

5 Reasons Why Your PowerPoint Presentation Failed Miserably

by David Gilman



You did the research, you prepared the deck, you printed out the handouts, and finally you delivered the presentation. But somehow there seemed to be a big disconnect between you and the audience.

In fact, when you glanced out at the audience, you noticed that people were looking down at their smart phones, fidgeting in their seats, and you even witnessed a few yawns.

Chances are your presentation contained one of the five biggest Powerpoint mistakes – the kind that make people in the audience wish they were at their dentist’s office instead.

Let’s face it: all us have sat through many painful PowerPoint presentations that leave a lot to be desired. But it really doesn’t have to be that way.

Here are five of the most common and biggest mistakes to avoid when delivering a PowerPoint presentation, with recommendations on how to avoid each of them. Although there are a lot additional factors, the emphasis will be on the visuals, which capture people’s immediate attention.

1. Too Many Bullets

You may have heard that bullets kill, and the same holds true for your audience when delivering a PowerPoint Presentation.

When you display a multitude of bullet points all at once and then read from the slides, you are essentially killing your audience’s.

As soon as you present the list of bullets, guess what do people do? They tend to read the bullets ahead of you, while you are still talking, and they are no longer listening to you. Their focus is split between you and your bullets.

Keep the bullets hidden and tucked away in the presenter’s notes portion in PowerPoint. The presenter notes were put there for a reason: to keep you on point.

Convey the information visually so it complements the points you are speaking about. To stop using bullets as a crutch can be difficult at first and will take unlearning a bad habit, but you can do it through practice and repetition.

Limit the number of bullets; bullets kill.

2. Not Enough Visuals

We are visually-oriented and sight-dominant. Sight is the sense that we rely on most. In fact the nerves that lead from the eye to the brain are twenty-five times as large as those leading from the ear to the brain. Our mind thinks in pictures – or as the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words”.

Your slides are meant to complement your presentation, not distract your audience from the presentation. Use pictures to present your idea or concept. Instead of showing a spreadsheet, talk about a compelling figure and focus on that.

To give you an example, a presenter delivered a talk about her home town of Bangladesh. Each slide was covered from edge to edge and covered the entire slide in vivid detail. As she progressed through each slide she let the visual on each slide convey and support her main point. The same can be done for facts, figures, etc.

This is similar to Steve Jobs’ style of presenting. His slides are highly visual and have no bullets! Use more visuals.



3. Use of Inadequate Clip Art

Using clip art from the web or the clip art browser contained within PowerPoint may be convenient enough and cost-effective, but there is a downside: It is usually a bore, often a poor choice, and looks unprofessional. There are plenty of other resources available.

There are three excellent choices which range from free to more expensive. As the saying goes you usually get what you pay for.

Pixabay is an excellent choice for free photos and illustrations. iStockPhoto is a middle-of-the-road choice, and GettyImages are the most expensive but are of high quality. For high-end clip art, consider Shutterstock.com.

Ditch the wrong clip art and choose clip art from better sources, it will have a more profound impact on your audience and make it appear much more professional.

4. Too Many Colors

While it is tempting to use a variety of colors, limit the color palette to preferably one or two dominant colors. This will simplify and enhance the overall look of the presentation.

To decide on a primary color, consider the content and what you want the presentation to convey. Colors convey attributes like passion, dependability, or youthfulness; you need to consider exactly which attributes relate to your content.

Colors have meaning. To give you a quick trip through the spectrum, red is energetic. Blue, the color of the sea and sky, portrays permanence and solid dependability, Yellow, the color of sunshine, is associated with joy, happiness, and energy. Green is the color of nature. It symbolizes growth, harmony, freshness, and vitality.

Chose a color based on the attribute you want to convey, and limit the color palette to one or two dominant colors. Anything more than this can look busy.

5. Poor Use of Fonts

As with colors, you should limit the number of fonts to one or two. Just as colors convey attributes, fonts convey and project a personality. Each font is unique, and there are a variety to chose from.

And forget Comic Sans and Arial; they are overused and do not convey much personality. A popular font used for headlines is bebas neue, and it is available for free at Font Squirrel.

Another faux pas is using small type sizes. Anything under 30 points is too small for your audience to read. If by chance you are using fonts that are smaller than 30 points, chances are you are still using bullets. Remember what we said about bullets earlier?

If you must use text, consider using only one to three words on a slide, and place them at a large size. Once again, this is what Steve Jobs did, and he should know.

To wrap up, get rid of the bullets, use more visuals, upgrade the clip art, simplify the color, and choose better fonts. By incorporating these suggestions, you can connect with your audience, wake them up, and be remembered for the great Powerpoint presentation that you delivered.

David Gilman is the founder and President of Cognito. He is dedicated to helping companies achieve the utmost recognition through eye-opening visual communications. In his 25 years in graphic design he has been published worldwide in numerous publications on brand identity and logo design. For more information, please visit www.cognitocreative.com.

