1. Hold up your end with compelling material.

In a way, PowerPoint's ease of use may be its own worst enemy. However simple and engaging it can be to build eye catching slides and graphics, bear in mind that PowerPoint isn't autonomous. The audience has come to hear you, not merely to stare at images tossed onto a screen. Build a strong PowerPoint program, but make sure that your spoken remarks are no less compelling. "PowerPoint doesn't give presentations — PowerPoint makes slides," says Matt Thornhill, president of Audience First, a Midlothian, Va., business that offers presentation training. "Remember that you are creating slides to support a spoken presentation."

2. Keep it simple.

We've all likely seen PowerPoint and other presentations where the speaker seemed ready to propose to the program. After all, it was clear that he fell in love with every wrinkle, special effect and other bit of gadgetry available. But the most effective PowerPoint presentations are simple — charts that are easy to understand, and graphics that reflect what the speaker is saying. Some authorities suggest no more than five words per line and no more than five lines per individual slide. "Don't gum up the works with too many words and graphics," Kerr says. "Do you really need to have everything up on the screen?"

3. Minimize numbers in slides.

PowerPoint's lure is the capacity to convey ideas and support a speaker's remarks in a concise manner. That's hard to do through a haze of numbers and statistics. For the most part, most effective PowerPoint displays don't overwhelm viewers with too many figures and numbers. Instead, leave those for a later, more thorough digestion in handouts distributed at presentation's end. If you want to emphasize a statistic in PowerPoint, consider using a graphic or image to convey the point. "For instance, when I once was talking about the prevalence of Alzheimer's patients, I used a photograph of an old woman rather than just throwing up a number on the screen," Kerr says.

4. Don't parrot PowerPoint.

One of the most prevalent and damaging habits of PowerPoint users is to simply read the visual presentation to the audience. Not only is that redundant — short of using the clicker, why are you even there? — but it makes even the most visually appealing presentation boring to the bone. PowerPoint works best with spoken remarks that augment and discuss, rather than mimic, what's on the screen. "Even with PowerPoint, you've got to make eye contact with your audience," says Roberta Prescott of The Prescott Group, a Connecticut-based communications consulting firm. "Those people didn't come to see the back of your head."

5. Time your remarks.

Another potential land mine is a speaker's comments that coincide precisely with the appearance of a fresh PowerPoint slide. That merely splits your audience's attention. A well-orchestrated PowerPoint program brings up a new slide, gives the audience a chance to read and digest it, then follows up with remarks that broaden and amplify what's on the screen. "It's an issue of timing," Kerr says. "Never talk on top of your slides."

6. Give it a rest.

Again, PowerPoint is most effective as a visual accompaniment to the spoken word. Experienced PowerPoint users aren't bashful about letting the screen go blank on occasion. Not only can that give your audience a visual break, it's also effective to focus attention on more verbally-focused give and take, such as a group discussion or question and answer session.

7. Use vibrant colours.

A striking contrast between words, graphics and the background can be very effective in conveying both a message and emotion.

8. Import other images and graphics.

Don't limit your presentation to what PowerPoint offers. Use outside images and graphics for variety and visual appeal, including video. "I often have one or two very short video clips in my presentations," says New York technology consultant Ramon Ray. "It helps with humour, conveys a message and loosens up the crowd."

9. Distribute handouts at the end — not during the presentation.

Some people may disagree with me here. But no speaker wants to be chatting to a crowd that's busy reading a summation of her remarks. Unless it is imperative that people follow a handout while you're presenting, wait until you're done to distribute them.

10. Edit ruthlessly before presenting.

Never lose the perspective of the audience. Once you're finished drafting your PowerPoint slides, assume you're just one of the folks listening to your remarks as you review them. If something is unappealing, distracting or confusing, edit ruthlessly. Chances are good your overall presentation will be the better for it.

Fix Your Presentations: 21 Quick Tips

Drowning in a PowerPoint swamp? Use these easy tricks to make your presentations more compelling & persuasive.

