

## ***How to kick the Powerpoint habit***

*Death by Powerpoint is not a description of the boredom endured by the audience. It's the slow, painful and public failure of a presenter to achieve his or her goal.*

I love Powerpoint. It's really easy to use, does what I want it to, doesn't crash and it has all sorts of neat zoomy sounds and movements that I can spice up my presentation with. Well, save the last bit, Powerpoint really ain't too bad.

But neither are AK47s.

In fact, Powerpoint is neither the answer nor the problem. The problem is the people who use, misuse and abuse presentation software.

### ***Bad presenters we have met***

You'll have met these people on your travels – maybe (please say not) you're one yourself. There are those who just have to tell you absolutely everything about their favourite topic, even if it takes 140 slides at 0.5 seconds a slide- or with fewer slides but with the contents of a short novel on each. And then there are the ones who simply, and boringly, just read out exactly what's on each slide, and add nothing more, or those who seem to have created their presentation while under the influence of some mind-altering substance so that a presentation that seemed to make perfect sense at 2 am now appears to the bemused and befuddled audience to be a load of incomprehensible gobbledygook. Sigh.

The sad thing about these presentations is that, in the end, we all lose. The presenter has failed in his or her attempt to communicate a message – or worse, alienated a group of potential buyers, influencers or allies. And for us poor suckers in the audience, we've just lost another hour of our finite times on this earth.

### ***You can do better***

Creating a non-screw up presentation really isn't all that hard. (Creating an award-winning presentation is really hard – but for most of us, successfully delivering a clear, credible, compelling and valuable presentation is quite enough.)

What all of these sad cases noted above have in common is that they've somehow fallen under the influence of presentation software, and come to believe that the answer to all their presentation fears lies in a drop-down menu. But we know better, don't we?

### ***Get to the point***

There's no silver bullet answer to creating a successful presentation. And of course you'll find reams of material on the net, should you care to have a look. But all the tips and tricks for delivering demon presentations aren't worth a bean if you don't first get some of the big questions answered right.

So, as a starter, you might consider these points when you come to create your presentation.

First up, ask yourself these questions: what am I trying to achieve with this presentation? what do I want the audience to be thinking when they leave the room? what action do I want them to take after this? Answer these questions clearly and succinctly, and you have your objective. Write it down and keep it in mind. Make sure every slide contributes to this outcome. If it doesn't, bung it out.

And to help you be ruthless, think about this: *less is more*. A few well chosen slides can deliver all the punch you need. More than that just fuzzes up the message. (Those who want more detail will ask for it.) I'm Genghis Khan when it comes to presentations that clients bring to me to review. Their carefully crafted behemoths get slashed and burned till they're a shadow of their former selves. Be savage!

But all this might just be re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Let's think about your audience again.

Have you thought about what baggage they're bringing into this presentation? What about the political relationships between members of the audience? What do all the people attending really want to get from their time with you?

A while ago a client of mine scored a demon opportunity to present to their client's senior management team. My client had a champion insider who had set up the meet and even helped with the inviting. My client created a beautiful, loooong, presentation, and were even considering shelling out big bucks for video and graphics work to make it look even snazzier. This was going to be a classic stand and deliver presentation, with my clients standing well out of the limelight. But what they hadn't considered was why their champion had been so keen to set up the meet. This was his opportunity to look good – not my client's. And the management team? They didn't want a showoff procession of facts and figures. They wanted to meet the guys who delivered their services – to decide if they liked and trusted them, or not. We got it straightened out. My client made a short intro and then allowed the champion to lead a discussion, based on some trigger points put up on the screen. And then they finished with a game of pool. It worked a treat.

The point is, it's real easy to use Powerpoint as a crutch. It's so easy to use, and you can get away with not really knowing your material or you can just hide in the shadows while the bright lights do the talking. But what happens when you lean on anything too much? You become a cripple. If you're doing the presentation then you should be the centre of attention.

And it's your material: you should know it. Deliver it from the heart, with passion and conviction – not from the bottom of your boots.

### ***Free seminar***

I've attended some excellent seminars over the years, but I can't tell you what presentation software they used because, of course, it didn't matter. One recent seminar I attended was put on by DatumConnect – website development guys. As I'm not on commission from them I won't go on about how wonderful they are at websites, but Rob Simmonds does a great presenting job. He's relaxed, he knows his material and he's clearly proud of what he and his firm does. He engages the audience with his banter and q and a and he uses the slides to illustrate what he's saying – no more. If you want to see how to do a good presentation (even if you're not really interested in a new website) get along to one of Rob's seminars.

### ***Takeaways:***

- **Define your objective and stick to it.** Chuck out anything that doesn't contribute.
- Remember: **Less is more**
- **Think about your audience** – who are they, what do they want, why are they here, what do you want them to take away, what baggage are they bringing with them?
- **You must be the centre of attention** – not what's on the screen. If you lose the battle for attention you'll lose the war.
- Remember: **Powerpoint isn't a crutch – kick the habit before it cripples you.**
- **Deliver your presentation with heart and guts** and you'll win on points – even if the structure of your presentation isn't the best.