You've got the power!

Jacky Lowe shows you how to present effectively using PowerPoint

How did that happen? A quick chat with the chairman of green, and you've somehow ended up offering to do a presentation to the membership. It can be the stuff of nightmares - standing up in front of a room full of people.

Where do you start? This article aims to take some of the fear (and pain) out of presenting your chosen subject matter to your designated audience. It will also introduce the most effective use of PowerPoint as a presentation and visual aid.

So, why should you use Power-Point?

PowerPoint should help you bring together all the elements of your presentation, enabling you to get your point across in a visually stimulating and memorable way. The use of a slideshow will enhance your presentation and add an extra dimension to your message.

Where do you start?

Significance

It might sound obvious that you should start by deciding on the message behind your presentation. Make sure that you are clear as to why you are presenting in the first place. If you can't make your subject matter meaningful, you shouldn't be presenting.

It needs to be significant –why? Because significance creates passion, and passion leads to action. There is nothing better than a passionate speaker – if you are passionate (or at least interested) in your subject matter, then you will present a confident and clear speech.

Structure

The structure of your presentation is your next consideration.

What structure should you use? It doesn't matter, as long as there is a structure. The three main things you need for your structure are:

Credible – Ensure it's believable and convincing. You may choose to have an introduction, a middle and a summary. Or maybe problem, pathway, solution. Choice of structure doesn't matter, as long as one exists.

Memorable – keep to 3 or 4 reasons to each point (or argument) – your audience won't remember any more than this. If you need more than 4 reasons, develop a new point.

Scalable – whatever you can say in 30 minutes should be scalable to 45 minutes, an hour, 5 minutes.

An example of a good, or widely used structure would be:
• Memorable opening
- Point 1 (3 reasons)
- Point 2 (3 reasons)
- Point 3 (3 reasons)
• Memorable closing/ Summary

Simplicity

Albert Einstein once said "If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself" and this is completely true of PowerPoint presentations. If you can't explain something so that any audience member will understand, then you don't understand it yourself. This also brings us to the point that you should know your audience. Are you addressing a room full of six year olds, or a room full of agronomists? This simplicity (or lack of) is one of the main reasons for the failure of PowerPoint presentations. We don't seem to be able to keep things simple. We end up cluttering slides with complicated diagrams, loads of text, or complicated graphics.

Powerpoint is designed to visualise ideas, create key points and

about the author

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impress the audience. I would also argue that it is there to help take the focus away from the speaker, but that's not a popular argument. Unfortunately, PowerPoint tends to actually be used as a prompt, in place of handouts, or as a data dump.

If you put too much text on a slide, the audience will read faster than you can speak which makes you useless!

Break it down into an extra slide – it costs nothing. Keep to one main point per slide and remove everything else. Forget the Power-Point 'rules' – some expert came up with the 2 rules that you shouldn't have more than 7 words per line, or 7 lines per slide. Forget that one – just make sure it can be read, clearly. When it comes to design, stick to the following 'rules' (sorry):

• One point per slide
• Few, matching colours – use one of the built-in themes or designs to keep it looking consistent.

• Keep the fonts to a minimum – again, using the themes and designs will help with this.
• Use photos NOT clipart. Some larger organisations have banned the use of Clipart in company presentations, and not before time!

If you need to send or print the slides, put it into a document, or create a second set.

Rehearsal

The final (and probably most important thing) when it comes to presenting is rehearsal. Practice, practice, practice. It will never work first time, trust me. Try to get some feedback; your most difficult audience is people you know, so practice to the family, the dog, and if you can't find an audience, tell the chair but make sure you practice aloud. Always double check the room and your equipment – don't arrive with 10 minutes to spare expecting everything to be set up for you!

Presentation Checklist:

With this simple checklist, you can effectively use PowerPoint as a powerful visual aid to your presentations.

• **Significance**
- Why does it matter?
- How do I grab their attention?
- What do I want them to do?

• **Structure**
- Credible
- Memorable
- Scalable

• **Simplicity**
- 1 Point per slide
- Pictures, not clipart
- Consistent design

• **Rehearsal**
- Practice aloud
- Gain feedback
- Check room and equipment