Most business presentations range from incredibly boring to, well ... just plain boring. I'm sure you have a few offenders within your own team. It doesn't have to be this way, though.

Here are 21 ways to make certain that your presentations hold your audience's interest–and help them make the decision you want them to make.

Preparation

- **Build a story.** Presentations are boring when they present scads of information without any context or meaning. Instead, tell a story, with the audience as the main characters (and, specifically, the heroes).
- **Keep it relevant.** Audiences only pay attention to stories and ideas that are immediately relevant. Consider what decision you want them to make, then build an appropriate case.
- **Cut your intro.** A verbose introduction that describes you, your firm, your topic, how you got there, only bores people. Keep your intro down to a sentence or two, even for a long presentation.
- **Begin with an eye-opener.** Kick off your talk by revealing a shocking fact, a surprising insight, or a unique perspective that naturally leads into your message and the decision you want made.
- **Keep it short and sweet.** When was the last time you heard someone complain that a presentation was too short? Make it half as long as you originally thought it should be (or even shorter).
- **Use facts, not generalities.** Fuzzy concepts reflect fuzzy thinking. Buttress your argument, story and message with facts that are quantifiable, verifiable, memorable and dramatic.
- **Customize for every audience.** One-size-fits-all presentations are like one-size-fits-all clothes; they never fit right and usually make you look bad. Every audience is different; your presentation should be too.
- **Simplify your graphics.** People shut off their brains when confronted with complicated drawings and tables. Use very simple graphics and highlight the data points that are important.
- **Keep backgrounds in the background.** Fancy slide backgrounds only make it more difficult for the audience to focus on what's important. Use a simple, single color, neutral color background.
- **Use readable fonts.** Don't try to give your audience to get an eyestrain headache by using tiny fonts. Use large fonts in simple faces (like Arial); avoid **boldface**, *italics* and ALL-CAPS.
- **Don't get too fancy.** You want your audience to remember your message, not how many special effects and visual gimcracks you used. In almost all cases, the simpler the better.

Presentation

- **Check your equipment ... in advance.** If you must use PowerPoint, or plan on showing videos or something, check to make sure that the setup really works. Then check it again. Then one more time.
- **Speak to the audience.** Great public speakers keep their focus on the audience, not their slides or their notes. Focusing on the audience encourages them to focus on your and your message.
- **Never read from slides.** Guess what? Your audience can read. If you're reading from your slides, you're not just being boring–you're also insulting the intelligence of everyone in the room.
- **Don't skip around.** Nothing makes you look more disorganized than skipping over slides, backtracking to previous slides, or showing slides that don't really belong. If there are slides that don't fit, cut them out of the presentation *in advance.*
- **Leave humor to the professionals.** Unless you're really good at telling jokes, don't try to be a comedian. Remember: When it comes to business presentations, polite laughter is the kiss of death.
- **Avoid obvious wormholes.** Every audience has hot buttons that command immediate attention and cause every other discussion to grind to a halt. Learn what they are and avoid them.
- **Skip the jargon.** Business buzzwords make you sound like you're either pompous, crazy, or (worst case) speaking in tongues. Cut them out–both from your slides and from your vocabulary.
- **Make it timely.** Schedule presentations for a time when the audience can give you proper attention. Avoid end of day, just before lunch, and the day before a holiday.
- **Prepare some questions.** If you're going to have a Q&A at the end of your presentation, be prepared to get the ball rolling by having up a question or two up your sleeve.
- **Have a separate handout.** If there's data that you want the audience to have, put it into a separate document for distribution after your talk. Don't use your slide deck as a data repository.

Now send a link to this column to all your colleagues. Maybe the worst offenders will take the hint.

