

Delivering the Perfect Presentation

All too easily, a PowerPoint presentation transforms an interesting topic into a snooze fest. Even a few simple errors—such as an over reliance on slides or on the dreaded laser pointer—can ruin even the most polished presentation. But fear not. Here's how to make your presentation strong and keep your audience engaged.

Keep it Simple

Too many people make the mistake of putting up slides that are jammed with lists, statistics and hard-to-read graphs or tables. They then compound that by waving the laser pointer at the screen to highlight the most important points. When the presenter puts up a slide with so much information, the audience automatically tries to make sense of it as a whole. If there is information on a slide that isn't absolutely necessary—don't include it.

Your Key to Success: the 10/20/30 Rule

No more than **10 slides** for a **20 minute** presentation and no smaller than a **30-point font**. Any more than that and you run the risk that the audience will stop paying attention.

Use Pictures Where Possible

PowerPoint is a visual tool. Use visuals to make it work. Words on a slide force your audience to read and think—and that takes time. Compelling images creates an emotional reaction in the brain— and that takes no time at all. Once you have captured the audience's attention they are much more likely to not only be focused on what you have to say but also to remember it afterwards.

Avoid Bullet Points

The audience reads a slide with bullet points faster than you do—so while you are still talking about the point #1, they've finished #4 and haven't heard a thing you've said. Our eyes naturally move from top to bottom when reading. Which means our brains—including the brains of your audience—automatically attaches progressively less importance to bullet points at the bottom than at the top. If you put four bullet points on one slide each one takes up 25% of the available space. If you use one point per slide that is 100% of the slide and means the audience is focused on that as you talk about it. If you really feel you need a list, use animation so the points come up on the screen one at a time.

Don't Read the Slides

Slides should *support and complement not duplicate it*. So don't repeat what's on the slide, elaborate on it. People can't read and listen at the same time so if your audience is busy reading your slides they are not busy listening to you.

Animation Is Your Enemy

PowerPoint has features that let you animate objects and words to fly across the screen. While these effects can be engaging they can also become distracting, so use them sparingly, and only on one key point.

Throw in Blank Slides

This is your presentation so you want people to be looking at you as much as they are at the screen. Throwing in a blank slides every once in a while forces the audience to turn away from the screen and focus on you.

Practice, Practice, Practice

You have put together a great presentation, avoided all the pitfalls and you are ready to wow the audience. Except that you forget the single most important element: how you deliver. Before you go anywhere near the event, practice your presentation until you know exactly what you want to say and—perhaps just as important—how you want to say it.

Rehearse your presentation out loud: Reading out loud lets you hear how you will sound and how it feels to you. Then, you can make

changes so that the final presentation sounds natural, has a strong flow and is as effective as it can be.

Don't be afraid to ask someone you know and trust to serve as an audience as you rehearse your presentation. They will be able to give you some feedback and you'll get a better sense of how this comes across to others.

Talk directly to your audience—don't read your presentation. Even if you have great slides, but are reading your presentation, the whole thing will feel flat. Connect with your audience by talking to them. The more you rehearse your presentation beforehand the more comfortable you will be with the content and the better your performance will be.

Remember, It's a Performance

People in the audience are looking at you, they are listening to you, they want you to engage and enthrall them. You can't do that if you are reading or talking in a flat, dull, monotone. So, remember that nothing is more engaging than someone who really cares about what they do. Enthusiasm is infectious. If you're enthusiastic, your presentation will hit home to any audience.

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