

Don't Get Caught In A 'PowerPoint Trap' When You Present

Easy-to-use presentation software programs like Microsoft® PowerPoint® can add a lot of pop to your business presentations. But they can also trip you up, by providing opportunities to send unintended messages to your audience. Far from enhancing your speech, poorly produced (or over-produced) visuals may actually diminish your powers of persuasion, and cast a dark shadow over your professionalism and speaking skills.

You can stay out of the most common PowerPoint traps if you keep these tips in mind when preparing visuals for any business presentation.

- Crystallize your message BEFORE you start working on slides. Write a complete draft of the speech—or at the very least, a detailed outline—so you know you've got a message that can stand on its own.
- As you start to develop slides, remember that “less is more.” Don't simply recap your entire talk on screen, providing slide after slide of “read-along” bullet points. Instead, pick out the key concepts you really want the audience to remember—the “take-away” points. To cover any gaps before and after your “content” slides, you may want to prepare a “transition” slide (e.g., displaying the meeting theme or logo) so that your audience doesn't have to stare at a blank screen while you speak.
- Make each slide easy to grasp “at a glance”: Include no more than seven or eight words on each line, and no more than six or seven lines of type on a single slide.
- When selecting colors for your slides, make sure that your text color provides enough contrast with the background color to be easily legible. Avoid color combinations that may be difficult for some people to distinguish (e.g., red/green, brown/green, blue/black, blue/purple). Keep a consistent color palette throughout the presentation. Better yet, use a slide template (or “master slide”) to enhance the professionalism of your visuals. (If your speech is part of a larger business meeting or industry conference, you may be able to save a lot of time and trouble by checking with the meeting producer to see if a slide template is available for visuals.)
- When presenting numbers, take steps to simplify how they're seen on the screen: Round off numbers (e.g., use “98%” instead of “97.78%”), and present your data in the form of graphs whenever possible. Use a “pie chart” to divide a whole into component parts; a “bar chart” to show relationships between two or more numbers; or a “line chart” to show trends over time, frequency or correlations.
- Limit the use of special effects. Sound effects, fancy “wipes” and “builds,” animations, and other presentation features are more likely to distract your audience than to help you drive important points home.
- Be careful when displaying copyrighted materials (comic strips, photos, movies, etc.). In almost every case, you must have the written permission of the copyright holder to use such materials. In many cases, you'll be required to pay royalties or usage fees in order to obtain permission.
- If you're planning to provide hand-outs, wait until the conclusion of your talk to distribute them, so that you'll have the audience's full attention while you're speaking.

One last thing to keep in mind: Be sure to PRACTICE your presentation—including slide cues—so that you'll have an opportunity to detect and correct any errors ahead of time. It's a good idea to bring back-ups, too: Save a copy of your presentation to a flash drive or CD-ROM, and consider having a set of transparencies

made as well, so that you don't have to worry about whether a computer's "blue screen of death" will ruin your presentation.

Follow these simple pointers, and you'll be well on the way toward delivering business presentations that keep the spotlight on you and your message—and not on the unwanted impression left by amateurish visuals or technology snafus.

For more helpful advice on effective business presentations, visit www.corpwrite.com.