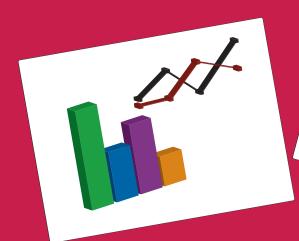
THE PowerPoint Detox

Reinvent your slides and add power to your presentation

Patrick Forsyth







PowerPoint Detox

With thanks to the wonderful folks at Microsoft, who changed our lives but gave us a few problems.

PowerPoint Detox

Reinvent your slides and add power to your presentation

Patrick Forsyth



London and Philadelphia

Publisher's note

Every possible effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this book is accurate at the time of going to press, and the publishers and author cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions, however caused. No responsibility for loss or damage occasioned to any person acting, or refraining from action, as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by the editor, the publisher or the author.

First published in Great Britain and the United States in 2009 by Kogan Page Limited

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the CLA. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside these terms should be sent to the publishers at the undermentioned addresses:

120 Pentonville Road London N1 9JN United Kingdom www.koganpage.com 525 South 4th Street, #241 Philadelphia PA 19147

USA

© Patrick Forsyth, 2009

The right of Patrick Forsyth to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

ISBN 978 0 7494 5511 8

Microsoft and PowerPoint are registered trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Forsyth, Patrick.

The PowerPoint detox : reinvent your slides and add power to your presentation / Patrick Forsyth.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7494-5511-8

1. Microsoft PowerPoint (Computer file) 2. Business presentations. I. Title.

P93.53.M534F67 2009 658.4'52028553—dc22

2008042681

Typeset by Saxon Graphics Ltd, Derby Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt Ltd

Contents

	Preface	vii ix
1.	Introduction: stand up comic Automatic pilot 3; Time for change 4; Fundamental rules 9	1
2.	How human nature affects communication Inherent problems 16; Aids to effective communication 22; Positioning your communication 27; Projecting the right impression 29	15
3.	Presentations: the slide/speaker duo Preparation: a few moments' thought 36; A key question 36; Deciding the message 38; Putting it together 39; Speaker's notes 44; On your feet 54; Anything and everything 55	33
4.	What to avoid	59

5.	Best practice Title slides 72; Ice-breaker slides 73; Checklist slides 75; Diagrammatic slides 77; Graph slides 81; Dealing with greater complexity 82; Pictures, photos and cartoons 87; 'Flipchart' slides 93; Being persuasive 95; Linking a message to a photograph 97; Sophistication unlimited 99; A final idea 102	71
	Afterword	105
	Appendix: Presenting successfully: the business equivalent of an open goal	109

Author's note

Seeing is believing
— Traditional proverb

This book is intended to do two things to help you maximize the effectiveness of your presentations. The first is to focus on the best use of visual aids used in presentations (primarily business presentations), and specifically on the use of the Microsoft Office PowerPoint slides that are now so much a part of presenting. This is not a technical computer guide to physically using PowerPoint, but a guide to the creation and deployment of the right kind of slide material. Specifically it offers advice and ideas that are realistic for the busy executive or manager. Though very sophisticated things are possible with PowerPoint (see page 99), everything suggested here can be implemented simply and quickly without the cost of elaborate graphic design.

Secondly, rather than assume that readers understand the broad principles of how to deliver a good presentation, one that is clear, informs and does so in an interesting, perhaps memorable way, a summary of the key personal skills of presenting are given in the Appendix.

You can choose in which order to read the book. You can start with the Appendix if you are new to the presentational process or want to review, or recap, the core principles, and return to the beginning of the book after that. Equally you can leave the Appendix until the end and start from the beginning.

The slides shown in the book are, of necessity, in black and white, so some imagination is required, although the principles of using colour are referred to in context.

Key points affecting the use of visual aids in general, and PowerPoint slides in particular, are summarized in boxes called 'Never forget'.

Making a presentation is always an exposed position to be in. But it is also an opportunity and should always be regarded as such. It is worth getting it right. You have to work at making it good and take advantage of every approach that will help you do so; making the best use of visual aids is very much part of this and can help you maximize your effectiveness.

Patrick Forsyth
Touchstone Training & Consultancy
28 Saltcote Maltings
Maldon
Essex CM9 4QP
United Kingdom
Tel: 01621 859300

E-mail: patrick@touchstonetc.freeserve.co.uk

Preface

The old thinking is not constructive enough. We need new thinking.

— Edward De Bono

Presentations matter. There can be a great deal hanging on them and rarely, if one fails to work, do you get a second chance. A poor presentation can blight a plan, a proposal, a reputation – even a career. But making a good one is not easy, as a quotation from Sir George Jessel makes clear: 'The human brain is a wonderful thing. It starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.' If you identify with this all too readily, your fears and experience will only be made worse if you make a presentation without understanding what makes it work, without adequate preparation or founded only on some irrational belief that you can wing it.

Making a good presentation can be done however. Anyone can present in an acceptable, workmanlike way and many people find that it is something at which they can excel if they go about it the right way. Few people are natural public speakers; and those that make it look easy tend to do so because they know the secret – they work at it.

The presenter's nightmare

If you stand up totally unprepared, then oh dear, things can go wrong. People stumble, hesitate and sweat. They begin every other sentence with the superfluous word 'basically'. Asked to comment on some project, they say: 'Um, er... at this moment in time we are making considerable progress with the necessary administrative preliminary work prior to the establishment of the initial first phase of work' when they mean, 'We aim to start soon.' Just when they should be impressing their audience with their expertise and confidence, and making them interested in what they have to say, they upset or confuse them. Exactly what is said and how it is put matters, indeed there may be a great deal hanging on it. As Bob Hope used to say of his early performances, 'If the audience liked you, they didn't applaud, they let you live.'

At worst, some people go on too long, their explanation explains nothing and where they are going is wholly unclear. Some fidget endlessly whilst others remain stock still gripping the table or lectern in front of them until their knuckles go white and their fear rises from them like a mist. Others are apt to pick holes in people in the audience, or their noses. If they use slides, then these can only be read from the rear of the room with a telescope, a fact made worse by their asking brightly, 'Can you see all right at the back?' despite the fact that there is precious little they can do about it if the answer is 'no', and in any case they should not be asking this question, they should know their slides are clearly legible. They barely pause for breath, as they rush from one word to the next. Many of these words are inappropriately chosen and as many are too long. Indeed, the only relevant word of which some speakers appear to be wholly ignorant is 'rehearsal'.

Of course, a lucky few believe that making a speech or presentation is second nature. They know they can wing it. They are convinced that they know their stuff and how to put it over. The first rule then for the inappropriately overconfident presenter is, of course, to assume that the audience is as thick as they look and will, provided the right level of impenetrable gobbledygook is achieved, instantly conclude that they are in the presence of a master.

Winging it means that if the presenter wants people to actually understand even the gist of what is said, some care must be taken. So they talk v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y; use simple words, and generally proceed on the basis that the audience have the brains of a retarded dormouse. They spell out complicated bits in CAPITAL LETTERS, speaking more loudly as they do so. However, they are always careful not to be condescending, as that will upset people (you do know what condescending *means* don't you?).

For this kind of presenter, being on their feet is something to be savoured. They need only the briefest of introductions and they are away, moving quickly past the first slide without noticing that it is number 12, the coins in their trouser pocket rattling at 90 decibels and the audience hanging on their every repetitive mannerism as they mutter to themselves, 'If he scratches his backside while standing on one leg again, I'm walking out.' It makes lesser mortals feel all too sadly inadequate - even the famous: Mark Twain said, 'It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.' Poor man; just as well he was a good writer.

However, even presenters convinced of their own abilities, however erroneously they hold that view, should not hog all the opportunities for themselves just because they are fun. They should give others a chance. Next time someone asks, 'Will you make the presentation?' they may hand over the task to whoever displays the least enthusiasm (maybe to you?). It will do them good they think; and they may feel that there is nothing like inflicting sheer terror on a friend or colleague to make them feel superior.

Putting someone in front of an important audience, knowing that they would rather chew off their own fingers than sit and listen to someone who cannot make the simplest point clear, is rather like pushing them into a lion's den. Without an understanding of how to make a presentation in the right way, they will be in deep, deep trouble. No audience will warm to a speaker who is ill prepared and who flounders through a presentation that is tedious, confusing and poorly delivered. And nor will they like it if the speaker is poor through unthinkingly believing they can wing it. Furthermore, no

7...

poor speaker is likely to magically acquire the requisite skills instantaneously in the few seconds between being introduced, rising to their feet to speak and clicking on the mouse.

So, if you are not in fact a natural, and few people are, you need to give it some thought before you get to your feet; once you are actually in the lion's den it is a little late to discover that salvation is not guaranteed by saying, 'Nice pussycat.'

Maybe you should turn to the Appendix now. But wait a moment. Perhaps salvation is at hand. There is something available to turn the uncertainties of presenting into a walk in the park. Structure what you do around some slides – and for most of us that means some of the now ubiquitous PowerPoint slides – and surely all will be well?

