

Powerful & Effective Presentations: How to Avoid Death by PowerPoint

By Duren Thompson and Bill McNutt, COABE 2009 – Louisville KY

Major Points of this Presentation

- *Memorable presentations have Clarity and Focus* – how to avoid “too long, too much info”
- *The presenter IS the presentation* – presentation planning & delivery to engage your audience
- *Use slides/visuals effectively* – proper use of text and graphics to achieve your goals

Overview of the Research on Effective Presentations

- Majority of presentations are reported by audiences to be ineffective (ref: 5, 6, 11)
- 2005 web survey of 2500 public interest professionals reported the following common elements of bad presentations (ref: 6):
 - Reading the slides (the dreaded “triple play” – the same text on the slides, said aloud, and on the handout)
 - Too long, too much info (good presentations had CLARITY)
 - Lack of interaction (good presentations had interaction with audience and/or amongst audience members)
 - Lifeless presenters (good presentations had enthusiastic presenters)
 - Room/technical problems (good presenters anticipate and have a back-up plan)

The resources we consulted recommended that you could design **CLEAR, Concise, and POWERFUL** presentations by implementing these recommendations:

Focus

- Common mistakes: the “Here is everything I want to tell you...” method, presenting only facts and statistics.
- Research: Working memory is limited (ref: 1, 3, 8)
 - Human mind can only remember 3-4 “chunks” from a presentation
 - When overloaded, each participant randomly picks the 3 points he/she will remember
 - This leads to inconsistent messages, critical info missed, and often erroneous messages remembered. Overloaded, overwhelming presentations are ineffective, even boring.
- Recommendations:
 - Focus presentations on **three main points**/critical ideas ONLY
 - Frame your big ideas/critical concepts in a **NARRATIVE**. Have your presentation tell a “story” – stories evoke emotions, draw on audiences’ prior experiences, and are *memorable*. (ref: 1,4,7,10)
Narratives should:
 - Fill in background, provide details
 - Discuss research data, rationale, logic/reasoning behind the main ideas
 - Use anecdotes, experiences, case studies, illustrate with analogies, metaphors
 - Keep a personal, less formal tone - be “real”
 - **Get away to plan** – The resources list many ways to determine main points, but most start by suggesting you (ref: 1, 6, 10):
 - Get away from the computer/distractions
 - Brainstorm on your 1-3 big ideas (and audience needs/wants, etc.)
 - Then storyboard your narrative ON PAPER (stickies, index cards, tec.)
 - THEN go to the computer and compose a narrative to go with a VISUAL slideshow.

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Delivery

- Common mistakes: Reading the slide; reserved, ultra-formal/'professional' tone; ignoring the audience
- Research: Like it or not, presenting (and teaching) is related to sales and/or acting. Salespeople, actors, politicians, etc. know what works. AE should draw from that knowledge. (ref: 2, 6, 9)
- Recommendations:
 - Use **good "Platform Skills"** – Connect with the audience, and engage them by (ref: 2, 6, 9):
 - Eye contact – look individual audience members in the eye as you speak
 - Vocal control & Tone – vary volume, speed, and tone (tell your story expressively, but don't overdo!).
 - Movement – body language: big gestures, little gestures, facial expressions, etc. (again, be expressive, but don't overdo). Move around the room if possible.
 - Provide opportunities for audience **Interaction** – with you, with each other, with the ideas. One rule of thumb suggests audience interaction every 7 minutes. (ref: 6, 10)
 - Attitude – **Be confident and enthusiastic** about your ideas. If you aren't, then why should your audience care? Also, be 'real' – your emotions, and reactions will draw in your audience.
 - **Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse** – Practice leads to delivery that is confident, flows well, and communicates a knowledge of subject. It also assists you to in time management and planning for the unexpected (ref: 1, 2, 9)
 - **Be flexible** – have a backup plan for technical failures, poor room setup, too many folks, too few folks, etc. Be ready to 'punt' and do something else when necessary.

