your course and why the students should follow it. If electro-technology is your particular option you emphasize that fossil fuels are running out and electricity should be seriously considered particularly if it is produced by renewables energy and not a gas-fired power station.

In its most generic form the key elements of an elevator pitch should include:

- Definition of the problem
- Offer a solution
- Who are you targeting?
- Knowing your competition?
- Costs and milestones

Take the case of trying to convince a manufacturer of textile packages to use RF in part of

the company's operations and you do not have all day to do so. Brevity is masterful in such situations, so you prepare an elevator pitch, which may take the following form next time you accidentally meet the technical manager and have minutes at your disposal, or you shadow him/her at a convention you know they frequent:

“You are drying your packages using steam or hot air but it takes too long and it needs a lot of space. The solution is to use a hybrid system, where you could use mangling (mechanically squeezing the moisture off) followed by conventional energy to reach, say down to 20-10% moisture depending on the type of textile, and finally remove the rest of the moisture down to equilibrium by using RF in a

compact and safe unit which would repay itself in 2 years based on an increased production of 5%.”

Well, I wonder how many times marketing engineers used such an elevator pitch to convince textile manufacturers to adopt RF in their operations? Judging by the thousands of RF textile dryers that have been installed in industry during the past 40 years, I would suggest countless times.

Similar elevator pitches have been used for tempering of frozen foodstuffs using microwaves or for drying of pharmaceuticals under vacuum using microwaves or welding of plastics using RF.

Wishing you all the best with your elevator pitches!