Maybe.

Most would readily accept that visual aids:

- make understanding easier;
- save time, for instance reducing the need for lengthy explanation;
- improve retention (we retain more of what involves more than one sense);
- create variety (more than just talk) and thus vary pace which in turn increases attentiveness;
- act as signposts, indicating what point has been reached within the structure of a presentation.

Visual aids can also assist the speaker to get organized and keep on track and link to material handed out to participants after certain kinds of presentation. But using these aids, and using them well are different things.

The audience's nightmare

Imagine: the presenter who must be listened to stands at the front of the room, surrounded by equipment and with the screen glowing behind them. The audience is spellbound. The little company logo at the corner of the screen fascinates them. Every time the presenter clicks the computer mouse, and sends another yellow bullet point shuttling onto the screen from stage left, their attention veritably soars. One slide replaces another, then another replaces that and then another in a bonanza of bullet points... but you get the idea.

Enough.

Too often all of the slides are bland, all are simple checklists, yet the presenter who must be listened to finds them riveting; certainly they spend most of their time looking over their shoulder at the screen rather than at the audience. There is so much text on some slides that they are like pages out of a book. And an unsuitably small typeface compounds the effect and overburdens the minds of the audience. So the presenter aims to improve this by reading from them, verbatim, more slowly than the audience does and with a tone that leads one to suspect that the presenter is seeing them for the first time. It becomes akin to a bureaucratic rain dance: a mantra and format is slavishly, indeed unthinkingly, followed – yet at the end no one is truly satisfied. Any opportunity that might have existed is at best diluted, at worst missed. Both presenter and audience have suffered 'death by PowerPoint'.

A core element of this is when a presenter says:

- Look at this bullet point.
- And at this one.
- Now here's another.
- One more will make the point.
- Another will make it again.
- And now, just one more.

It gets relentless, more so when these bullet points are not just a word or two, but lengthy sentences:

■ Look at this interesting bullet point just going up on the screen now to illustrate what I'm saying (or rather to duplicate what I say because what I am actually doing is reading it to you as I ...).

Sometimes such sentences fill the entire screen. Enough. If only good business presentations were that easy, so mechanistic: put up one slide, read its text out loud – repeat, and success follows automatically. But they are not.

Large numbers of lacklustre, wordy slides do not a good presentation make. Certainly they do not make a distinctive or memorable one. But then perhaps, honestly assessed, the kind of presenter caricatured above does not really believe they do. The slides are there – be honest – because that is how presentations are prepared. A ubiquitous norm is followed largely unthinkingly, and the results fail to sparkle (at worst the 'death by PowerPoint' phrase is well deserved). Indeed they may fail to explain, inform and certainly to persuade.

There has to be a better way. There is much that can be done to avoid a presentation becoming bland and lacklustre. The approaches and ideas that follow can be used or adapted to enliven what you do and maximize its effectiveness.

1

Introduction: stand up comic

From what has been said so far, let's now draw two immediate conclusions. First, whatever is put on a slide will, for a moment at least, draw people's attention. A group must be allowed to take things in without the distraction of having to look and listen at the same time. As Ralph Richardson said, 'The most precious things in speech are pauses.' It's a good point.

Never forget: every time a slide is displayed the presenter should pause – stop talking – while the audience's attention is on the screen and allow their immediate interest to be exercised.

Such a pause may only need to be for a few seconds, or it could need to be longer and preceded by a comment, 'When you see the next slide, look particularly at...', but it should always happen. Secondly, remember that slides are not essays or reports; they are essentially brief – at least initially they can be added to and grow as people watch, but we will come to that later.

Never forget: slides should be clear, simple and any words on them kept to a minimum.

If this thought was being put on a slide it might say:

'Words on slides should be kept to as few in number as possible. and your writing style must ensure this is so.'

By writing 'tight' as it is called, we can reduce these to say:

'Use as few words as possible and write only the essentials.'

But maybe a slide only needs to say:

'Write tight. Use few words.'

Perhaps we could lose 'Use', or make it one line - 'Writing tight = minimizing words and maximizing impact' or settle for 'Write tight' alone.

'Write tight!'

Adding something visual (using a block of text in the background with the archetypal red pen through it, perhaps) will help. There is no sole right way of writing anything of course, but the principle of limiting words on slides is fundamental to making them work. A final point before leaving this topic: be careful about spelling and language. For example, this sentence contains an error, its not so important, at least in terms of understanding, but mistakes are often read by an audience as evidence of an unprofessional approach. You spotted the mistake? The word 'its' should have been 'it's'. A small thing maybe, although the incorrect use of apostrophes is something anyone concerned with language will notice. But it's is not small on screen. Your every error is up there perhaps two feet wide.

'It's so obvious!'

Be warned. And be careful, spell check slides and/or get someone else to take a look at them.

Automatic pilot

Maybe I was exaggerating as I described presenting in the Preface; maybe not. The fact is that for many presenters, good and not so good, the automatic response to finding that they have a presentation to make is to turn to the computer, click on PowerPoint and start to originate some slides.

This gives rise to what might be called the 'automatic pilot' school of presentation preparation. The degree of lack of conscious thinking this creates and the rut it can put the presenter in is potentially deep. One example (quoted in my book Marketing and Selling Professional Services published by Kogan Page) is of a sales pitch for which the firm involved prepared slides to show to the committee of a potential client: a charity for the blind. They really did not think of the audience - but rather just blindly (sic) followed the routine of how a presenta-

4 The PowerPoint Detox

tion is prepared and based it on a battery of slides. The absurdity of it only dawned on them minutes before the presentation was due to start. When they asked where the electric point was so that they could plug in their equipment, they were told, 'You do realize most of the committee won't be able to see your slides, don't you?' They did – then. But it was too late, and struggling to make a presentation designed around slides without using them, they failed to win the business. Make no mistake: if something like that can be overlooked, anything can be overlooked.

Never forget: presentations cannot be prepared without thought (and, as we will see, that includes thinking about the visual aids).

So, while audiences may put up with this sort of thing, and a comparison with the norm of their experience may even be not be so bad, often everyone is aware that something is missing.

Time for change

Such a formulaic approach, screening out any real, individual consideration of what is best, is so prevalent and so ill thought-of by those on the receiving end of such presentations that it has become the subject of academic and journalistic comment. And it is the slides used that come in for the greatest criticism.

For instance, in the United States, a well-known and respected academic, Edward R Tufte of Yale, who is a communications expert, has written a strong condemnation of PowerPoint, *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (which you can read in full by accessing www.edwardtufte.com). One fascinating example he uses concerns the *Columbia* space shuttle disaster. In a slide presentation, which Tufte calls 'an exercise in misdirection', a crucial piece of information about the foam section that detached and crippled the craft was

buried in small type several layers down in a busy PowerPoint list. Though danger was actually flagged, the warning was not noticed. The main heading on the slide indicated a positive outcome to tests, saving: 'Review of Test Data indicates Conservatism for Tile Penetration'. One might criticize the verbose language too, but the point remains - the key information was passed over unnoticed. It was Tufte, I think, who coined the phrase 'Death by PowerPoint'; certainly the term has entered the language and stuck.

To reinforce any lingering feeling that traditional PowerPoint style and practice are fine, try looking at www.norvig.com/Gettysburg where Peter Norvig has posted a wonderful spoof of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Such stirring language and thoughts are reduced to banality by a visual presentation that is not visual, and which uses bullet points such as 'Met on battlefield (great)'.

In the United Kingdom, a feature by John Naughton in a quality newspaper, the Guardian, addressed the same issue, quoted Tufte's US article and added its own despairing spin: 'Power corrupts. PowerPoint obfuscates. Next time you have to give a presentation, leave it at home.'

The reasons such a comment was made are obvious: the prevailing style of PowerPoint-driven presentations, while they are something audiences expect and tolerate, too often fails to satisfy audiences as it should. A good, stylish presenter, with presence and panache, may be able to make up for this – but only in part.

Consider a presentation as a simple hand drawn pie chart (see Figure 1.1).

When you make a presentation how much of the impact comes from you, and what you say and how you say it (and act), and how much

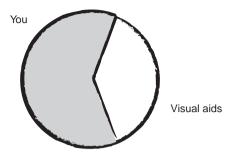


Figure 1.1 A simple pie chart

comes from what you show? Visual aids can create a significant part of the impact, but they do not do – and cannot ever do – the whole job.

Furthermore, as is all too evident in some PowerPoint presentations, the slides can end up taking over, taking up too much of the time and yet still failing to enhance what is said. At worst they can dilute the effectiveness of the speaker and distract from the message they are aiming to put over.

If the presentation as a whole can be visualized in this way, consider what happens if you zoom in on the segment representing visual aids. Imagine two more pie charts, this time showing that part of the presentation coming over via the visual aids. Split these into two segments: first, what proportion of the slides has a visual element and what consists of words alone? Secondly, what proportion of what is on the slides will be duplicated exactly by what you say? The latter may include things you will read or get close to a verbatim rendering of.