Effective Visuals/Slides

- Common mistakes: "My information is inherently interesting and memorable –logic and reasoning will achieve my goals." Slide after slide of bulleted lists; complicated graphs and charts; distracting clip art, sounds, and animations, etc.
- Research:
 - Every presentation's goal is to **PERSUADE** folks to change their store of knowledge, behaviors or beliefs. Marketing industry has over a century of research on persuasion - their techniques **work**. AE should USE their techniques, expertise, research to foster change – we. (ref: 1,6, 10)
 - Marketers know that a key element of appealing to an audience is to engage **EMOTION and make it "personal" or relevant.**
 - Dual Channel Research (ref: 3,8) slideshows are for **IMAGES not text.**
 - Audience uses both a 'verbal channel' and 'visual channel' simultaneously for brain input at presentations. Text on screen is converted to narrative by the brain –is processed as "verbal" information. Thus lots of text and no effective visuals = double load on verbal channel and ineffective use of visual channel.
 - Also, controlled studies show text on the screen (or in the handout) "fights with" what you are saying when you read them aloud, and fights harder when you say something **OTHER** than what is on the screen (or handout). (ref: 8),
 - K-12 Brain-based research supports important role of emotion, relevance, and visuals in learning and memory (ref: 4, 7)
- Recommendations:
 - Know your **AUDIENCE** your "big ideas" and narrative must be built on knowledge of your Audience. If you don't know your audience, your message can fall on deaf ears. When determining main points & planning narrative, ask:
 - Who is my audience?
 - What are their concerns/needs?
 - How can I make my critical concepts/big ideas appeal to them?
 - How can I persuade them to change their behavior/attitudes, etc.?
 - Draw on **EMOTION** via you delivery, narrative and visuals.

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- **SIMPLIFY your slides** - Slide show should be the Cinematography to your Narrative – NOT your Narrative. Typical slides with multiple bullets overload working memory – again, they will only remember bullets randomly, if at all.
 - **ONE thought/point PER SLIDE** (ref: 1, 6, 10) If it is important enough – give the “bullet” its own slide – otherwise *say* it, don’t put it in the show. Powerpoint slides are free – adding another has no cost
 - PowerPoint is NOT a Word Processor – large blocks of text should be in your handout, not your slideshow (or in the notes section)
 - **LITTLE TEXT per slide** - goal: no more than 6 words per slide. No text is OK – graphic Can speak for itself.
- **Handouts: Give out at the END** (otherwise they will read and not listen to you). YOU are what folks have come to hear – if your text/handout is all they need – why are you there?
- **Images** - Graphics should “hook” your audience, appeal to their emotion, emphasize your statements, or present useful VISUAL information (data, metaphors, etc.). A few important rules of thumb:
 - Use photos not clip art
 - Avoid slide headers and footers – they take up screen space and are tuned out by the 2nd or 3rd slide. Put that info in your handout or at the beginning and end of your show.
 - Bigger has more impact – allow photos to hit edges of slide or fill slide.
 - It is OK for your text to be on top of your picture – but be sure you use good clear contrast for your text (readability)
 - Black backgrounds generally have more impact than white.
 - Present critical data points instead of entire graphs.
 - *People* are interesting than *things*, and faces looking at you are more “gripping.”

In Summary:

Research shows that **effective presentations are clear, concise, and make effective use of visuals.**

You can improve the effectiveness of your presentations by addressing these areas:

- ✓ **Audience:** Who are they, what are their needs/wants/expectations? How can you appeal to them/persuade them?
- ✓ **Focus:** No more than 3 big ideas per presentation. If they take away only THREE things – what three do *I* this is most important for them to take away? (keep in mind your audience!)
- ✓ **Delivery:** Be enthusiastic, personable, and expressive. Interact with the audience. Rehearse to build confidence and plan for the unforeseen.
- ✓ **Narrative:** Use real experiences, colorful metaphors, real situations to “frame” your big ideas/critical concepts
- ✓ **Simplify:** ONE thought/point per slide, text to a minimum, avoid templates & bullets – remember additional slides cost \$0 each!
- ✓ **Images:** The powerpoint is for emphasis – images are your “hook”, the more powerful the image, the more effective – use photos, big & clear, pull out key data.

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References and Resources

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- (4) Elias, Maurice, et al (1997) *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning* (ASCD)
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- (10) Reynolds, Garr (2008) *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*
- (11) Tufte, Edward (2003) *PowerPoint is Evil: Power Corrupts. PowerPoint corrupts absolutely*. WIRED magazine, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2_pr.html

Presentation Examples:

Dick Hardt – sample presentation on Utube: Identity 2.0 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrpajcAgR1E>

Lawrence Lessig – sample presentation on Utube: 10 minutes to announce two ideas

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLIniks2O0s&feature=channel_page

(note – this is a political opinion piece, but a good example of his powerpoint style)

70+ Powerpoint and presentation resources and Great Examples:

<http://www.meryl.net/2008/01/70-powerpoint-and-presentation-resources-and-great-examples/>

Resources for Images:

- Photo CDs/collections already owned by CLS (See Mike or Ed)
- www.morguefile.com (free – cannot resell PICTURE, but can profit off of pic)
- <http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons> ('free' images with a variety of restrictions)
- <http://www.stockxpert.com> (royalty free photos – some limitations)
- <http://images.google.com> (be careful of copyright)
- <http://www.gettyimages.com/> (some free images, many for sale)