Tips
for Better PowerPoint Visuals

Over 75% of the information the people have in their head has come to them visually, just 13% through hearing and the other 12% through smell taste and touch. Research indicates, if you show a picture comprehension and retention is three and a half times greater than saying the words alone. To apply a commonsense test, ask yourself which do you remember best, names or faces.

Often presenters design and use visuals so badly they distract rather than enhance the message.

Here is a 26-point checklist of tips to develop and deliver high impact visuals to support your presentation:

1 The Billboard

Good visuals should be like a billboard on a highway, designed to deliver a precise and concise message where people can grasp the concepts quickly and easily.

2 Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

A day at a conference often delivers a nightmare of visual pollution, with colours overused, words overused, too many audio effects, too much information and a distraction from the presenter. The rule for better visuals is to simplify, simplify and simplify again.

3 Visuals to Support the Presentation

At the end of the presentation, the speaker will influence the audience more than the visual support. Even the best designed visuals will not carry a poorly prepared presenter because the power of influence rests with the speaker. Develop visuals around the presentation, not the presentation around the visuals.

4 Too Few Rather Than Too Many

It is always best to make a few points well and develop them effectively rather than "machine gun" too many points at an audience. It's the same with visuals. Many presenters use too many with too much detail. Ask the question of each visual… "Does this really support my objective, can it be simplified, and does it clarify or confuse?"

5 Choose a Sans Serif Font

The font you select is important, so choose a "sans serif" style. This means a font without serifs, which are the little projections or feet at the extremities of a printed letter or numeral. Search through your font profile and select one that is clear and easy to read. Stay with it throughout the visual design.

Here is an example of "sans serif" font:

Presenting with Panache (Arial)

Presenting with Panache (Comic Sans)

Here are examples of "serif" fonts:

Presenting with Panache (Times)

Presenting with Panache (Script)

6 Upper & Lower Case

Avoid using all capitals because they are difficult to read and audiences feel you're shouting through the visuals. To create impact, use bolding or italics in the font style.

7 Choose the Words Carefully

Use simple active words or short sentences in conversational style.

E.g. Instead of *Future Projection Analysis*, use *The Future*.

Instead of *Research Analysis*, use the question, *What Did We Find Out?*

8 One Concept Each Visual

Don't try to achieve too much on one visual. If the topic is complex, use builds on the slide to bring in new content when developing points. If you are concerned with overloading an audience with too much content, go to a second slide.

9 Font Size Does Matter

For main copy, use a minimum of 24-point font. Ideally, bullet point topics on the slide should be a minimum of 30 point. Headlines should be around 40 point. If you stay with these sizes, you will avoid the all too common problem of complicated slides with text too small to read.

10 Repeated Headlines

Evaluate the need for topic headlines on each slide. They are often unnecessary and may add little value when repeated. Simplify, simplify, simplify. Avoid clutter to eliminate unnecessary words and detail.

11 Understand the Value of Colour Backgrounds

For modern data projectors consider using a dark background with white, yellow or pale coloured words. Be careful, as some older data projectors do not have the lux power to project effectively with dark background slides. Overhead projectors need pale background and dark contrasting print.

12 Backgrounds to Enhance not Distract

The slide background should compliment the message, so keep it simple. An imported picture and graphic can be very effective if used sparingly, but not to overwhelm the slide message. If you choose to use a graphic disaster picture to enhance a safety presentation, then use it on the first slide. Let it stand alone, even without text. Perhaps repeat the visual at selected intervals to make a point with a slide, but avoid repeating on every visual.

13 Stay with Bullet Points

Audiences will not read too much detail on a slide, so it is best to use bullet points and develop the verbal story around them. Keep the detail simple with minimum words against each bullet.

14 Understand the Value of Colour

Colour will make all the difference to a visual but when it's overused, it distracts from the message. Stay with two or three colours for consistency through the presentation. The audience should be thinking about your message, not admiring your design skills.

15 Bullets not Numbers

Bullets are generally better than numbered points, because audiences often consider points listed with numbers as a priority sequence, with number 1 more important than number 2 etc. Unless this is the interpretation you want to achieve, it is safer to use bullets.

16 Don't Let Ego Rule Over Content

Each visual must deliver a clear message. Common audience feedback reveals that often the presenter's corporate logo is too dominant and overused. Audience participants are interested in the "What's in it for me?" message and how they are affected, so present information in audience opportunity, rather than obligation terms. Take care to ensure that the message you project, addresses the audience ego and not your own.

17 Landscape Format for Data Projection

Avoid the temptation of mixing landscape and portrait slides in the one presentation. Conference screen set-up is invariably designed for landscape presentation. Consider portrait format for overhead projectors and for venues with older style projection screens.

18 Use Natural Transitions

The easiest transition and builds are when text drops down from above or appears coming in from the left. It's easier to read when the text comes in from the same way each time, unless you have a specific case where a new transition would create attention. Take care not to overdo the builds and transitions because not every slide needs these effects.

19 Don't Rely on Spell Check Only

Spell check won't help with synonyms such as "their" and "there" or the correct spelling of a company name. It's best to print out the slides and get someone else to read it for typos, spelling and other inconsistencies.

20 Know the Slide Numbers

By printing out the presentation in handout form, you can number each slide and use the print out as your presentation notes. When you are in slide show you can move back and forth amongst slides simply by hitting the slide number and enter. This is also helpful when answering questions rather than having to scroll through the slides.

21 Audience Handout Notes

You can print out audience handouts with either three slides or six slides to a page. Alongside each slide in the three print format, is the provision to make notes. This also allows the presenter to make up keyword trigger notes as their own guide through the presentation.

22 Have a blank slide or two at the end

If you end your session by clicking out of slide show you will show the audience the "backstage" view of the presentation but a blank slide or two at the end will solve this problem.

23 Use the "B" Key

When you are in slide show view, if you press the "B" key you will get a black screen. This is helpful if you want to change the tempo of the presentation or develop group discussion.

24 Address the Audience Not the Screen

Don't read from the screen; assume the audience is capable of reading. If you have a hard copy of the slides in sequence and numbered, you should know exactly where you are in the presentation. Look to the screen occasionally to ensure you are on track, but face the audience. Eye contact is important to build credibility, especially with a cynical audience.

25 Have a Backup Plan

We have all experienced the difficulties when things go wrong with technology, so it's helpful to have a fallback plan with overheads or a whiteboard to avoid anxiety and stress.

26 Practice to Perfection

From experience over half the presentations at major conferences are subject to delays with communication and equipment issues between presenters and meeting organisers. Ensure that you have a seamless transition from one speaker to the next and know your equipment well. If time is running short, know how to skip slides without making an issue to the audience.

Many excellent presentations fail because program continuity is ineffective and audiences are unlikely to forgive time being wasted regardless of who is at fault.