

Using Slides Effectively to Deliver a Powerful Presentation

BY KAREN ELMHIRST



Unfortunately, many presenters hide behind their slides, giving their visual aids far too much of the focus in their presentations. We've even come to the point of calling the slide deck the presentation. When used well, slides can be a great complement and can help you give a powerful presentation. However, PowerPoint® slides do not connect with listeners. They do not engage with listeners, or motivate them to act. That work is up to you!

Here are a few tips when **developing** PowerPoint® slides for your presentation:

- First, develop your presentation outline using the Presentation Planner Worksheets template. Then, identify on your completed outline where a slide is needed to increase listener understanding of your material, and help reinforce your message. Create a list: Number and name the slides you'll need.
- Whenever possible, use a theme or motif for your presentation that will help illustrate your points and bring your material to life. Use that theme or motif as a continuing thread for your slides.
- Organize your slides around your 3 Key Points. It will help your audience keep track of where you've been and where you're going.
- Title each slide as you would a "headline" about the content to be covered.
- Test each one for audience interest and relevance. Also, review all slides in "Slide Sorter" view to verify they are consistent and walk your listeners through a progression that makes sense - a story line.
- If you use a powerful visual, consider making it full screen, with no headline.
- Keep all slides very simple.

- Reduce charts and graphs to include only the necessary elements. Everything on the slides needs to be of value to the audience, otherwise, it doesn't belong.
- Use pictures and diagrams whenever possible. Avoid sentences. If you must use text, limit it to 3 - 4 bullet points of 5-6 words each.
- Use active language and be consistent in your use and placement of verbs and nouns.
- Avoid tiny font sizes. Use non-serif fonts like Arial.
- Think of your slides as visual aids, and only that. Ensure they add value, and do not attempt to replace what you should say. Less is always better, and pictures are always better than words.

Here are a few tips when **using** PowerPoint® slides during your presentation:

- Do several complete run-throughs to practice. Practice in the same way that you will deliver (seated or standing, small room or large room with the slide advancer in your hand).
- Remember that listeners will shift their attention between you and your slides. It's your job to help guide their attention between the two.
- Identify what to say to help transition to the next slide in the series. Once you've directed your listeners' attention to a slide, give them the opportunity to take in the information it offers. Once they've absorbed a slide, they will look back at you and you can continue speaking to elaborate on each slide.
- Do not read what's on the slide to your listeners.
- The day of your presentation, if possible, get to the room early to practice and get comfortable in the space. If appropriate, test the microphone to determine the appropriate volume.
- If you'll be standing at the front of the room, determine your strategy for how you will approach the front of the room, and when giving your presentation you will first opt to move with purpose to another spot in the room to add visual variety and energy.

- Practice using the slide advancer for advancing your slides.
- Check to see how far you can walk without stepping into the light of the screen.
- Use the "black out" feature on your slide advancer to take a break from slides, or to move across the screen to another part of the room.
- Keep the lights in the room up as much as you can. Many rooms offer the option of only darkening the screen area. Your listening audience should be able to always see you clearly and easily.
- Avoid talking while looking at your slides. If you need to pause to see which slide you're on, be silent as you look at the screen, then turn and connect with your audience as you speak. The basic rule is don't talk if you're not looking into someone's eyes.
- If you provide copies of slides upfront, instruct your audience to follow along with you and provide space for them to take notes along with the slides. At the end, you can offer more detailed information, charts and graphs for further reference.
- Overall, remember that you are the main attraction.
- Take the time to prepare thoroughly, and practice extensively. That way, you'll have the confidence to take center stage and be the focus of your presentation, versus retreating behind your slides.

The confidence of being well-prepared will also enable you to be "in the moment" and to extrapolate on certain points to suit the energy and attitudes of your audience.

Regina Brett said it well in her quote, "Over-prepare, then go with the flow."