I have seen presentations where 80 per cent (more sometimes) of everything that is said comes straight off the slides. In such circumstances an audience might be forgiven for wondering, 'what is the presenter for?'

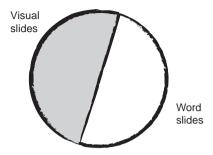


Figure 1.2 The visual and verbal elements of a presentation

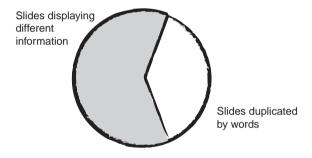


Figure 1.3 What is shown and what is said

Never forget: slides should support the presentation and not lead it.

Slides have many things to do. They can:

- provide an element of repetition (a key to learning and retention);
- enhance a point, adding explanation and emphasis;

- 8 The PowerPoint Detox
- visualize something (literally painting a picture);
- aid retention of a message;
- help add structure and keep track of a developing, and perhaps complex, message;
- change pace;
- focus and direct audience attention;
- add humour.

One slide may do a good deal of this. A series of slides can do it all. However, they should not distract. There are moments when what a presenter is saying is the most important thing and the audience focus should be on that and that alone. It follows therefore that even when slides are an important part of a presentation they should not be dominating or even seen all the time. Yet how often do you (as presenter) switch on the projector at the beginning of a presentation and simply leave it on, with a slide on screen, until the end? Be honest. Think too of how far you get beyond one slide, in terms of topic and talk, before you get to another and bring that up on screen. It is not uncommon for people to talk for 10 minutes or more with the slide on the screen behind them having ceased to have anything to do with what is being said after the first few moments following its appearance.

This leads us to an important rule.

Never forget: only allow a slide to be seen while it is relevant to and fits with what is being said. Do not allow slides to show throughout the duration of a presentation.

How do you do this? It's easy (yet with groups I meet on training courses I am amazed how many people do not know this). You press

the B key on the computer. B = Blank. The screen goes dark and will return to exactly the same place in your presentation when you press the same key again.

Making this change alone, rather than having a slide on all the time, will improve many a presentation and allow those elements of what you need to say to shine through and be put over to maximum effect. Try it; not least you will see how it moves the audience's attention. Switch on and eyes, and attention, go to the screen. Switch off and they focus on the presenter; for a while at least. An alternative, if you really must have something there, is to have a 'filler' slide: that's something with few or (preferably) no words, but some element of design and colour that is relevant but not distracting. Several copies of this can be inserted into a presentation wherever you need a pause in specific visual images and attention to be solely on you.

So let us be clear. PowerPoint is a wonderful thing (and perhaps it should be acknowledged here that there are other similar systems). But it can present hazards. If it is ill-used, or simply used without sufficient thought – the automatic pilot approach – it can and will damage a presentation; at worst it can render a presentation ineffective and risk a presenter failing in whatever intention they had in making the presentation.

Fundamental rules

It has already been said that you should:

- never skimp on preparation;
- view slides as supporting a message, rather than leading it;
- not have slides showing throughout a presentation (use the B key).

Let's add another firm rule at this stage.



Never forget: do not read verbatim.

Figure 1.4 shows an introductory slide that might be used in introducing a training session on the subject of this book. I actually use it, but only as an example of what not to do.

Death by PowerPoint: The day's objectives

◆ The day is designed to help presenters enhance the effectiveness of their presentations, by boosting the power of the impact they make with the best use of slides and visual aids. It examines the way an audience thinks and what actively assists their understanding, thus what kind of communication is most likely to have a positive effect on their reception of your message. It looks first at two areas: factors that hinder successful communications and what approaches there are that can help us overcome these inherent obstacles.

Figure 1.4 An introductory slide

Reading is actually quite difficult (actors who record talking books really earn their money). I discovered this myself recently giving talks to promote a travel book (*A Land Like None You Know*, a lighthearted account of a journey in Burma) during which I have to read extracts; it is something that takes some getting used to. Gore Vidal, being dismissive of President Eisenhower's speeches, once said he was 'reading a speech with his usual sense of discovery'.

Never forget: people read to themselves seven times faster than you can read out loud; if you read you will always lag behind and attention will be compromised as people move between reading (to themselves), listening and waiting for you to catch up.

Things get worse as the text gets more verbose and best described as gobbledygook. So Figure 1.5 is worse than Figure 1.4. Creating gaps when people's minds are free to wander, because they believe they are ahead of you and do not need to concentrate, just guarantees that your purpose is diluted.

Death by PowerPoint: The day's objectives

◆ The day is designed to facilitate presenters, allowing them to enhance their presentational communications effectiveness, by boosting the power of the impact they make in the deployment of slides and visual aids. It examines the psychology of audience behavioural interaction and investigates what actively promotes their understanding, thus what characteristics of communication are most likely to upgrade your performance and the reception of your message. It looks first at those factors that hinder successful communication and then it investigates other factors that help in overcoming these obstacles and making clear communication more likely.

Figure 1.5 An introductory slide with much too much text

There may be brief exceptions, getting a definition or some numerical point absolutely right perhaps, but otherwise remember what Ben Johnson said: 'to speak and to speak well are two things'. Consider Figure 1.4 again for a moment. What could you do instead?

You could, for instance, use an illustration. Figure 1.6 shows a good starting point. An image that can be explained as showing how people

present different profiles to the world – with the implication then explained that being a good presenter sets you apart, positively, from those who are not. This not just explains something, but is designed to motivate, persuading people that getting themselves into that position is worthwhile.

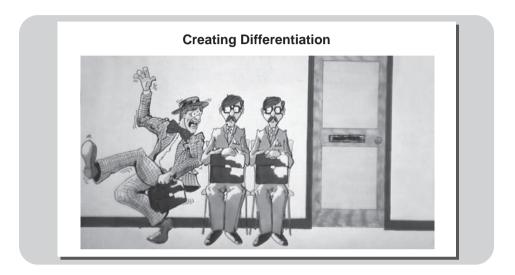


Figure 1.6 An introductory slide which uses an image

Alternatively, you could highlight key points in a word (or two). Figure 1.7 shows this in checklist style, though these words could be superimposed on the picture, either immediately or by clicking them in as a second stage.

Note: this slide can be effective with or without a heading; or first without and then with one being added.

Back to absolute basics: a typical slide looks like this:

Heading						_
Text						

Maximizing presentational impact

- Slides
- Audience
- Communication
- Changing current practice.

Changing

Changing

Changing

Figure 1.7 An introductory slide which uses a checklist

Essentially a slide is in two parts. It may also be backed by a colour or a design. Make sure that the heading is clear and appropriate. Once introduced, and noted by the group, it may be possible to reduce the heading in size on subsequent slides to allow more room for other elements. If you use two headings (one might be the title for a talk and on every slide, the other describing the current topic), ensure that their relationship is clear. Do not let one element overpower others. For example, you might have a logo of some sort on every slide (why? because it's visual, coloured or there to please the client). If this is the case, it risks distracting on every slide.

The second section of the slide, marked 'text' in the box opposite (though it might be something else), can take many forms but must always fit with what the header says. If a picture or chart needs more space to make it clear, then lose the heading for that slide (or reduce its size markedly).

A simple checklist slide, like Figure 1.7, can be enhanced visually by having one word emphasized. The word 'change', here could appear in a different style or appear with three or four versions of it moving or fading onto the overall image. There are, of course, a host of ways

available in PowerPoint to emphasize a word or other element of a slide – too many to list here. These are useful, but they should not be overused, or regarded as adding sufficient interest to render making a slide better in other ways redundant.

This highlights another principle that should be borne in mind.

Never forget: a slide does not have to make sense until the presenter adds something by speaking and creating the full message.

Such a slide may hint at something (like the three figures in Figure 1.6), but it does not even need to do that. Sometimes, as we shall see, it makes a better point by not being clear without a spoken caption, as it were. It is then the presenter and slides together that create impact and explanation; each playing a different part in achieving whatever purpose is in train.

One more basic point to end this chapter: most slides have a heading, like the 'death by PowerPoint' phrase on Figure 1.4. Such a phrase is useful but the weight of it does not need to be overdone. Certainly when it is repeated (because there are several slides essentially on the same subject) it can be smaller on second and subsequent slides. When it is superseded by another it is good practice to make the heading visibly move/fade in as the slide comes up; the movement will make it more likely that people notice the change.

The intention so far has been to make you think both about general typical prevailing practice, and about what you do currently. For many people what they do with regard to PowerPoint and presentations is, for good or ill, a deeply ingrained habit. You need to see the dangers and the limitations of a pedestrian approach. Then you need to recognize and deploy different ways of using this tool, ways that will be beneficial to the effect you have on your audiences.

2

How human nature affects communication

Presentations intend to communicate and that may mean doing a variety of things: inform, explain, demonstrate, stimulate, persuade, motivate, prompt, debate or change attitudes... and more. Sometimes several of these intentions are in play in one presentation. Make no mistake: communication can be difficult; and the responsibility for making communication work lies primarily with the communicator. So, no surprise.

