

Better PowerPoint

Why are we here?

More in the 'right here and now' physical sense as opposed to the 'is there a God', '42 equals the meaning of life' sense - however, we are here to discuss PowerPoint.

This whitepaper will not turn you into a PowerPoint Genius, or even an evil one but it should help you to stand back and look at what you're producing and ask 'is this the best way of displaying the information'?

What is PowerPoint?

PowerPoint was created as a hack, a method of communication between engineers and the marketing department as a quick and dirty way of generating slides. This has now mutated into a powerful tool, allowing very dense communication but therein lays the danger; it has now become so dense that people are losing interest.

Not a fan:

“PowerPoint Is Evil – Power Corrupts. PowerPoint Corrupts Absolutely.”

Wired Issue 11.09. **Edward Tufte** [Tufte kills a kitten]

“PowerPoint doesn't kill meetings. People kill meetings. But using PowerPoint is like having a loaded AK-47 on the table: You can do very bad things with it.”

Peter Norvig, Google Director of Research

Connecting to Your Audience

Think of every presentation you've ever seen, which ones stood out to you?

Remember, you are presenting the deck, the people in your audience are there to listen to you; the slides are there to enforce your message.

Core Branding Message

Branding is important, get it wrong and the trust will disappear.

You are a brand. Keeping your brand consistent is important. Consistency leads to trust.

A brand is trying to get you somewhere and establish a reputation, so when the message going out doesn't match what your audience sees and hears you have a problem.

We call this problem the authenticity gap, that gap threatens credibility, threatens growth and threatens your progress. Which is why your brand and your reputation need to work together, when they do you can match promise with perception, you can create harmony with one unifying message and you can be seen as you wish to be seen. In the words of Charlie "perception is reality"

Breaking Down the Information

Chunking: Don't be tempted to put everything you're trying to say in one slide, it will be on the screen too long, it will be cramped and it will look boring.

Three bullets per page, max, ever. Got more to say - put it onto another slide...

Complicated Diagrams: A necessary evil, especially with complicated messages! Even when the process is broken down to the fewest core elements they can still be overwhelming. Consider your audience - if you're using a diagram, take the time to talk them through it, their recall will be greatly improved.

Imagery

If you think your presentation will ever be in the public domain or forward facing, ensure all imagery used is not in breach of copyright.

Good place to start: <http://compfight.com/>

Flickr (advanced search, only search within Creative Commons-licensed content)

Basic Design tips

1. Keep it simple.
2. Rule of thirds.
3. Big numbers big.

Hierarchy

Hierarchical organisation is the simplest structure for visualising and understanding complexity. Chunking method of splitting content into short, easily scannable elements, to avoid overloading and maintaining engagement.

But we are not designers

I don't believe that to be true, by using common sense and following the few simple design principles your deck will greatly improve. Things to remember:

- Stick to the template, fonts and color scheme.
- This will help keep the visual language consistent and not distract from your message.
- If a slide looks too crowded - it is too crowded, edit down to your core message.
- Think grids. Alignment creates order. It allows you to quickly connect elements across the page and helps define start and end points.

Do's and don'ts

- Don't use your presentation as a teleprompter.
- Don't give out any handouts at the beginning or else people will read them instead of listening to you.
- Do use the notes facility, or better yet have prompt cards.
- If you are leaving some printouts behind or writing documentation, do not use PowerPoint - there is a Word and InDesign template, which will look far more professional.
- Good presentations take time to put together, spend the time and it will be an asset that gives you great returns.
- Consider your audience, decide your tone of voice - if it's a first meeting keep it light and not too technical. If you're there for a follow up and your audience is technical then be technical.

SOURCES

<http://www.sethgodin.com/freeprize/reallybad-1.pdf>

The atomic method of creating a PowerPoint presentation

- The typical person speaks 10 or 12 sentences a minute.
- The atomic method requires you to create a slide for each sentence. For a five-minute talk, that's 50 slides.
- Each slide must have a single word, a single image or a single idea.
- Make all 50 slides. Force yourself to break each concept into the smallest possible atom. If it's not worthy of a slide, don't say it.
- Once you have 50 slides, do the talk in practice. Remove slides and sentences that add no value or don't move you forward.
- Now (and only now), start consolidating slides. If two or three or four slides work together as one, then go ahead and make them one. You've got molecules now, not atoms.