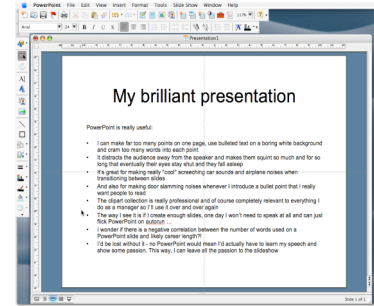


How to Avoid Death by PowerPoint and PowerPoint Poisoning

Presentation software has become as ubiquitous as the office coffee machine. No self-respecting manager today would be seen without his own carefully crafted slide deck. Yet many still wield PowerPoint with often devastating incompetence.

A Partner of the FutureWork Forum, Susan Huskisson asks: Just how can we avoid death by PowerPoint?



You may have seen the Dilbert cartoon with the guy who has 397 slides, a sleeping audience and an observer's comment "PowerPoint poisoning." The term "Death by PowerPoint" was introduced by Jared Sandberg in a The Wall Street Journal article when he said "The phrase 'Death by PowerPoint' is common corporate parlance." Most of us who are in the audience these days can attest to the accuracy of these observations.

In my more than 20 years coaching speakers, I have never seen a tool that can both help and hurt a presenter the way PowerPoint can. Used correctly, it enhances the presentation by showing information in a way that mere words cannot do; used badly, it can confuse and compete with the communication.

"HR professionals have so many slides about people – and there are no PEOPLE in their slides."

So how do you use PowerPoint correctly? Let's look at the three big mistakes presenters make and how to correct them.

Big mistake number one: The speaker develops the presentation in PowerPoint. Wrong! PowerPoint is a visual aid – it does not represent the structure. First outline the objective and content of your message, THEN choose the slides that will enhance that message.

Big mistake number two: The presenter puts his/her notes on the slides and all the details the audience may need later. So now the audience has a reading lesson.

All those WORDS on the screen mean the audience cannot really listen to the speaker, nor can they actually read the zillion words you showed them. Result – bad communication. If you used the solution for mistake number one,

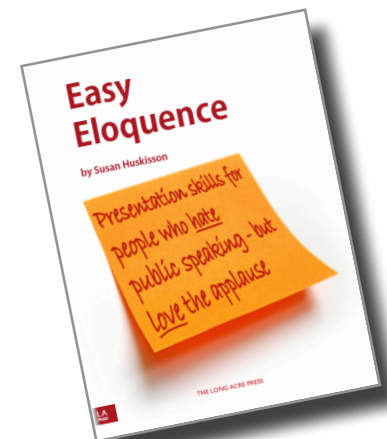
you should have limited the slides to the ones that are backing up your structure, not the other way around.

Take the slides your listeners need in order to understand your message better, and clean up all unnecessary words (articles, prepositions, full sentences, etc) and shorten to four to six abbreviated bullets. Then look for a picture, clip art, chart, or some image that gives meaning and interest to the message on that slide. For all those details you want the audience to have later, put them in Speakers Notes (a great PowerPoint function) and give them out later. Learn to use separate notes so that the audience does not have to read yours. People don't want the details in the presentation. Always separate DATA from INFORMATION when designing your slides. Remember, the audience just wants INFORMATION and IMAGES. Supposedly Confucius said "A picture is worth ten thousand words." I am always amazed when HR professionals have so many slides about people – and there are no PEOPLE in their slides.

Big mistake number three: The speaker keeps the slides on the entire presentation, fearing any moments when he/she is without that large, bright screen drawing attention away from him. Remember, YOU ARE THE MESSAGE - not what is on the slide. Learn to begin and end your presentation by blanking the screen and moving into the center of the stage. Even better, put the screen on the side (making sure everyone can see it) and keep yourself as much in the middle as possible.

PowerPoint is a visual aid – it is there to assist you, so learn to black that screen from time to time so that audience attention goes back to you.

If you create a logical structure before you select your visuals, then make slides as concise as possible and with supporting images, your audience will pay more attention and retain more from the presentation. And if you are centrally positioned in the delivery, they will remember YOU and your message as well. So you turn PowerPoint poisoning into PowerPoint success.



Susan Huskisson is the Author of the just published Easy Eloquence – THE book on how to create more professional presentations. She can be reached at:

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The FutureWork Forum works with CEOs and HR Directors to help them anticipate the future of work and develop strategies and plans to help achieve their objectives.

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