Never forget: the responsibility for getting through to people, for making things clear and ensuring understanding when you present, is simply – yours.

Consider two important rules:

The first rule about communication is: never assume any kind of communication is simple. Most of the time we spend in our offices is

taken up with communicating in one way or another. It is easy to take it for granted. Occasionally we are not as precise as we might be, but never mind, we muddle through and no great harm is done. Except that occasionally it is. Some communication breakdowns become outand-out derailments. Often, there is much hanging on them, as there usually is with formal presentations. Then communications must be got exactly right and the penalties of not so doing range from minor disgruntlement to, at worst, major disruption to productivity, efficiency or quality of work.

The second rule is that everyone needs to take responsibility for their own communication, tackling it in a sufficiently considered manner to make it work effectively; something that must make particular sense for presenters.

To set the scene for everything that follows we shall step back just a little from the detail of presenting and consider certain underlying influences on whether communication works effectively or not, then look at how to get over the difficulties they present. This provides a practical basis for action in terms of presentations and the slides that form a part of them.

If there are difficulties associated with communication, and there surely are, then it is not because other people, work colleagues or whoever, are especially perverse; there are inherent problems caused simply by the way people are – how they tick.

Inherent problems

In communicating, your intentions are clear. It is necessary to make sure that people:

- hear what you say, and thus listen;
- understand, and do so accurately;
- agree, certainly with most of it;

take action in response (although the action may simply be to decide to take note).

Such action could be a whole range of things including agreeing to spend more time on something, attending a meeting or following specific instructions.

Let us consider hearing, understanding, action and feedback in turn.

To ensure people hear/listen (or read)

Here difficulties include the facts that:

- People cannot or will not concentrate for long periods of time: so this fact must be accommodated by the way we communicate. Long monologues are out; written communication should have plenty of breaks, headings and fresh starts; and two-way conversation must be used to prevent people thinking they are pinned down and have to listen to something interminable.
- People pay less attention to those elements of a communication that appear to them unimportant. So creating the right emphasis, to ensure that key points are not missed, is a key responsibility of the communicator and something that must be done in every presentation.

Never forget: you have to work at making sure you are heard - you must literally earn a hearing.

To ensure accurate understanding occurs

Difficulties here include the facts that:

People make assumptions based on their past experience: so you must make sure you relate to just that. If you wrongly assume certain experience exists, your message will not make much sense. (Imagine trying to teach someone to drive if they had never sat in a car: 'Press your foot on the accelerator' – 'What's that?')

- Other people's jargon is often not understood. You need to think very carefully about the amount you use and with whom. Jargon is 'professional slang' and it can be a useful shorthand between people in the know, for example in one organization or one industry, but it dilutes a message if used inappropriately. For instance, used in a way that assumes a greater familiarity than actually exists it will hinder overall understanding (and remember, people do not like to sound stupid and thus may well be reluctant to say 'I don't understand', something that can apply whatever the reason for a lack of understanding).
- Things heard but not seen are more easily misunderstood: thus anything that can be shown may be useful and a message that 'paints a picture' works best.
- Assumptions are often drawn before a speaker finishes: the listener is, in fact, saying to themselves 'I'm sure I can see where this is going' and their mind reduces its listening concentration, focusing instead on something else; in this case perhaps something outside the presentation entirely. This too needs accommodating and where a point is central to a message, feedback can be sought to ensure that concentration has not faltered and the message really has got through. How is this done? Primarily through asking questions (see box).

A question of questions

Many communications situations need to be clarified by the asking of questions. Unless you know the facts, unless you know what people think, and most important of all, unless you know why things are as they are, taking the process on may be difficult or impossible. How do you resolve a dispute if you do not really understand why people are at loggerheads? How do

you persuade people to action when you do not know how they view the area in which you want them to get involved? How do you motivate if you do not know what is important to people or what worries them? The answer in every such case might be stated as 'with difficulty'. Questions create involvement, they get people talking and the answers they prompt provide the foundation for much of what makes communication successful. The same applies to presentations.

But questioning is more than just blurting out the first thing that comes to mind – 'Why do you say that?' Even a simple phrase may carry overtones, and people wonder whether you are suggesting they should not have said that, or see no relevance for the point made. In addition, many questions can easily be ambiguous. It is all too easy to ask something that, only because it is loosely phrased, prompts an unintended response. Ask, 'How long will that take?' and the reply may simply be, 'Not long'. Ask, 'Will you finish that before I have to go to the meeting at 11 o'clock?' and if your purpose was to be able to prepare for the meeting accordingly, then you are much more likely to be able to decide exactly what to do.

Beyond simple clarity you need to consider and use three distinctly different kinds of question:

- Closed questions: these prompt rapid 'Yes' or 'No' answers, and are useful both as a starting point (they can also be made easy to answer to help ease someone into the questioning process) and to gain rapid confirmation of something. Too many closed questions on the other hand create a virtual monologue in which the questioner seems to be doing most of the talking, and this can be annoying or unsatisfying to the other person.
- **Open questions**: these are phrased so that they cannot be answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No'. They typically begin with words like what, where, why, how, who and when, and phrases such as 'Tell me about....' Such questions get people

talking, they involve them and they like the feel they give to a conversation. By prompting a fuller answer and encouraging people to explain they also produce far more information than closed questions.

■ **Probing questions**: these are a series of linked questions designed to pursue a point. Thus a second question that asks 'What else is important about...?' or a phrase such as 'Tell me more about ...' get people to fill out a picture and can produce both more detail and the 'why' that lies beyond more superficial answers.

Many a presentation is made to succeed by the simple expedient of starting it with some questions.

A particular form that is relevant to presentations is the **rhetorical question**. This is a question thrown out, not to prompt an actual answer, but to extend thinking. A presenter who says something such as: 'How many reasons can you think of for a decline in our sales?' may then field half a dozen examples, but the group will probably think of more (and the pace and use of slides must allow for this).

To prompt action

You might want to do so despite the facts that:

It is difficult to change people's habits: recognizing this is the first step to achieving it. A stronger case may need making than would be the case if this were not true. It also means that care must be taken to link past and future. For example don't say, 'That was wrong and this is better,' but rather, 'That was fine then, but this will be better in future' (and explain how changed circumstances make this so). Any phraseology that casts doubt on someone's earlier decisions should be avoided wherever possible.

- There may be fear of taking action Will it work? What will people think? What will my colleagues think? What are the consequences of it not working out? This risk avoidance is a natural feeling: recognizing this and offering appropriate reassurance is vital.
- Many people are simply reluctant to make prompt decisions: they may need real help from you, and it is a mistake to assume that laying out an irresistible case and just waiting for the commitment is all there is to it.

To stimulate feedback

The difficulties here are that:

- Some (all?) people, sometimes deliberately, hide their reaction: some flushing out and reading between the lines may be necessary.
- Appearances can be deceptive: we all know, for example, that phrases such as 'trust me' are as often a warning sign as they are a comment to be welcomed – some care is necessary.
- Presentations do not allow feedback automatically, though some can be gleaned from the demeanour of the audience; it certainly tells you something if too many fall asleep! Different presentations need different prompts built in to provide feedback, whether by questions allowed at the end or questions thrown out by the presenter during the proceedings.

The net effect of all this is rather like trying to get a clear view through a fog. Communication goes to and fro, but between the parties involved is a filter. Not all of the message may get through, some elements may be blocked, and some may be warped or let through only with pieces missing. In part, the remedy to all this is simply watchfulness. If you appreciate the difficulties, you can adjust your communications style a little to compensate, and achieve better understanding as a result.

One point is surely clear. Communication is likely to be better for some planning. This may only be a few seconds thought – the old premise of engaging the brain before the mouth (or writing arm) – although for a presentation a bit more is usually necessary.

Some comments within the last few paragraphs already provide some antidotes to the inherent difficulties, but are there any principles that run parallel and provide mechanisms to balance the difficulty and make matters easier? Luckily the answer is, yes, there are.

Aids to effective communication

Good communication is, in part, a matter of attention to detail. Just using one word instead of another can make a slight difference. Actually, even just using one word instead of another can make a significant difference (as you see!). But certain overall factors are of major influence, and these can be used to condition your communications and relate directly to presentations and the visual aids that form part of them.

The following four factors are key.

The 'what about me?' factor

Any message is more likely to be listened to and accepted if how it affects people is spelt out. Whatever the effect, in whatever way (and it may be ways), people want to know 'what's in it for me?' and also 'how will it affect me?' People are interested in the potential effects, both positive and negative. Tell someone that you have a new computerized reporting system and they may well think the worst. Certainly their reaction is unlikely to be simply 'Good for you'; it is more likely to be 'Sounds like that will be complicated' or 'Bet that will have teething troubles or take up more time.' Tell them they are going to find it faster and easier to submit returns using the new system. Add that it is already drawing good reactions in another department, and you spell out the message and what the effects on them will be, rather than leaving them wary or asking questions.

Never forget: whatever you say, bear in mind that people view it in this kind of way; build in the answers and you avert their potential suspicion and make them more likely to want to take the message on board.

