The Point of PowerPoint

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AQUS

PowerPoint, it’s an easy target for ridicule, this poor misunderstood software. Who hasn’t been victim to a presentation with busy slides of endless bullet points filled with minuscule text and unreadable charts?

PowerPoint allows us to control the flow of information in a linear fashion for our audience. That’s a good thing if we also take a step back to consider the bigger issue; that is, whether or not our messages make sense to the viewer.

PowerPoint can be an exceptionally powerful tool if a few basic rules are adhered to. If they are followed, they uniformly improve the quality of the slides, which in turn improves the presentation skills of the presenter, which in turn creates a presentation that conveys creative ideas in a compelling and memorable way. And isn’t that really the point of PowerPoint?

Determine the purpose and call to action of the presentation

Before you write any slide, answer these three questions:

• What is the objective or purpose of my presentation?

• Who is my audience? What do they think or know now?

• What should my presentation convince the audience to do? What’s the call to action?

I’d even suggest you might want to add a final question: Is PowerPoint the best tool to convey my messages?

Think of your presentation as a whole, not a series of slides

Think of your presentation as a whole, to give it a sense of integrity by laying out a logical flow of ideas and continuity from start to finish. Again, before you write any slide, answer these questions:

• What is my singular message, the one I want the audience to remember above all else?

• What are the three or four core messages to support that umbrella message?

• What are the sections of the presentation, in priority and/or logical order?

• What is the best way to introduce the subject?

• What is the best way to conclude the subject?

• Which is the critical slide, and where should it be placed in the presentation?

The “critical slide” is the one slide that would remain if you stripped away all unimportant ones. It’s the slide your audience is waiting to see but may not know it. Most presentations have one, perhaps two. To figure out which slide it is, ask yourself, if you had only one minute to give your presentation, which slide would you choose? Finally, think about how long your presentation should be. Most slides take roughly 90+ seconds to present. If you have 30 minutes to present, you probably only need 15-18 slides.

Write the titles of all slides first

Once you have an outline of your presentation, including the introduction and conclusion, write just the titles of each slide. It’s the most important element of the slide because it’s where the viewer’s eye goes when they aren’t sure what the slide means. As a rule of thumb, a title should be no more than six words and should accurately reflect the slide content. Do not repeat the same title from slide to slide, or write titles which end with “...”.

Write bullet points, not paragraphs

Once you have your titles, write your slides by asking yourself: How can I visualise the content on this slide? Photographs, clip art, clear graphs or charts bring the most mundane information to life. When you present, you elaborate on the visual images, and if you really want to shine as a presenter, your elaboration should be in the form of stories, anecdotes or personal observations. Every slide should have one point - maybe two. Using as few as possible, the bullet points should elaborate on that single point, and each bullet point should be no more than 5-7 words. The slide should not be your presentation written out in detail.

Remember that colours are never arbitrary

There should be one overall colour to your presentation, reflected in your slide template, which should reflect your company, client or topic. The template should never be anything remotely called “busy.” Avoid templates which have awkward sizing on titles and text. Use the master slide function to adjust the title area so it doesn’t take up an inordinate amount of real estate at the top of the slide, or that any graphic element - like a rule or box - pinches your title.

After you decide on your basic colour, select two complementary colours. The first is a dull (but not muddy) colour to use for small emphasis, such as chart
headings or bar graphs. The second colour is a bright and pleasing colour that instantly stands out from the template. It should highlight the one element you want the audience to instantly see when the slide comes up on the screen such as the title, a key message, a directional arrow, a key fact, an insight. If you use this same bright colour from slide to slide, you will train your audience to look for certain things on each slide, giving the entire presentation a sense of continuity.

Because you often can’t control the light in the presentation room, it’s best to use the palest template with the darkest type. It’s simply the easiest to read.

As for typefaces or fonts, select one dominant font and one sub-dominant font. Titles should be at least 24 point size, text should be no less than 18 points. It’s best to pick simple and common fonts, particularly if you move your presentation from computer to computer. Finally, always give your template, colour system, and typefaces/font a test run on a projector. If you can’t read it from the back of the room, change it.

