

## **Presenting with Visual Aids...Less is More.**

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*Are your presentation slides helping or hindering you in delivering your message? Do they attract attention for the right reasons, or do they merely distract the audience? How should you use your slides to aid and not impair your presentation?*

### **All cluttered up**

Have you ever been in a presentation whereby the presenter flashed out slide after slide of text and numbers? Each slide is so choked-full of data that the useful information is lost on you. You do not even know where to begin to focus, and your brain switches off soon after.

What's worst, all the presenter did was to read the text and figures verbatim.

### **Who are they supposed to aid anyway?**

Are visual aids prepared for the benefit of the presenter or the audience? Many presenters filled their slides to the brim with facts and figures thinking that the more they packed in there, the more the audience will understand. In reality, the exact opposite is true. Such slides merely help the presenter to regurgitate the data and serve as speaker's notes. They do very little to aid audience understanding. As the presenter, if the audience failed to understand, you have failed in your delivery.

### **Where too much data is a hindrance**

When there is a lot of data on a slide, the tendency is for you as the presenter to read the slides. This could be due to a fear of missing out something important. The other reason is complacency. If you think the data are going to be there on the slide anyway, you would not have invested sufficient time to internalise the content of the slides since you can read it to your audience. In other words, you have not fully prepared for your presentation.

This creates at least two problems for you as the presenter. Firstly, by reading, you lose valuable eye contact and hence connection with the audience. Secondly, having not internalised the content, you will be less prepared and less confident. As such, you tend to focus inwards, rather than outwards to your audience. You will be less engaging.

### **You role as a presenter**

Your role as a presenter is to present insights based on the slides presented, not read them. So you will explain, elaborate and exemplify by demonstrating and illustrating. The audience wants you and not just your text. If you can be replaced by the text, then you should save everybody's time by simply giving them your slides and not have a presentation.

Based on research, your overall message is broadly made up of the following components: words (7%), vocal (38%) and visual (55%). The text comprises only a mere 7% of the message. How you say what you say comprises the rest. The "how" is made up of the way you sound and look when you deliver your text.

According to Aristotle, the elements of a persuasive speech comprise the following: ethos (credibility of the speaker), logos (logical reasoning) and pathos (emotional appeal). In this regard, you are the most important visual aid of your

presentation. This is because people will be looking to you for verbal and visual cues as to your believability, authenticity and sincerity—adding up to the critical element of ethos. If you have no credibility, you have no buy-in. Simple.

With sufficient time and effort, a written proposal can be made to look good on paper. But whether the results will be delivered is determined by the person who will carry out the project. Management and clients use presentations as a platform to assess your passion and professionalism. They will determine if you can be trusted with the money and resources to deliver the results. This is the reason why even in the internet age where files and reports can be zipped across the world in seconds, presentations are still highly valued in the business world.

## Less is More

While many presenters have a tendency to pack as much as they can into one slide, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Inc., on the other hand, actually removes as much as he can. By showing less, he focuses the audience on the main idea in his slides. In fact, Steve uses very minimal, if any, bullet points in his slides. For example, during his 2008 “Let’s Rock” presentation, he shared with the audience that iTunes has an offering of 8.5 million songs, after starting from only just 200,000 songs. On his slide, he simply showed “8,500,000 songs”. The slide simply reinforces his key idea. In fact, the less you show, the more you can focus the audience on what’s really important.

Presenters who pack too much onto a slide, especially with bullet points, tend to overload their audience. Many pack in as much as possible as they want their slides to double up as the hardcopy handout to the audience. Garr Reynolds, author of *Presentation Zen*, calls them “slideuments”—where documents are merged with the slides. In trying to kill two birds with one stone, what ends up being killed is communication. The recommendation is to keep them separate.

Nancy Duarte, author of *Slide:ology*, has this to offer: white space on a slide offers visual breathing room. Clutter is simply a failure of design.

## Conclusion

Burying yourself in the text will not help you. You need to rise above the clutter and simplify your message. If you need more slides to convey a complex idea, do so by all means. Do not try to pack everything into one slide. This is a potential turn off and could hurt you before you even have a chance to explain yourself, and risk losing your ethos.

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