This principle may mean additional slides and perhaps also careful consideration of the order in which they are shown: the message must dispel fears and comment on how it affects people before it gets into too much 'what it is' detail.

The 'that's logical' factor

The sequence and structure of communication is very important. If people know what it is, understand why it was chosen and believe it will work for them, then they will pay more attention. Conversely, if it is unclear or illogical then they worry about it, and this takes their mind off listening. So for example, a hotelier making a presentation to encourage people to book a meeting to be held at their hotel, might sensibly describe the property and sensibly also do so in the order of what a visitor would experience. Thus they describe drawing up outside, entering reception, being guided through to the meeting room and so on. This clearly influences slides. Agenda slides that spell out how a presentation, or a part of it, is going to be handled also play to this principle.

Information is remembered and used in an order – you only have to try saying your own telephone number as quickly backwards as you do forwards to demonstrate this – so your selection of a sensible order for communication will make sense to people, and again they will warm to the message. Using an appropriate sequence helps gain understanding and makes it easier for people to retain and use information. As with much of what is said here, this is especially true for a technically orientated or complex message. Incidentally, we remember telephone numbers by what is called 'chunking'; it's a useful technique that can be applied to many things – see box.

Chunking

If you want to order additional copies of this book you should telephone 02072780433. But you will not see this number printed like that anywhere else: all telephone numbers are chunked. This one is normally written as 0207 278 0433. It is much more difficult to remember – or even read – a string of 11 undifferentiated numbers than three sets, one of four, one of three, and then one of four again. Even in these days of speed dialling, think how many numbers you know in your head. If you want even small children to remember your mobile number (in case they get lost), you should break it down still more, perhaps linking it to words or a story.

This principle applies to anything that we need to explain, from the chapters in a book, to the size of 'information unit' we use when making a presentation. Anything that goes on and on – losing itself in its own complexities – needs to be divided into bite-sized chunks.

Telling people about this is one aspect of what is called 'signposting' – flagging in advance either the content or nature of what is coming next. One important form of this is describing a brief agenda for what follows.

Signposting is a very useful device. Say, 'Let me give you some details about what the reorganization is, when the changes will come into effect and how we will gain from it,' and show a slide setting out the agenda. Then, provided that makes sense to your listeners, they will want to hear what comes next. So tell them about the reorganization and then move on. It is almost impossible to overuse signposting. It can lead into a message, giving an overview, and also lead separately into sub-sections of that message. Sometimes it can be strengthened by explaining why the order has been chosen – 'Let's go through it chronologically; perhaps I could spell out...' – within the description.

Never forget: whatever you have to say, think about what you say first, second, third and so on, and make the order you choose an appropriate sequence for whoever you are communicating with.

Like many aspects of a presentation, the nature of the audience dictates the approach and the kind of slides required.

The 'I can relate to that' factor

Imagine a description: it was a wonderful sunset. What does it make you think of? Well – a sunset, you may say. But how do you do this? You recall sunsets you have seen in the past, and what you imagine draws on that memory, conjuring up what is probably a composite based on many memories. Because it is reasonable to assume that you have seen a sunset, and enjoyed the experience, in the past, I can be fairly certain that a brief description will put what I want in your mind.

It is, in fact, almost impossible not to allow related things to come into your mind as you take in a message. (Try it now: and do *not* think about a long, cool refreshing drink. See.) This fact about the way the human mind works must be allowed for and used to promote clear understanding.

On the other hand, if you were asked to call to mind, say, the house in which I live and yet I do not describe it to you, then this is impossible; at least unless you have been there or discussed the matter with me previously. All you can do is guess, wildly perhaps – all authors live in a garret – all authors are rich and live in mansions (and here this would be wrong on both counts!).

So, with this factor also inherent to communication, it is useful to try to judge carefully people's prior experience; or indeed to ask about it if you have not known them for long and you are unsure of their past experience. You may also refer to it with phrases linking what you are

saying to the experience of the other person. For example, say things such as 'This is like...', 'You will remember...', 'Do you know so and so?', 'This is similar, but...', which are all designed to help the listener grasp what you are saying more easily and more accurately.

Never forget: beware of getting at cross purposes because you think someone has a frame of reference for something which they do not; link to their experience and use it to reinforce your message.

The 'again and again' factor

Repetition is a fundamental help to grasping a point. Repetition is a fundamental help to... Sorry. It is true, but it does not imply just saying the same thing, in the same words, repeatedly. Repetition takes a number of forms:

- things repeated in different ways (or at different stages of the same conversation);
- points made in more than one manner: for example, being spoken and written down;
- using summaries or checklists to recap key points;
- reminders over a period of time (maybe varying the method, phone, email or meeting).

Slides are essentially a form of repetition. You hear something and you see something. More than that: at a presentation you may have considerable repetition:

- an agenda sent in advance makes a general point;
- the introduction starts from the general (prior to moving to the particular);

- a point is made (maybe more than once);
- a slide is shown about it;
- an example or anecdote is used to illustrate it (maybe with a summary point at the end, or even another slide);
- a summary mentions the point again (with another slide, perhaps);
- a handout mentions it in writing (and includes copies of slides used).

This is a fair bit of repetition. It can be overdone of course (perhaps as in the introduction to this point here), but it is also a genuinely valuable aid to getting the message across, especially when used with the other factors now mentioned.

Never forget: people really are more likely to retain what they take in more than once, and in different ways.

Enough repetition.

Positioning your communication

So far in this chapter the principles outlined have been general; they can be useful in various kinds of communication, not just presentations. But exactly whom you communicate with is important. Consider staff, reporting to a manager, as a special category. If managers want people to work willingly, happily and efficiently for them one useful approach to any staff communication is to remember not to allow communication style to become too introspective. If managers want to influence staff, they must relate to these people in a way that makes them the important ones. Although a manager speaks for the organization, staff members do not appreciate an unrelieved catalogue, which focuses predominantly on the manager's side of things:

- 'the organization is...';
- 'we have to make sure...';
- "I will be able to...";
- 'our service in the technical field is...';
- "my colleagues in research...";
- our organization has...', and so on.

Any such phrases can be turned round to focus on the people thus – 'you will find this change gives you...', 'you will receive...', 'you can expect that...'. A slight mixture is, of course, necessary, but a predominantly introspective approach always seems somewhat relentless, especially highlighted up on screen big and bold.

```
'I think...'

'The organization will...'

'We must...'

'This company...'
```

It is more difficult when phrasing things that way round for you to give a real sense of tailoring what you say to the individual. Introspective statements sound very general. Using the words 'you' or 'your' (or similar) at the start of a message usually works well, and once this start is made it is difficult for you to make what you say sound introspective. The same applies to slides. 'You' is a good word, and the overall perspective should be on the people in the group, not on the presenter.

Projecting the right impression

Having made a point about not sounding too introspective, on the other hand you do need to be concerned about the image you put across, because there is a good deal more to it than simply sounding or appearing pleasant.

Some factors are largely common to all circumstances. You will probably want to include a need to appear:

- efficient;
- approachable;
- knowledgeable (in whatever ways the customer expects);
- well organized;
- reliable;
- consistent;
- interested in your staff;
- confident;
- expert (and able to offer sound advice).

People like to feel they are working for someone competent, someone they can respect. Fair enough. Whatever the circumstances the thing to note is that there is a fair-sized list of characteristics that are worth getting over, and all of them are elements that can actively be added to the mix. You can intend to project an image of, say, confidence, and make it appear that you are more confident than you feel, or of fairness when you want it to be absolutely clear that this is what you are being.

Never forget: projecting the right mix – and balance – of characteristics to create the right image is important to the success of any communication, and particularly to presentations where you are 'on show' and people are making judgments.

There is some complexity involved here and it is another aspect of the whole process that deserves some active consideration. Anyone, whatever their role, can usefully think through the most suitable profile for themselves in this way.

In addition, you must have a clear vision of the kind of way you want to project the organization you represent and the department or function you are in. This is especially important when you are dealing with people with whom you have less regular or detailed contact, those in other departments for instance.

Consider whether you should put over an appearance of:

- innovation;
- long experience and substance;
- technical competence;
- having a very human face;
- confidence.

Again you must decide the list that suits you and emphasize your intended characteristics as appropriate to create the total picture that is right for the people you are communicating with. This is often no more than just a slight exaggeration of a characteristic, but can still be important.

In all these cases different levels and types of person will need different points emphasizing in different ways. For example, some people may warm to an experienced manager with apparent concern for their staff. If so, then any qualities creating that impression can usefully be stressed. Others may seek more weight, so a style that conveys that makes sense for them, and you will need to project appropriate clout to make it believable.

The use of slides in presenting is an important part of what creates the right profile for the presenter. Poor slides may make presenting awkward and the audience will rate what is being done poorly; even a good presentation with poor slides can be less effective than it might. Both the slides themselves and whether they help the audience matter, so too does the way they are used. A presenter who fumbles slides, forgetting to move to the next at the right moment, flitting over one as if changing their mind about including it, or standing so that people in the group cannot see the screen, is not going to be seen as professional.

