

Powerpoint Presentations Less is More

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PowerPoint presentations can either support a speaker's purpose or harm it. Ensuring that it is both a value added component and efficiently made requires planning. Taking the time to consider your objectives and to script and plan your presentation is time well spent. In the end you will build your presentation faster and the time spent will be of lasting value.

What is it for?

Building a slideshow for speaker support is a very specific task, not to be confused with preparing a free-standing slideshow that functions on its own in a kiosk.

As speaker support, the PowerPoint slideshow, properly used, helps to focus the audience on the topics at hand and keeps attention directed towards the speaker.

If the PowerPoint was the main means of conveying information, there would be no need for a speaker at the head of the room and no reason for a conference or meeting. The speaker is the authority, and the reason people are in the room.

What does it take?

Massive amounts of information are not necessary to motivate our audience to look at the screen. The fact

that there is a screen with brightness emanating from it is in itself enough to draw attention to the front of the room. To test this assertion, try turning a TV on during a party to a channel with only static. Conversation will fade as attention is diverted to the screen, where only the potential for an image exists. The blank screen itself can tend to dominate over any but the most intense conversations and before long even those may draw to a close.

Inappropriately used, PowerPoint can be entirely counterproductive. For example, using the PowerPoint slides as speaker's notes to keep

the presenter focused on the presentation is a dangerous practice. It is also important to note that a speaker who reads directly off of the slides is insulting the audience.

Too much information on the slide also leads people to believe that reading the slides is more important than actually listening to the speaker. The participants scramble to take notes on the slide contents and they inevitably lose the threads of the talk.

If you are concerned that your audience will forget or miss important points, you should consider providing written notes.

Less is more

Steve Jobs, of Apple Corporation, a brilliant presenter, uses PowerPoint slides that consist of single words. He employs the screen to hush the room, draw eyes to the staging area, and to keep his audience aware of what point he is addressing should their attention drift. This is an extreme example, not every speaker is as skilled as Jobs, but the principle is sound.

It is also worth noting here, that Jobs regularly allows the screen to fade to black. This draws our attention back to the speaker. Again, the purpose of the PowerPoint is to guide the attention of the audience.

Information

Your mission when scripting for PowerPoint, is to present essential information. You need to design the information to enhance the

overall experience by reinforcing key points from the talk.

Using the slides to help support the talk requires that the information on them is the bare minimum to synopsize the topic point. For example: “Less is More” covers both brevity in writing and visual elegance and establishes the primary premise of this article.

Writing

Clear and concise writing is critical to the proper function of any slideshow. Use short sentences for your bullet points. If you find that you have two thoughts contained in one point, separate them. Ideally, each line should be as short as a billboard, one to seven words.

Numbering your key presentation sections is an excellent practice. For example: “Today I will talk about 4 key points, Productivity, Quality, Service and Satisfaction”.

Visual Design

When you design the slides that make up the parts of each section, make it visually clear which section they belong to. This can be done through layout, titling, colour or a combination of these elements.

A clean and clear look to the slides is essential. Clutter will repel the eye and will inevitably sour the audience’s perception of the entire presentation.

Custom Colour Scheme

One of the first things you should establish is your custom colour scheme. This is a key element in

creating a visually elegant presentation. Choose your colour scheme carefully. Make certain that the colours both complement each other and are sufficiently unique from each other to function well. The primary colours are too strong for use in most contexts and should be used for very specific reasons, for example, red to indicate danger.

Type styles

Choose your type styles early and do not deviate from your choices. You should not use too many type styles on any given page, or within any section of a presentation. As a rule of thumb, use no more than one face each for your bold headline, subheading, body text and emphasis (generally italics). You might use less, but you should exercise extreme caution in using more.

Master slides

All attributes (colour, font choices, backgrounds) on the Master-slide are keyed to the attributes on default slides. For example, the text boxes that are part of the default slides are linked to the master slide typeface selections. This means that if you decide to change the typeface, those changes will flow to any text created in boxes linked to the Master-slide. Changing the Master-slide can also change other attributes throughout the presentation. New objects and text boxes that you specifically create are not linked to the Master-slide, their attributes will not change with it.

Margins

Your text boxes should be drawn to respect the margins of your

pages. Text that exceeds the margins or intrudes on your brand on a PowerPoint slide is just as unappealing visually as creeping text in any other context. It is unprofessional looking and degrades the impact of your presentation.

Transitions

If you choose to present several bullet points on a single slide, present them one at a time using the transitions option. Be sparing in your use of animated transitions, remembering that the appearance of a new line on the screen is inherently a transition,

'No Transition' under this menu option is an often-elegant solution. Again, this all relates to the issue of function.

Use animated transitions only when they enhance the meaning of the slide show, not because you have found a really fun transition.

You want people to remember the content, of your talk, not how it made its appearance on screen.

If you believe it is essential to use them, the simple transitions are generally the best to use, such as cover and uncover, fade, and box in and out. Dissolve, while visually simple, can often slow down the show and is not a good one to use too much.

This leads to another reason to be sparing with transitions; they create a computing draw that can slow and even choke your presentation at a critical moment. If you need tricky transitions to enhance the meaning of your show, you should be relying on a designer who is skilled in animation.

Clip art

Avoid the built in clip art, which is very poor in quality and seldom matches any design scheme. An important presentation requires bet-

ter. For the best impact, you should use a photo/illustration agency. For general use, royalty-free images are available for a minimal cost.

In the end, the small amount of planning invested will pay off richly for you. Your PowerPoint presentations will be more informative, memorable and convincing, which can only help to fulfill your goals in giving the presentation in the first place.

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Less is More

- Plan your presentation
- Write simple, concise text
- Use the same typefaces/colours
- Pretty is nice, but simple is essential

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