



PowerPoints Can Kill—Or Create—Audience Buzz

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One of the most painful business meeting experiences I ever have is being subjected to a 35-slide PowerPoint presentation, each slide packed with dense verbiage and graphs too detailed to read. This is especially painful right after being served a big lunch or dinner with wine.

Do such gruesome events make me want to do business with the PowerPoint presenter? I am certain that you have had similar experiences. I've *daydreamed* through many interminable PowerPoint presentations while checking my Blackberry messages. So why do people torture us with boring and useless PowerPoints? Often because PowerPoints are created by committees or corporate marketing departments, and each participant insists on having his input. Or because presenters don't understand that *less is more* in creating impact while making an oral presentation or because speakers think they can wear down your resistance with sheer volume of detail. All are bad reasons for unedited *PowerPointing*.

Should we just discard PowerPoints and wing it with notecards or whiteboards? Absolutely not. PowerPoints can be effective presentation tools and have multiple applications. In fact, when appropriate and when technology is available, we strongly suggest that our clients use PowerPoints. You can embed video, audio and web links in them, email them, post them on your website, print them out and use them for making notes. They are fantastic tools. Here are some ways we think they can be used more effectively:

- **The 10-Slide Rule** – Never...ever use more than 10 slides. Fewer are better. The primary reason is that you are asking a roomful of human brains to do something they do not do well. Very few people can recall even one day after a speech more than a couple of points you've made. You're lucky if you can imprint *a single thought* that your audience will recall a week later. You certainly want to control what that thought is, and not rely on your audience to shift through hundreds of bullet points and perhaps remember one of the least significant ones.
- **Leave Them with Just One Thought** – This seems like a radical goal: Getting up in front of an audience and saying just one thing. But that is exactly what you should do for many reasons. As noted

above, your audience will remember only one thing anyway. It's best that *you* decide what the most important "takeaway" should be.

- **Say it...Number it...Describe it** – We are not advocating that you get up to a speaker's podium, utter one sentence and then sit down. (Though your audience would certainly prefer this to a long monologue chocked with details.) Your presentation should state your important point, illustrate it with statistics and describe it with interesting anecdotes. Then repeat your point, add more statistics, and illustrate it with another story or two. This will absolutely cement your point in everyone's mind. They could recall what you said for weeks or years afterwards. And they will be much likelier to act on it.
- **Take Questions** – *Engage* your audience by offering to answer questions. The Q&A period will be the liveliest and most enjoyable part of your program, anyway.
- **Distribute Material** – Make sure you have someone hand out your material toward the end of the program. That's when you can add as much detail as you'd like. You can also drive them to your website for yet more information.

I guarantee that your presentation or speech will be much easier to give. Your audience will get a lot more from the experience, and you will appear much likelier to be a good business partner than if you torture people with a 35-plus slide show.

For more information about how you can better communicate with your audiences, contact henry@easoncom.com