Individually, all the factors mentioned in this chapter are straightforward. Any complexity in making communication work comes from the need to concentrate on many things at once; especially with presentations on your feet. Here habit can quickly come to our assistance. There is a danger in this too, however. Unless you maintain a conscious overview it is easy to slip into bad habits or, by being unthinking – and making no decision rather than making the wrong decision – allow the fine-tuning that makes for good communication to go by default. Remember just a word or two can make a difference. A complete message delivered in an inadequate manner may cause chaos. A presentation is more difficult to do than just a chat across the desk, the opportunities for it to go wrong are legion.

Conversely, getting it right – and that includes what is said, how it is said and the slides that assist in its being said – can pay dividends.

To summarize: two approaches are essential to everything in business communication – see box.

Never forget: recognize i) the inherent problems which exist and make communication less certain (and do not assume the process is straightforward) and ii) that your communication needs to be actively aimed at getting over (or at least minimizing) these problems and be arranged accordingly.

With presentations, if these principles are not accommodated, even adding the further techniques involved is going to mean that effectiveness will be diluted to such an extent that even the best slides in the world cannot rescue the situation.

3

Presentations: the slide/speaker duo

The fact that what makes a presentation ultimately work is the totality of the speaker and visuals working together has already been mentioned. The relationship between the two is clearly important. So too is the fragile nature of a presentation. Small details matter, and research shows that as much as 70 per cent of what is said at a presentation is quickly forgotten. It is gone the following day in fact, and time passing dilutes memory still more (although reference back will reinforce it).

Research also shows that what is both seen and heard extends both understanding and retention very significantly; and other senses can augment matters too. Just think what memories a song or smell can conjure up. The box below sets out some more information about the worrying proportion of information retained.

What?

The statistics thrown about by psychologists suggest that people remember approximately:

- 10 per cent of what they hear;
- 20 per cent of what they read;
- 30-40 per cent of what they see;
- 60-70 per cent of what they see and hear.

This is what your use of PowerPoint must cope with. In unison presenter and the right sort of slides can get over a plethora of information, difficult concepts and details, and make the majority of them stick. The way information is put over must therefore reflect the relative importance of that information.

The details of precisely why this occurs do not matter here; suffice to say that different aspects of the brain are activated by, for example hearing and seeing. Thus the inherent nature of the people attending a presentation means that it is possible to enhance what they take away from it by delivering the message in the right way. In context, the implication is that the core of a message must be clear and must be emphasized to ensure that important core elements are among the parts of the presentation that will be recalled best.

Never forget: the substantial nature of the communications job you have to do. It is this that necessitates careful preparation and attention to detail throughout the piece if a presentation is truly to work as well as possible.

An element of visualization is essential, particularly if the message is important and complex; without this retention is always less. So slides can enhance your message, but some slides can enhance it more than others. Chapter 4 reviews some things to avoid, either because they do not help or because they actually reduce effectiveness. Chapter 5 looks at 'best practice': things that work. In this chapter we focus on overall factors about the amalgam of slide and speech. The starting point is that preparation must be done in a way that creates the right sort of slides in parallel with the right message.

One factor preventing this being done is that slides often have three disparate purposes. Presenters regard them as:

- what the audience sees;
- a prompt for themselves as to what to say next;
- a handout to be given to people afterwards as a summary (this role can be extended if, for some reason, they are regarded as also providing hard copy for people who have not heard the presentation).

The danger is clear. In part because slides are so often the first thing that is prepared, they end up trying to do all these different things and being less than ideally suited for any of them. At worst they become primarily designed to help the presenter, and the needs of the audience are sidelined.

Never forget: slides are first and foremost for the audience.

In preparing slides this must be the paramount consideration. If, at a later time, they are adapted to fulfil other roles that is fine, and besides, there is no reason why there cannot be two or three different versions of the slides. For example, this might mean that slides are embedded in a longer document to create a handout, a document that

includes additional information. Or it might mean changes being made to certain slides in the handout version to make them more explanatory on their own away from what was said when they were seen on screen. This concept may mean a little more time is taken in preparation, but it need not be too much and is a small price to pay for getting both things right.

Preparation: a few moments' thought

No one should think that having to prepare implies some sort of weakness. For instance, the 'born' public speaker, effortlessly sailing through their presentation, is in fact probably only able to give this impression because they are well prepared. Preparation needs doing. The job is to make sure that it is well done and is also done productively – good preparation should save time overall.

A key question

Whatever kind of presentation you may be contemplating, its purpose must be clear. You must be able to answer the question, 'Why am I doing this?' And set out a purpose, one that always needs to involve you and the recipients of your message and which describes what effect you aim to have on them. Remember that communication can have many overall purposes (to inform, motivate and more; described earlier), and that these are not mutually exclusive. The more purposes there are, the more preparation must ensure all will be fulfilled.

Never forget: presentations are rarely, if ever, just 'about' something, and approaching one as if it is can mean that you may waffle.

So, in order to avoid an 'and-another-thing' type of presenting, objectives need to be set and be clear and spelt out in sufficient detail (certainly in your own mind and often for others). They must act as a

genuine guide to what you will do. They also need to reflect not just what you want, but the audience's view also.

A much-quoted acronym can provide a good guide here: SMART. This stands for:

- Specific;
- Measurable;
- Achievable;
- Realistic;
- Timed.

As an example you might regard the objectives linked to your reading of the Appendix, on the core skills of making presentations, as being to:

- Enable you to ensure your presentations come over in future in a way that audiences will see as appropriate and informative (*specific*).
- Ensure (measurable) action takes place afterwards. Here you might link to any appropriate measure: from agreements or actions that group members take or commit to, to the volume of applause received!
- Be right for you: sufficient, understandable information in manageable form that really allows you to change and improve what you do later (an achievable result).
- Be *realistic*, that is desirable hence a short text (if it took you several days to read the effort might prove greater than any benefit derived from doing so).
- Provide *timing*; always a good factor to include in any objective by when are you going to finish reading this section? When is your next presentation? How far ahead of it should you prepare?

Ask yourself whether you are clear in this respect before you even begin to prepare. If you know why the presentation must be made, and what you intend to achieve, you are well on the way to success. Time spent sorting this, and making sure you have a clear vision of what the objectives are, is time well spent. It may only take a few moments, but is still worth doing. Or it may need more thought and take more time. So be it. It is still worth doing, and in any case may well save time on later stages of preparation.

With your purpose clear, and a constant eye, as it were, on the audience, you can begin to assemble your message.

Deciding the message

There is more to this than simply banging down the points in sequence ('Good morning, ladies and gentlemen' and onwards), something that was hinted at early on. A more systematic approach is necessary. Indeed a more systematic approach can quickly become a habit of preparing in a way that promptly and certainly enables you to deliver what you want.

The following provides a full description of a tried and tested approach. This describes the fullest degree of preparation necessary, but it is important to stress that this is not offered as something that must be followed slavishly. The important thing is to find, experiment with, and refine and then use, a method that suits you. In addition, practice and experience, or other factors such as familiarity with your chosen topic, may well allow you to adopt a 'shorthand' version of these approaches which is quicker, but still does for you the total job that is necessary at this stage.

Never forget: deciding, planning and preparing the message is not best done by first creating a list of PowerPoint slides.

That said, leave the slides on one side for a moment and consider the approach stage by stage. A four-stage approach helps to sort out what the message is to be; what you need to say in our presentational example (and what you should not say also). Here also we investigate more about how you will put the message across. Both link to the structure involved: what comes first, second and third, and what constitutes the beginning, the middle and the ending.

There is something of the chicken and egg here. Does preparing the message or organizing the structure logically come first? Both are important, both are interrelated. The sequence chosen here works well, and shows the reader how to put a presentation together as it would need to be done in a real-life situation. The details and the sequence can equally apply to something such as writing a report or proposal, and in less elaborate form to much else besides. What follows is the detail of assembling the message.

Putting it together

It is not only necessary to 'engage the brain before the mouth', but also vital to think through – in advance – what a presentation must contain; and not contain for that matter. The following process of thinking through and preparation is recommended for its practicality and can be adapted to cope with any sort of presentation, of any length or complexity and of any purpose. Many communications fail or their effectiveness is diluted because preparation is skimped.

Never forget: accepting that preparation takes time and building this into your daily schedule is the first step to being a good presenter.

In the long run preparation saves time. Remember the premise that while there is never time to do things properly, there always has to be time made available to sort out any mess caused by an inadequate approach.

There are six stages (described primarily by continuing to focus on presentations). The very best way of linking the principles described here to real life is to go through them with some personal project, such as a presentation you must make, in mind and link this to the approach that follows. You could pause here and find a personal example to have by you as you read on.

Stage 1: listing

Forget about everything such as sequence, structure and arrangement. Just concentrate on and list – in a short note (or keyword) form – every significant point that the presentation might usefully contain. Give yourself plenty of space (something larger than the standard A4 sheet is often useful: it lets you see everything at a glance). Set down the points as they occur to you, almost at random across the page. For something simple this might result only in a dozen words, or it might be far more.

