

A Great Powerpoint Presentation

It's Selling

If everyone in the room agreed with you, you wouldn't need a presentation, would you? You could save a lot of time by printing out a one-page project report and delivering it to each person. No, the reason we do presentations is to make a point, to sell one or more ideas.

But selling is hard. Most people don't even like to admit that they're selling. So, instead of taking a chance and trying to sell people in a presentation, we make our presentations boring. What a waste.

If you believe in your idea, sell it. Make your point as hard as you can and get what you came for. Your audience will thank you for it, because deep down, we all want to be sold.

Four Components To A Great Presentation

First, make yourself cue cards. This feature should be built in to PowerPoint, but it's not. You should be able to see your cue cards on your laptop's screen while your audience sees your slides on the wall. Alas. In the meantime, you'll just have to resort to writing them down the old-fashioned way. Now, you can use the cue cards you made to make sure you're saying what you came to say.

Second, make slides that reinforce your words, not repeat them. Create slides that demonstrate, with emotional proof, that what you're saying is true not just accurate.

Talking about pollution in Houston? Instead of giving me four bullet points of EPA data, why not show me a photo of a bunch of dead birds, some smog and even a diseased lung? Amazingly, it's more fun than doing it the old way. But it's effective communication.

Third, create a written document. A leave-behind. Put in as many footnotes or details as you like. Then, when you start your presentation, tell the audience that you're going to give them all the details of your presentation after it's over, and they don't have to write down everything you say.

IMPORTANT: Don't hand out the written stuff at the beginning. Don't! If you do, people will read the whole thing while you're talking and ignore you. Instead, your goal is to get them to sit back, trust you and take in the emotional and intellectual points of your presentation.

Fourth, create a feedback cycle. If your presentation is for a project approval, hand people a project approval form and get them to approve it, so there's no ambiguity at all about what you've just agreed to.

So What's On Your Slides?

Here are the five rules you need to remember to create amazing PowerPoint presentations:

1. No more than six words on a slide. EVER.
2. No cheesy images. Use professional images from corbis.com instead. They cost \$3 each, or a little more if they're for 'professional use'.
3. No dissolves, spins or other transitions. None.
4. Sound effects can be used a few times per presentation, but never (ever) use the sound effects that are built in to the program. Instead, rip sounds and music from CDs and leverage the Proustian effect this can have.
5. Don't hand out print-outs of your slides. They're emotional, and they won't work without you there. If someone wants your slides to show "the boss," tell them that the slides go if you go.

The home run is easy to describe: You put up a slide. It triggers an emotional reaction in the audience. They sit up and want to know what you're going to say that fits in with that image. Then, if you do it right, every time they think of what you said, they'll see the image (and vice versa).