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Fading into Sameness: How Too Many Slides Can Ruin Your Presentation

By Debbie Bailey

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"I have a love/hate relationship with PowerPoint. In the right hands, it's a great presentation tool. In the wrong hands (and unfortunately, most usage falls into this category) we are cloning generations of boring slide shows narrated by speakers we barely notice." – Debbie Bailey

Ah, the good old days. For me, those were the days before PowerPoint slide shows became the norm for virtually every business presentation given in corporate America. I fondly remember the days when presenters spoke passionately about a subject near and dear to their heart without having to display every single thought on a slide. I reminisce back to the time when 80 slides for a 20 minute presentation was NOT the norm, when presenters weren't just slide narrators, when preparing for a presentation meant more than putting together your slide show.

Now don't get me wrong, I know the advantages of using slides, however, I also know that too much of a good thing is NOT GOOD. I subscribe to Bill Wheless' philosophy about PowerPoint "It's like alcohol in the hands of a drunk. What we need is moderation." Somehow, we must learn to use, but not abuse, the positive attributes slides bring to our presentations. If we don't, we risk looking and sounding like every other boring business presenter. Worst of all, we become forgettable.

Think about the last presenter who strongly affected you. More than likely that presenter used very few, if any, slides. The most memorable presenters rely on their delivery style to make their point, rather than a well designed slide deck.

When I first began teaching presentation skills more than 20 years ago, I struggled to convince presenters to incorporate the use of visual aids. My how the world has changed.

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Today, I have to work twice as hard to convince presenters to rely less on their slides and more on their dynamic communication skills. It's almost as if presenters believe that all it takes to deliver a successful presentation is a good slide deck. The truth is, when asked to prepare a presentation, presenters spend the vast majority of their time working on their slides, rather than their delivery style.

Consider for a moment why political candidates and presidents DON'T use slides... My guess, they don't want to divert any attention away from themselves. They understand what Roger Ailes, author of the famous book *You Are the Message* has known for quite some time. "For those who want to succeed, there is only one secret. **YOU ARE THE MESSAGE.**"

Generally, here's what happens when you overuse slides.

1. Your slides lose their ability to make an impact— Essentially, slides become the white noise in the presentation, so constant that they are no longer noticeable.

2. The audience focuses on your slides, rather than on you. If 55% of your communication power comes from your body and face (based on the universally accepted research by Albert Mehrabian),

than NOT having the audience focused on you diminishes about half of your **POWER** as a presenter. Can you really afford to cut your power in half?

3. You are demoted to the position of slide narrator. The slides take center stage and like the narrator of a play, you are the anonymous voice in the background.

Just like too many slides can detract from your success as a presenter, having a few well designed slides can strengthen your impact. Consider these quick tips designed to help improve your use of slides:

1. Develop your presentation first, then determine where a visual might help the audience better understand your message. This is a much better approach than developing your slides first.

2. Try to boil your presentation down to the six most important slides that speak to the heart of your message. Make sure that each slide you chose complies with the 6 x 6 rule—no more than six lines of text with six words on each line.

3. Better yet, make the impact of your slides visual, rather than verbal (words written on slides). The best slides arouse the audience visually so take a creative approach to translating words into meaningful pictures.

In retrospect, it's not so much that I am anti slides—I am pro **YOU!** While slides do serve an important function, even the best designed slide can't compete with the power of **YOU.** **YOU** are the greatest visual aid of all. Take the focus **OFF** the slides and put it back where it belongs—squarely on **YOU!** Invest the time you used to spend on your slides on your delivery practice and you will **STAND APART** from the rest!

Debbie is author of the book "15 Presentation Secrets – How to WOW Even the Toughest Audience." She is well known for her presentation skills classes and in addition to training Corporate America, has also taught Presentation Skills for United States Marines, San Diego State University, and UCLA Extension. Debbie possesses a Masters Degree in Professional Communications and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communication.

How To Make Your Best Ever Presentation

By Graham Jones

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The most important tip...EVER!

Make sure that you always think of your audience – when preparing your talk, writing it and presenting it. Put yourself in the audience's position at all times and your presentation will go with a swing. Remember your audience does not want to know how marvellous you are, or how brilliant your product is. What they do want to know is something that will help them. Find out what your audience needs to know first and your presentation will be bound to succeed.

The second most important tip...EVER!

When you prepare your presentation do not include any bullet points or text whatsoever. All your slides should be pictures, illustrations, charts, cartoons etc. That way your audience does not have to read anything and can concentrate on what you are saying. Equally, if you lose your way in your presentation it is not obvious – with text, the audience knows you've made a mistake!

The third most important tip...EVER!

MOVE! Whenever you are presenting make sure you move. Animation helps your audience and it helps you. Movement stops your muscles from tensing and also puts extra air into your lungs. When you move you relax. When you relax you perform better. So don't be static, get moving!

Use flow charts

If you need to demonstrate the way a project is proceeding or how you plan to achieve something, use a flow chart rather than a list of bullet points. This way you can make the flow chart visual, using icons and symbols.

Avoid too much colour

Try not to make your slides look like an explosion in a paint factory! Too much colour will be distracting. Try to use 'complementary' colours which you'll find opposite each other on the 'colour wheel' found in most software packages that can produce slides. For instance, you'll find that yellow is opposite red on

the wheel. Never use colours that are next to each other on a colour wheel as they will clash.

Prepare different handouts

Many people give printed copies of slides as their handouts. This is next to useless as the slides rarely make sense without the accompanying spoken words. So, the best handouts are those which are a written version of your talk – simply write a summary article with plenty of subheadings and bullet points. That way your audience will be able to review what you said more easily. True it takes more time to do this, but it is considerably more effective. Top presenters never give handouts of their slides.

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How To Make Your Best Ever Presentation

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