Death By PowerPoint

PowerPoint is one of the best tools we have for presentations, but it is also one that is frequently used poorly. When well done, PowerPoint brings presentations to life, when not done well audiences find themselves facing "death by PowerPoint" – an endless barrage of slides that contain too much text and that go by so quickly, no one can see what is on them. It is always true that presentations are delivered for the audience, so the way you present your information can affect how much credibility and attention your audience grants you. Follow these suggestions to improve the PowerPoint slides used in your presentation:

> *"While a good set of slides will certainly help your presentation be easier to sit through, they do not take away the need for you to practice, have interesting content and engage your audience."*

Create white space.

Too many images on one slide can look cluttered and distracting. The same is true of too much text that fills the screen. White space is the area of the screen that is empty; sometimes it is spacing between lines of information, sometimes it is space around the text. White space on a slide makes it easier for the audience to "grasp" what is on the screen.

Use the rule of five.

Limit the number of bullets on a screen to five and the number of words per bullet to five words. This forces you to state your message concisely, gives your audience a chance to read your points, and keeps your slides looking neat and organized. When there is too much text, the audience gets torn between trying to read the words, and listening to you. The points on the slide should be there to reinforce what you are saying, not replace it. Besides, if they can read your presentation for themselves, then why are you there?

Ensure a template with a striking contrast.

Sometimes a template that looks good on your computer screen causes problems when it is projected for a large group presentation. The safest templates are those with dark font on a light background, or vice versa. In the same way, use at least a 28 point font and a font that's easy to read from the back of the room you'll be presenting in.

Keep distractions to a minimum.

PowerPoint offers many useful features but when used in the wrong place, they become the focus of attention and distract your audience from your message. Sounds and animations fall into that category and should be used sparingly if at all. Random beeps and dancing bears are seldom the focus of business presentations and have no place on your slides. Everything you put on the screen and the way you reveal it should reinforce what you are trying to say. Don't let your audience tag you as cheesy just because you want to liven the show.

Display data graphically.

When you talk about numbers and statistics in your presentation, try to present them graphically or in chart form. Presenting mere numbers can be confusing. A clearly labelled graph will get the message across more clearly and effectively than lists of numbers ever could.

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Give a take-away.

If you have a lot of information you want the audience to walk away with, summarize it in a handout that expands on what you have on your slides.

Blank it out.

Once a presentation begins, many presenters leave the screen lit until they wrap up and say their goodbyes. In longer presentations such as training sessions, there are often long periods where participants engage in activities or discussions where the content on the screen is not needed. When a slide is left dangling, it can become a distracter or just plain annoying. Instead, hit "B" on your keyboard to blank out your screen, and bring the focus back to you and the audience members.

Look at the slide sorter.

Before presenting, go through the slides in Slide Sorter to see the how busy any slides may appear. Look at the slides from your audience's point of view and change anything that seems crowded, confusing or distracting.

Remember:

You are the presentation. Your slides should support you as the presenter, not be the presentation themselves. Slides are meant to add to your presentation by illustrating your points in an impactful manner. What you say and how you say it will make the presentation a true success.

While a good set of slides will certainly help your presentation be easier to sit through, they do not take away the need for you to practice, have interesting content and engage your audience. You still need to have good presentation skills. Together though, your skills and good slides will make the presentation successful and memorable. Good luck!

Links:

http://www.garrreynolds.com/Presentation/slides.html

http://www.microsoft.com/office/powerpoint-slidefest/do-and-dont.aspx