You will find that this process is a good thought prompter. It enables you to fill out the picture as one thought leads to another, with the freestyle approach removing the need to pause and try to link points or worry about sequence. With this done (and with some messages it may only take a short time), you have a full picture of the possibilities for the message in front of you and you can move on to Stage 2.

Stage 2: sorting

Now, you can review what you have noted down and begin to bring some order to it, deciding:

- what comes first, second and so on;
- what logically links together, and how;
- what provides evidence, example or illustration to the points.

At the same time, you can – and probably will – add some additional things and have second thoughts about other items, which you will

delete, as well as amending the wording a little if necessary. You need to bear in mind here what kind of duration (or length) is indicated; and what will be acceptable.

This stage can often be completed in a short time by simply annotating and amending the Stage 1 document. Using a second colour makes this quick and easy, as do link lines, arrows and other enhancements of your original jottings.

At the same time you can begin to catch any more detailed element that comes to mind as you go through (including ways of presenting as well as content), noting what it is at more length on the page or alongside.

Stage 3: arranging

Sometimes, at the end of Stage 2, you have a note that is sufficiently clear and from which you can work directly in finalizing matters. If it can benefit from clarification however, it may be worth rewriting it as a neat list; or this could be the stage where you type it and put it on screen if you are working that way and want to be able to print something out in due course.

Final revision is possible as you do this. Certainly you should be left with a list reflecting the content, emphasis, level of detail and so on that you feel is appropriate. You may well find you are pruning a bit to make things more manageable at this stage, rather than searching for more content and additional points to make.

Stage 4: reviewing

This may be unnecessary. Sufficient thought may have been brought to bear through earlier stages. However, for something particularly complex or important (or both) it may be worth running a final rule over what you now have listed. Sleep on it first perhaps – certainly avoid finalizing matters for a moment if you have got too close to it. It is easy to find you cannot see the wood for the trees.

Make any final amendments to the list (if this is on screen it is a simple matter) and use this as your final 'route map' as preparation continues.

Stage 5: prepare the 'message'

For a presentation this will be in the form of speaker's notes (more about these later). Now you can turn your firm intentions about content into something representing not only what will be said, but also how you will put it over.

Never forget: one of the virtues of the procedure advocated here is that it stops you trying to think about *what* to say and *how* to say it at the same time. It is much easier to take them in turn.

This fifth stage must be done carefully, although the earlier work will have helped to make it easier and quicker to get the necessary detail down.

A couple of tips:

- If possible, choose the right moment. There may be times when your thoughts flow more easily than others (and it may help literally to talk it through to yourself as you go through this stage). Certainly interruptions can disrupt the flow and make the process take much longer, as you recap and restart again and again. The right time, uninterrupted time in a comfortable environment, always helps.
- Keep going. By this I mean do not pause and agonize over some detail (which may well be thoughts about the right slide), but leave it for the moment. You can always come back to something; indeed it may be easier to complete later. If you keep going you maintain the flow, allowing consistent thinking to carry you through the structure to the end so that you can 'see' the overall

shape of it. Once you have the main detail down, then you can go back and fine-tune, adding any final thoughts to complete the picture.

Stage 6: a final check

A final look (perhaps after a break) is always valuable. This is also the time to consider rehearsal: either talking it through to yourself, to a tape recorder or a friend or colleague, or going through a full-scale 'dress rehearsal'.

Thereafter, depending on the nature of the presentation, it may be useful – or necessary – to spend more time, either in revision or just reading over what you plan to do. You should not overdo revision at this stage, however. There comes a time to simply be content you have it right and stick with it.

But what about slides: when do you prepare those? Let's look back at the stages again.

- List: it is probably best to ignore slides here completely and concentrate on reviewing content and points to be covered.
- Sort: here, especially if you are a regular slide user, it will be difficult to ignore them completely. It may be useful to add a note (just a letter S – S1, S2 etc – perhaps in a colour to make it stand out) of where you see slides going (you may even identify slides you have on file that you want to use), but it is not necessary to identify all the places where a slide will be deployed at this point and certainly not how they will look in detail.
- Arrange: as you get more organized the notes about slides may increase, you do not, after all, want to fail to note an idea that crosses your mind and then lose it altogether.
- Review: slides can be subject to a quick review here along with everything else.

- Prepare the message: here content and illustration go hand in hand. You might still leave exactly how a slide will look for later in order to keep the thread of your overall message intact.
- Final check: A last run through will add final details about the slides and complete the message.

Essentially slide preparation may go in two stages. First, you decide where a point needs a slide to back it up or assist your verbal explanation. Secondly, you need the detail of how it will do this and what element of visualization it might include.

Note: completion implies you being clear about exactly how you arrange the material and what you need in front of you as you present; so it is to speaker's notes that we turn next.

Speaker's notes

For most people having something in front of them as they speak is essential. The question is what form exactly should this take. Speaker's notes have several roles. They:

- act as a guide to what you will say and in what order;
- boost confidence: in the event you may not need everything that is in front of you, but knowing it is there is, in itself, useful;
- assist you to put things over in the best possible way: producing the right variety, pace, emphasis and so on as you go along.

On the other hand your notes must not act as a straitjacket and stifle all possibility of flexibility. After all, what happens if your audience's interest suggests a digression or the need for more detail before proceeding? Or the reverse, if a greater level of prior information or experience becomes apparent, meaning that you want to recast or abbreviate something you plan to say? Or if, as you get up to speak for half an hour, the chairperson whispers, 'Can you keep it to 20

minutes? We're running a bit behind'? Good notes should assist with these and other scenarios as well.

Again there is no intention here either to be comprehensive or to suggest only one way makes sense. Rather I will set out what seem to me some rules and some tried and tested approaches, not least to ensure that slides fit in and play the right role. The intention is not to suggest that you follow what is here slavishly. It is important to find what suits you, so you may want to try some of the approaches mentioned, but to amend or tailor them to suit your kind of presentation.

One point is worth making at the outset. There is advantage in adopting (if not immediately) a consistent approach to how you work here. This can act to make preparation more certain, and you are more likely to become quicker at getting your preparation done if you do so. A consistent approach also helps you judge accurately how long a presentation will take to deliver, and thus ensure you achieve the required timing.

The format of notes

The following might be adopted as rules:

- Legibility is essential. You must use a sufficiently large typeface, or writing, avoid adding tiny, untidy embellishments and remember that your notes must be suitable to be used standing up and therefore be readable at a greater distance than if you sat to read them.
- The materials must be well chosen for you. Some people favour small cards, others larger sheets. A standard A4 ring binder works well (one with a pocket at the front may be useful to contain ancillary items you may want with you). Whatever you choose, make sure it lies flat. It is certain to be disconcerting if a folded page turns back on itself - especially if you repeat a whole section. It can happen!
- Using only one side of the paper allows space for amendment and addition if necessary and/or makes the total package easier to

follow. Some people like notes arranged with slides reproduced nearby to produce a comprehensive double-page spread, and the PowerPoint Notes feature provides one way of doing this: see box.

A useful feature of the PowerPoint system is the Notes Page. Click on View, click on Notes Page and you get a view of the slide with a box below it into which you can enter text – notes about what you will say. This enables the presenter to turn through a presentation slide-by-slide, with one page in front of them acting as their prompt to what to show and what to say (the lower box can be marked on a printed version to give information about emphasis and how precisely a message is planned to be delivered). This is shown on Figure 3.1 (which uses Figure 1.7 again just to put some words in the upper half).

Maximizing presentational impact

- Slides
- ◆ Audience
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Changing current practice.

Changing

Changing

Changing

Your guiding notes go here – the slide they link to goes above

Figure 3.1 Making notes to accompany a slide

- Always page number your material (yes, one day, as sure as the sun rises in the morning, you will drop it). Some people like to number the pages in reverse order - 10, 9, 8 etc. - which gives some guidance regarding time remaining until the end. Decide which ordering to use - and stick with one way to avoid confusion, also allowing for the numbering of slides (a number appears on these automatically).
- Separate different types of note, for example reminders of what you intend to say and how (emphasis etc).
- Use colour and symbols to help you find your way, yet minimize what must be noted.

Because you should never put down verbatim what you want to say, or read it out, notes means notes. The detail on the speaker's notes (alongside slides) needs to be just sufficient for a well-prepared speaker to be able to work from them and do so comfortably. Consider the devices mentioned here, and try to bear in mind as you do so the effect that the use of a second (or third?) colour would have on their ease of use. Some highlighting is clearly more dramatic in fluorescent yellow, for example.

