

Five Simple Principles for Creating A+ Visuals

*By Judith Filek—President,
Impact Communications, Inc.*

Some people would rather be shot in the foot than to sit through a long power point presentation. In fact, many sales people now hear customers caution them about using a slide show. They don't want a "dog and pony show." They just want the speaker to talk to them. Business professionals have sat through too many presentations where the slides seem endless to put up with it any longer. However, if one remembers the following five simple principles, he/she can create a presentation that has impact and be perceived as more knowledgeable than a speaker who uses no visuals.

Rule # 1—One Slide per Two Minutes of Talk

There is no excuse for showing a slide deck of 60-100 slides in an hour. Any slide that isn't absolutely necessary for comprehension should be eliminated. The slide show should be created after the presentation is crafted and after the speaker has identified the more difficult sections of a presentation. If the speaker can say it better, there is no need for a slide.

If the speaker decides to use a visual, he/she needs to ask what questions will the visual answer for the listeners. How will it contribute overall to persuading the listeners to the speaker's point of view? Thus, the astute speaker chooses or creates slides very carefully, as if determining the perfect wines to complement each course of a gourmet dinner. If the speaker shows more than one slide in two minutes, listeners feel that the speaker is no longer talking to them on a personal level. Their focus will be on the visuals and not on the speaker.

Rule # 2—Keep it Simple

Less is more when it comes to what is on a slide. Too much information on a visual makes it hard for listeners to digest the information quickly. Effective visuals communicate a single point. With less information, a speaker increases the likelihood that the

information will be retained and that the listeners will keep up. When there is too much text on a visual, the speaker creates a tug-of-war. Instead of paying attention to the speaker, the listener is reading what is on the visual.

If a bullet point list is used, there should be no more than five bullet points and no more than five words to the line. In addition, if the speaker reads what is on the slides, people have a knee jerk reaction. They can read it themselves and would prefer that the speaker not waste valuable face to face time by reading to them.

Rule # 3—Use a Variety of Media

A speaker should mix up the type of slides he/she shows. If all of the slides are exactly the same, listeners become bored. Some slides should be text. Some should be charts, graphs, pictures, and graphics. Listeners need to be constantly motivated to pay attention.

A picture is worth a thousand words. We do not dream in words but rather in pictures. In fact, major ideas should be distinguished by incorporating pictures or graphics. A picture of someone climbing Mount Everest is clearly more powerful than bullet points to get across the idea of taking a risk in a foreign market. So is the picture of a smoking gun when talking about crime statistics in a major city.

The wise speaker doesn't just rely on slides. For example, the speaker might use a flipchart if the audience is small enough to see it, as well as the whiteboard. The more it looks like the speaker knows the material and looks for any means to get the message across to the audience, the more he or she increases retention.

Rule # 4—No Eye Charts

The font on any slide needs to be large. The bigger the room, the larger the font needs to be. At a minimum, the font should be at least 24 points. In fact, 32 points is preferable. Speakers often make some parts of a chart or graph too small to be

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readable by all. Sometimes, they apologize with a statement such as, “I know you can’t read this, but...” If the entire slide isn’t legible from all sections of the room, it is a throw-away. It creates a distraction and side-bar conversations may occur as a result.

Rule # 5—Aim for Consistency

Background colors and placement of logos should be consistent. Do not change placement of the logo and the background colors from slide to slide. Each slide, not just some slides, should have a headline that tells the listener at a glance what point the speaker is trying to make. Moreover, if a speaker is using bullet points, there should be consistency in the list also. For example if the first bullet point begins with a verb, the rest should follow suit.

Visual aids can make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of a speaker’s presentation. Careful attention to planning and creating visuals will position the person for success. The goal is to persuade an audience. When people stay involved and understand the points being discussed due to the visuals, the job of persuading the listeners becomes a snap.

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