Geoffrey James is an award-winning journalist who has written hundreds of articles on sales and marketing, and has helped thousands of sales professionals communicate more effectively with customers. James' latest book is How to Say It: Business to Business Selling. @Sales_Source

PowerPoint Presentation Advice

Mike Splane –© 2006

http://www.cob.sjsu.edu/splane_m/PresentationTips.htm

Structuring Your Talk:

Preparing a talk always takes far longer than you anticipate. Start early!
- Write a clear statement of the problem and its importance.
- Research. Collect material which may relate to the topic.
- Tell a story in a logical sequence.
- Stick to the key concepts. Avoid description of specifics and unnecessary details.
- If you are making a series of points, organize them from the most to the least important. The less important points can be skipped if you run short of time.
- Keep your sentences short, about 10-20 words each is ideal. This is the way people usually talk.
- Strive for clarity. Are these the best words for making your point? Are they unambiguous? Are you using unfamiliar jargon or acronyms?

Preparing Your Slides:

Presentation Design
- Let the picture or graphics tell the story - minimize the use of text.
- Don't overload your slides with too much text or data.
- FOCUS. In general, using a few powerful slides is the aim.
- Type key words in the PowerPoint Notes area listing what to say when displaying the slide. The notes are printable.
- Number your slides and give them a title.
- Prepare an Agenda or Table of Contents slide. You can reuse the same slide at the end of the presentation by changing the title to Summary.
- Prepare a company logo slide for your presentation.
- You can add a logo and other graphics to every slide using the slide master feature or by adding them to the footer.
- Proofread everything, including visuals and numbers.
- Keep "like" topics together.
- Strive for similar line lengths for text.

Visual elements
- A font size of 28 to 34 with a bold font is recommended for subtitles. The title default size is 44. Use a san serif font for titles.
- Use clear, simple visuals. Don't confuse the audience.
- Use contrast: light on dark or dark on light.
- Graphics should make a key concept clearer.
- Place your graphics in a similar location within each screen.
- To temporarily clear the screen press W or B during the presentation. Press any key to resume the presentation.

Text
- Font size must be large enough to be easily read. Size 28 to 34 with a bold font is recommended.

- It is distracting if you use too wide a variety of fonts.
- Overuse of text is a common mistake.
    - Too much text makes the slide unreadable. You may just as well show a blank slide. Stick to a few key words.
    - If your audience is reading the slides they are not paying attention to you. If possible, make your point with graphics instead of text.
    - You can use Word Art, or a clip art image of a sign, to convey text in a more interesting way.

Numbers
- Numbers are usually confusing to the audience. Use as few as possible and allow extra time for the audience to do the math.
- Numbers should never be ultra precise:
    - "Anticipated Revenues of $660,101.83" looks silly. Are your numbers that accurate? Just say $660 thousand.
    - "The Break Even Point is 1048.17 units. Are you selling fractions of a unit?
    - Don't show pennies. Cost per unit is about the only time you would need to show pennies.
- If you have more than 12-15 numbers on a slide, that's probably too many.
- Using only one number per sentence helps the audience absorb the data.

Statistics
- Use the same scale for numbers on a slide. Don't compare thousands to millions.
- When using sales data, stick to a single market in the presentation. Worldwide sales, domestic sales, industry sales, company sales, divisional sales, or sales to a specific market segment are all different scales. They should not be mixed.
- Cite your source on the same slide as the statistic, using a smaller size font.

Charts
- Charts need to be clearly labeled. You can make more interesting charts by adding elements from the drawing toolbar.
- Numbers in tables are both hard to see and to understand. There is usually a better way to present your numerical data than with columns and rows of numbers. Get creative!
- PowerPoint deletes portions of charts and worksheets that are imported from Excel, keeping only the leftmost 5.5 inches. Plan ahead.

Backgrounds
- Backgrounds should never distract from the presentation.
- Using the default white background is hard on the viewer's eyes. You can easily add a design style or a color to the background.
- Backgrounds that are light colored with dark text, or vice versa, look good. A dark background with white font reduces glare.
- Colors appear lighter when projected. Pale colors often appear as white.
- Consistent backgrounds add to a professional appearance.
- For a long presentation, you may want to change background designs when shifting to a new topic.

