

DAILY REPORT

AT ISSUE

The process of creating PowerPoint slides has merged in our corporate brain with the process of initially creating a presentation. As a result, we're creating terrible presentations.



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Add more 'power' to presentations

CREATE A COMPELLING PRESENTATION by turning off PowerPoint and spending more time rehearsing

AS POWERPOINT turns 20 years old this summer, I'm reminded of a gruesome scene from the sci-fi action film "Total Recall," starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. In this scene, Arnold wraps a towel around his head and then sticks a metal probe up his nose.

The probe then proceeds to crawl up into his brain and pull back through his left nostril a red ball that looks way too big to make it out of his nose. Watching the ball slowly and painfully emerge, I cringed in my seat. As my 9-year-old daughter likes to say, "Now that's gotta hurt!"

The ball was a "bug" placed into Arnold's brain—sort of a human LoJack that the bad guys secretly put there to track his movements. He had to get rid of it if he were going to save the universe.

I think that American business and the legal profession need a similar probe to remove PowerPoint from our collective corporate brain. I'm not saying that PowerPoint is evil. It's a fine piece of software for creating visuals to illustrate a presentation.

However, it has grown beyond an illustration tool and merged with our corporate psyche in ways that hamper our ability to connect with audiences and give good presentations.

Don't use PowerPoint to draft presentations

The process of creating PowerPoint slides has merged in our corporate brain with the process of initially creating a presentation. As a result, we're creating terrible presentations.

Here's a scene that takes place every day in law offices across America. Judy wants to create a presentation. So, she sits down at her desk and opens up her PowerPoint and begins using the program's easy-to-use templates to outline her message. Before long, she has created 40 slides, loaded with bullet points. She then goes in front of her audience and narrates her presentation from the slides. About two minutes into her speech, her listeners are busily thumbing their BlackBerries. Judy has bored her audience with too many slides.

Why? In part, because PowerPoint encourages lots of bullet points and a boring outline format. We need to remember that PowerPoint is a program for creating visual aids, not drafting presentations.

Instead of turning so quickly to PowerPoint, Judy should have taken out a blank sheet of paper and written down three simple ideas that she really wanted her audience to take away from her presentation. Then she could use PowerPoint as a tool for bringing her presentation ideas to life with graphic images.

Don't let PowerPoint rob you of rehearsal time

Corporate America is spending so much time creating PowerPoint slides that it's failing to do the most important thing needed to give good presentations: rehearse.

PowerPoint is a horrible time-suck.

I was on the telephone with an architect the other day who told me that his firm was consistently losing new business. When I asked how much time he spend rehearsing his presentations, he admitted that he didn't do much rehearsal. But when he e-mailed to me their PowerPoint slides, it was clear that he had spent several days creating gorgeous visuals.

If it comes down to a choice between PowerPoint and rehearsal, dump the slides. For a 30-minute presentation, use eight to 10 slides at most. Save your time for rehearsal.

Plenty of people are great presenters without PowerPoint. No one is great without rehearsal.

So on PowerPoint's 20th birthday, give your listeners a present. Don't murder them with bullets. Otherwise, we may have to borrow Arnold's nostril probe. ☞