**Once written, put your entire preso on the wall**

Print out your entire presentation on recycled paper and arrange it so you can read all slides at once. I prefer to tape it to a big wall, but laying it out on a large conference room table works too. Now you can see missing links, leaps of logic, the size of one section compared to another, flow from one slide to the next, the location of the critical slide, and readability. Because each slide is laid out for the eye to see as a whole, you can edit faster and more efficiently. Hand-write new slides. Move and re-order slides. Delete unnecessary slides which slow down the flow of your presentation. You might even finish this step with a quick verbal rehearsal. If you repeatedly stumble over a slide as you rehearse, something is probably wrong with the slide.

**Rehearse**

Don’t throw away your hard work by rehearsing your presentation in your head. It doesn’t work: you always sound perfect in your head, but it rarely comes out that way. If you’re pressed for time, rehearse by reviewing the titles of each slide so you have a sense of the overall presentation, then find the one point to make on each slide.

Finally, if your audience doesn’t understand and remember what you said, you didn’t do your job as presenter... and no amount of good slides will overcome that basic fact.

**For additional tools and resources for strategic and creative thinking, message development and delivery, and communications training, visit the Aqus website at www.aqus.com.au.**

With nearly 25 years of experience around the world, Andrew Eklund is the founder of Aqus, a creative and training consultancy specialising in public relations, communications and marketing. Comments or questions can be directed to Andy at andy@aqu.com.au.

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### Key Features

- **2.0 megapixel camera**
- **Windows Media® Player Mobile**
- **Dual stereo-quality speakers**
- **Supports most popular audio and video formats**
- **Removable microSD cards**
- **256MB of built in memory**
- **Browse the web with HSDPA 3.6 Mbps**
- **Call Management Features**
- **Call contacts or open applications with advanced speech recognition**
- **Built in hands free speakerphone**
- **Inbox, Contacts, Calendar and Tasks**
- **Bluetooth connectivity**

### Specifications

- **View or Edit (Microsoft Word™, Microsoft PowerPoint and Microsoft® Excel™ files)**
- **View PDF files**
- **Bands: Quad-band GSM/GPRS/EDGE; UMTS 2100**
- **Synchronization: ActiveSync® with Microsoft® Exchange Server 2003, and Windows Mobile Device Center**
- **HSDPA 3.6Mbps**
- **Memory (FLASH/RAM): 256MB / 96MB7**
- **Removable Memory: Micro SD up to 4GB**

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**Things you need to know**: * Approved customers can take up a Mobile Repayment Option (MRO) and repay to Telstra $999 for the Motorola Q1 handset phone over 24 months. Minimum cost over 24 months is $2,440.00 plus call charges. Approved customers only. ID and ID required. Customers terminating early must repay the balance owing on phone as well as any other early termination charges on the mobile plan. Final monthly repayment may be higher to cover total MRO amount. Image size and resolution on mobile screen may vary from that displayed by actual product.

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New Crimes in a Technology-enabled Environment

Serious concerns exist about the ways in which new technologies are likely to be misused in years to come.

The Australian Institute of Criminology has released two publications looking at the future environment in which Australians will use information and communications technologies and how this environment will provide opportunities for illegality and infringement of current regulatory controls. The reports, funded by the Australian High Tech Crime Centre, are Future directions in technology-enabled crime: 2007-09, and The future of technology-enabled crime in Australia.

The reports identify developments that may facilitate technology-based crime including:

• Globalisation and the emergence of new economics;
• Increased widespread use of broadband services and mobile and wireless technologies;
• Increased use of electronic payment systems; and
• Changes in government use of technology to allow the public to conduct transactions securely, including participation in democracy.

The most likely areas in which opportunities for illegality may arise include fraud, identity-related crime, computer viruses and malicious code, theft of information, dissemination of objectionable material online, and risks of organised crime and terrorism.

The burden of protection against misuse of the technology has largely fallen onto individual users because public agencies have a limited role to play in the prevention of technology-enabled crimes and manufacturers have often failed to develop systems to protect users fully prior to releasing new products. The design of the personal computer and the global adoption of the internet have been largely in the hands of private sector forces with less focus on security than on functionality.

At present, there is limited capacity in law enforcement to investigate a high volume of technology-enabled crimes. The reports suggest strategies that could reduce the risk of exposure to these crimes including:

• Industry developing more secure hardware and software;
• Increased sharing of information between public and private sectors;
• Use of police taskforces to respond to particularly complex technology-enabled crimes;
• The threat of prosecution and punishment, particularly where substantial penalties can be imposed, and publicity given to successful prosecutions;
• Sharing of information and intelligence across jurisdictional borders, both within Australia and internationally; and
• Legislative reforms to address the emergence of these crimes.