Death By PowerPoint

How To Avoid It & Other Presentation Tips
Death By PowerPoint

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PowerPoint was released by Microsoft in 1988 and has radically changed the way we all create and deliver presentations. It enabled us to deliver slides with high impact using a wide range of media, personalised to our business and our clients’ needs, quickly and efficiently.

Microsoft estimate that over 30 million presentations are made using PowerPoint every day, worldwide.

Unfortunately, it potentially had serious drawbacks when used as a sales tool. I am old enough to remember 1988. Prior to PowerPoint being released we used acetates and overhead projectors. The only benefit I can remember is that at least when the presenter entered the room you knew how many slides were going to be used because you could physically see them being carried in and estimate how long the presentation would last.

Many of the mistakes made by presenters’ pre-PowerPoint are still being made today. In this article I want to look at the problem overall then give you a few ideas for you to put into practice next time you make a presentation.

I have attended many PowerPoint presentations and made many myself. In the early days of PowerPoint everyone was determined to make use of all the features it provided. We were exposed to images flying in from one side or another, explosions, all sorts of weird graphics and worst of all clip art, snatches of audio and video and bullet points galore.

The problem was the presentation became more important than the message being delivered. It was impressive at first but soon we began to tire of it.

In my opinion, with PowerPoint the presenter relies too heavily on the presentation and fails to interact properly with the group. Most presentations contain far too much detailed information and because of attention span problems much of the message is lost.
PowerPoint can be a very powerful sales tool, but it is really important to remember that you are the presenter and you need to be the focus of attention. Your role is to communicate with the group. The PowerPoint presentation is there to help add impact to the way you communicate, not to take over as presenter.

Here are 10 tips on presenting and PowerPoint to be going on with:

1. Get Off To A Good Start

As part of your pre-presentation set up, before the audience arrives, go into slide show and display your first slide. Then make it disappear. I’ll tell you how to do this in point 2.

Avoid having, as your first slide, a slide that just gives the title of the presentation and your name. Many people have this on display as the audience arrives. It serves no purpose and distracts the audience.

Remember, you are the presenter and you need to be centre stage and centre of attention. Get rid of superfluous slides that don’t add value.

Your introduction should give the audience 5 pieces of information:

- What is the objective of the presentation?
- What is going to be covered during the presentation?
- How long will it last?
- Can they ask questions?
- What’s in it for the audience? How will it benefit them?

2. The Power Of B

Now it’s time to make the first slide disappear until you are ready to show it.

I will repeat what I just said because this is a really important point. When you are presenting you need to stand centre stage. Most presenters using PowerPoint present from the side because the screen is positioned in the middle.

When you are in Slide Show making a presentation if you press the B key on your keyboard the screen goes black and the slide disappears. This allows you to stand in the middle without getting the image projected onto you. In addition it allows the audience to focus on you. To get the slide back, press the B button again.

I don’t like presentations where slides are shown one after the other. It’s like being subjected to watching a friends holiday snaps. Switch off the slide once it has done its’ job then get back to your job of communicating with your audience.
3. Introduce The Slide Before You Show It

Once you show a slide the audience starts to read it and stops listening to you. I don’t show the slide until I have introduced it and prepared the audience. Here is an example:

Introduce the slide with the screen blank, having pressed the B key:

“Having looked at the sales figures for the whole team I now want to break these down into individual regions. You will see there has been a wide variance between the results achieved in different parts of the country”

Press B, stand to one side and show the slide and focus on the key points you need to demonstrate. Present the information on the slide. After you have done that and the slide has done its’ job:

Press B, turn the slide off, come centre stage then summarise:

“So what we have seen is a wide variance in results for different parts of the country. What I want to explore next is the reasons why this is happening.”

And we are on to the next slide.

4. Let Them Look At The Slide & By The Way, Shut Up!

When I show a slide, after having introduced it, I move to one side then shut up. This gives the audience time to look at the slide and take in the information. Don’t worry about silence. It’s only a few seconds and if you keep talking while they are taking in the information on the slide, they probably aren’t listening to you anyway.

Instead of talking for these few seconds, observe the audience and their reaction. Confident presenters aren’t afraid of silence. Silence can focus the mind of the audience and draw their attention to key points.

5. Look For Feedback

Eye contact with your audience is really important. It tells you how the audience is feeling and can give you valuable feedback.

I was once sitting in on a presentation when I was working as sales coach to the presenter. The audience was bored stiff. Their body language and excessive yawning gave that away although the presenter didn’t seem to notice.

Then he said something and they all sat up and started making notes. Guess what? He missed it.
You didn’t need to be a genius to work out he’d said something important, but it didn’t register with him. Keep your eyes and ears open and be flexible enough to go off script if required.

6. Here Is The News

I like to steal ideas from professionals. No, let’s put it another way. If I observe a professional at work who is good I will try to copy what they do. For example, listen to news readers, professional entertainers and media people and study how they use their voice when they are broadcasting or presenting.

They don’t speak in a monotone but vary the tone, pitch and volume of their voice as they speak. Copy what they do. It feels a bit strange at first but will make your voice presentation style more interesting.

Look at how news programmes are structured. You get a summary of the key points at the beginning, a summary at the end and links between the different news stories.

You can copy this structure for your presentation. Too many presentations are delivered like a movie with no space for summaries and time for the audience to reflect. It has been described as (Tell them)³

In other words, tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them.

It’s the old adage. If you want to be good at something, find someone who is already successful and do what they do.

7. Here Is Some Useful Information. Your Audience Can Read!

The worst thing you can do as a presenter, in my opinion, is to produce a PowerPoint slide that contains text, show it, and then read it to the audience. This goes back to the main message from this article. You are the presenter. You’re not reading them a bedtime story. They can read!

Visual aids should aid you in getting your message across. If you are reading from your slides your audience is bored after a few minutes.

Use images and key words. Stop reading and start communicating.

8. Give Your Slides Impact

Following on from the last point, show images and don’t cram the slide full of information or data. I have seen whole Excel spreadsheets reproduced as a slide and shown the audience.
The problem is that it lacks impact.

Get rid of the detail and show the important stuff. You can always give them the spreadsheet as a handout. You have got to keep their attention and focus on the key points you want them to remember.

9. Summarise

You really do need to consider your audience and their ability to take in information. We bombard them with information when, in actual fact, there may be a fairly simple message we want them to take away.

Begin with your preparation. What do you want to achieve as a result of making this presentation? What do you want them to remember?

By stopping occasionally and summarising where we have got to and where we are going, you give the audience time and space to reflect on your message.

Go back and see how they present the news. Look at how often they summarise the key points before moving on to the next item.

10. Look & Sound Confident

In my opinion, confidence comes from practice and experience. Practice your presentation until you know it well. Present to your friends or colleagues and ask for feedback.

Work on your body language it accounts for around 55% of the message your audience receives. Tone of voice another 38% and the words just 7%.

Slow down, speak up and take a few deep breaths before you start. Not too many though or you may hyperventilate and pass out!

Only joking!

Conclusion

PowerPoint can be a very powerful tool for all of us who need to present. However, we need to reassess how we use PowerPoint and remember that each presentation we make has to have an objective. Our role as presenter is to make sure the objective is achieved and the needs of our audience are met.

The Sales Training Consultancy specialises in helping people make more effective presentations. For more information visit our website www.salestraining.co.uk