Excitement
- Slides for business presentations should be dull! You don't want to distract the audience.
- Sounds and transition effects can be annoying. Use sparingly.

- Animation effects can be interesting when used in moderation.
  - Too much animation is distracting.
  - Consider using animated clip art
  - Consider using custom animation
- You can insert video and audio clips into PowerPoint.
- You can also insert hyperlinks.

Hints for Efficient Practice:

Timing - Practicing Your Presentation,
- Talk through your presentation to see how much time you use for each slide.
- Set the automatic slide transition to the amount of time you want to spend discussing each slide.
- Are you using the right amount of time per slide? Decide which slides or comments need alteration to make your presentation smoother.
- Change the automatic slide transition settings for individual slides to fit the amount of time needed for that slide and practice again. Are you still within the time limit?
- Decide if you want to remove the automatic slide transition feature before giving the presentation.

Content
- Make a list of key words/concepts for each slide
- Read through the list before you begin.
- Don't attempt to memorize your text;
- Your words will probably be different each time you practice.
- Think about the ideas, and your words will follow naturally.

Delivering Your Talk:

Pre-Talk Preparation
- Plan to get there a few minutes early to set up and test the equipment.
- Dress appropriately for your audience.
- Turn off your cell phone.

Handouts:
- Edward Tufte, the leading expert on visual presentation techniques, advises speakers to always prepare a handout when giving a PowerPoint presentation.
- Make about 10% more handouts than you expect to use.
- Distribute handouts at the beginning of your talk.

Opening:
- Jump right in and get to the point.
- Give your rehearsed opening statement; don't improvise at the last moment.
- Use the opening to catch the interest and attention of the audience.
- Briefly state the problem or topic you will be discussing.
- Briefly summarize your main theme for an idea or solution.

Speaking
- Talk at a natural, moderate rate of speech
- Project your voice.
- Speak clearly and distinctly.

- Repeat critical information.
- Pause briefly to give your audience time to digest the information on each new slide.
- Don't read the slides aloud. Your audience can read them far faster than you can talk.
- If you plan to write on the slides to emphasize key points during the presentation, practice ahead of time. To select the writing tool right-click during the presentation.

Body Language
- Keep your eyes on the audience
- Use natural gestures.
- Don't turn your back to the audience.
- Don't hide behind the lectern.
- Avoid looking at your notes. Only use them as reference points to keep you on track. Talk, don't read.

Questions
- Always leave time for a few questions at the end of the talk.
- If you allow questions during the talk, the presentation time will be about 25% more than the practice time.
- You can jump directly to a slide by typing its number or by right-clicking during the presentation and choosing from the slide titles.
- Relax. If you've done the research you can easily answer most questions.
- Some questions are too specific or personal. Politely refuse to answer.
- If you can't answer a question, say so. Don't apologize. "I don't have that information. I'll try to find out for you."

Length:
- To end on time, you must PRACTICE!
- When practicing, try to end early. You need to allow time for audience interruptions and questions.

Demeanor:
- Show some enthusiasm. Nobody wants to listen to a dull presentation. On the other hand, don't overdo it. Nobody talks and gestures like a maniac in real life. How would you explain your ideas to a friend?
- Involve your audience. Ask questions, make eye contact, and use humor.
- Don't get distracted by audience noises or movements.
- You'll forget a minor point or two. Everybody does.
- If you temporarily lose your train of thought you can gain time to recover by asking if the audience has any questions.

Conclusion:
- Close the sale.
- Concisely summarize your key concepts and the main ideas of your presentation.
- Resist the temptation to add a few last impromptu words.
- End your talk with the summary statement or question you have prepared. What do you want them to do? What do you want them to remember?
- Consider alternatives to "Questions?" for your closing slide. A summary of your key points, a cartoon, a team logo, or a company logo may be stronger.