Other things can help too. Consider these ideas: there should be things here you can copy or adapt, or which prompt additional ideas that will help make sure your chosen style suits you:

- Main divisions: the pages imagine they are A4 are divided (a coloured line is best) into smaller segments, each creating a manageable area on which the eye can focus with ease. This helps ensure that you do not lose your place (effectively it produces something of the effect of using cards rather than sheets). PowerPoint Notes format also has this effect, of course, splitting an A4 page in half with slide above and notes below.
- Symbols: which save space and visually jump off the page making sure you do not miss them. It is best to avoid possible confusion by always using the same symbol to represent the same thing - and maybe also to restrict the overall number used. A plethora of them

might become difficult to follow. Bold exclamation marks and a symbol – S1, S2 and so on – to show which slide is to be shown where, are examples.

- Columns: these separate different elements of the notes. Clearly there are various options here in terms of numbers of columns and what goes where.
- Space: turning over only takes a second (often you can end a page where a slight pause is necessary anyway). It is always best to give yourself plenty of space, not least to facilitate amendments and, of course, to allow individual elements to stand out.
- Emphasis: this must be as clear as content; again a second colour helps.
- Timing: an indication of time elapsed (or still to go) can be included as little or often as you find useful; remember the audience love to have time commitments kept.
- Options: this term is used to describe points included as a separate element, which can be particularly useful. Options can be added or omitted depending on such factors as time and feedback. They help fine-tune the final delivery and are good for your confidence also. They might go in a third vertical column.

Note that points in the 'Options' column are designed to be either included or not, depending on the situation. A plan might thus include 10 points under Options with, say, half of them (regardless of which half) making your total presentation up to the planned duration. Thus you can extend or decrease to order and fluently work in additional material where more detail (or an aside or example) seems appropriate on the day. Slides that these items make necessary should be included in the running order; any not used can be skipped and not shown.

Good preparation and good notes go together. If you are well prepared, feel confident of your material and confident also that you have a really clear guide in front of you, then you are well on the way to making a good presentation. There is just one more thing to note here: maybe you are not alone. You could be involved in team presentations. As a slight digression, this is commented on in the box below.

With a little help from your friends

When a complete presentation is made up of segments with perhaps two, three or more people contributing separate parts of it, the need for preparation is magnified. Team presentations must not only go over well, they must also appear seamless. There should be neither any disruption to the smooth flow of the content, nor any fumbling in terms of handover between speakers. Those in the audience will read any uncertainty as unprofessional. It will either seem to be a sign of bad planning or appear as a lack of respect for the audience – or both. Even if the individual presentations are good, any fumbling on handover – 'I think that's all I have to say. John, you were going to pick things up here, weren't you?' - will dilute effectiveness.

It is often extremely difficult for a group of people to present effectively together without getting together beforehand to thrash out the details. Time and pressures within many an organization may typically conspire to make such meetings difficult to arrange, but there is no substitute for them. A word or two on the telephone or a couple of emails is just not the same, and you fail to liaise in this way at your peril. You have been warned!

You need to consider matters such as:

- what order people will speak in (and whether this in any way should relate to the hierarchy involved: often it should not);
- who will be 'in charge';
- how speaking styles will match or detract;
- who will organize and take questions;
- implications for the timing.

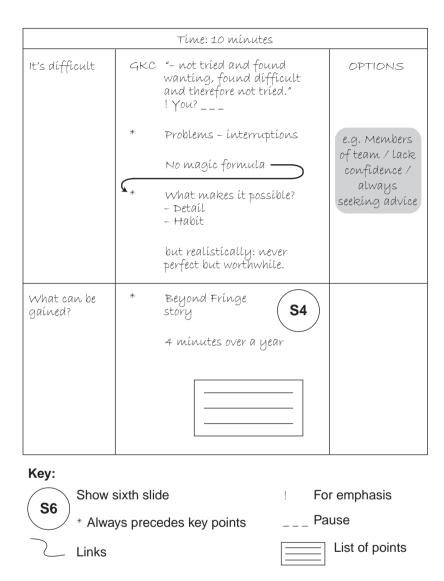
You may think of more considerations. Not least there is the question of slides. Will each person prepare their own slides? In

this case, will their slides work as a cohesive set? Or is it better if one person originates all the slides? Often team presentations end up with a mish-mash of slides that, separately or together, end up spoiling the intended effect. Given the importance of this aspect of a presentation, it is something that must be subject to consultation, then a plan agreed by all needs to be implemented. An approach should be selected that is not an 'easy way out', but which will ensure the slides are right on the day.

All this is worth thinking about. The effect of an ultimately seamless presentation is powerful. It is no fun getting up to speak when you are less well prepared than you know you should be. Getting up alongside a colleague having little idea how what the two of you will say will mesh together runs a close second and should be avoided at all costs.

There are of course many variations here, but an illustration of the sort of thing that you might prepare and have in front of you is given in Figure 3.2. This might be a right-hand A4 page, used in a ring binder with slides shown alongside. Figure 3.2 is actually taken from material on the subject of time management; the details do not matter here (although I have another Kogan Page book on this, *Successful Time Management*). What are important are the suggestions it makes regarding format. It:

- is in three columns, main headings on the left, key reminders and the sequence in the centre, and Options on the right;
- flags time information;
- shows where to display a slide (S4);
- uses simple symbols (! and a dotted line to indicate a pause);
- has some reminders boxed (there would be words in here).



An example of the format of speaker's notes Reproduced from Patrick Forsyth, How to Craft Business Presentations and Public Speeches, with the permission of Foulsham Publishing. (As an entirely biased recommendation, perhaps I may suggest that it would make a good additional reference for anyone wanting to investigate the whole process of presenting and speaking in public.)

Clearly a variety of permutations are possible here; you need to experiment and work out what suits you, and the sort of presentation you make, best.

As a check that you have covered everything, make sure that you have an answer for all the following questions:

- What is the topic or title?
- What is the duration (specified or estimated)?
- What are my intentions?
- How would I sum up my overall objective?
- What are the main points to be made?
- What logic and sequence will be used?
- Have I prepared a good start?
- Will the central content flow and hold people's interest?
- Do I have a good summary stage and final 'sign-off' planned?
- And, last but not least, are there the right number of slides, in the right places and do they genuinely support with a visual element what will be said rather than overpower it or simply duplicate what I plan to say?

Go about preparation in this sort of way, be clear in your own mind what you will do, content that it fits your audience and you are well on the way to making a good presentation. This whole preparation process is important and not to be skimped. Preparation does get easier, however. You will find that, with practice, you begin to produce material that needs less amendment and that both getting it written down and any subsequent revision begin to take less time.

As has been said, you need to find your own version of the procedures set out here. A systematic approach helps, but the intention is not to over-engineer the process. What matters is that you are comfortable with your chosen approach – and that it works for you. If this is the case, then provided it remains consciously designed to achieve what is necessary, it will become a habit. It will need less thinking about, yet still act to guarantee that you turn out something, which you are content meets the needs - whatever they may be.

Preparation is a vital part of making a good presentation. At its simplest it is merely a moment's constructive thought. More often more is necessary. The key issues are recapped below.



Never forget: always:

- begin your planning by devising a clear objective;
- prepare messages with a clear idea of what intentions they reflect (informing, persuading, etc);
- think matters through systematically, separate your decision on what you will say (or communicate in whatever way), from how you will say it, and decide upon the precise language you will use:
- prepare slides that fit the presentation, rather than a presentation to fit the slides;
- allow sufficient time and, if possible, build in some pauses so that you do not become unable to see the wood for the trees;
- be prepared to fine-tune the message to get it right.

On your feet

Good preparation will enable you to present confidently the good message you have originated, thought through and organized. Slides will have an important role in guiding you. They unashamedly act as cues, prompts helping you move accurately from one point to the next, but prepared this way, do so while fulfilling their prime role of assisting the audience. You need to manage the process of speaking and showing slides so that it allows you to do so fluently and so that nothing distracts you or the audience as you do it. So:

- Position things correctly: you need to be able to see the computer screen clearly (and your notes) and be positioned out of the line of sight between the audience and the screen. Remember that what you see on the computer screen is what people see on the big screen. You need to glance occasionally at the big screen to make sure all is well, but otherwise look at the audience. (Eve contact is important, see Appendix.)
- Link, and match, the language you use and that of any words on the screen, so that it is clear where you are up to.
- Describe what is going on up on the screen: language using visual analogies as you go is helpful (X fits with Y for a chart, say) and instructions too ('note the level of the blue bar chart').
- Point at the screen if necessary: I know I've said don't look at it, but occasionally it makes sense to do so – you point and say, 'Note the level of the blue bar chart.'
- Add other visual aids to the slides you show: there is a danger that we feel that if slides are being used no more is necessary and that they are the only visual aids in play. But other things help: see opposite.

Never forget: when you do have a slide that will take a moment for the audience to read or take in - allow them that time. People cannot concentrate on you and the screen at the same time; stop talking when appropriate.

Anything and everything

This section is about an inventive approach to visual aids that are not slides. Practically anything can act as a visual aid, from another person (carefully briefed to play their part) to an exhibit of some sort. In a business presentation, exhibits may be obvious items: products, samples, posters and so on, or may be something totally unexpected.

Something unexpected, surprising and striking can have considerable impact. For example, there are hotels and conference centres which proudly boast that they have the access and strength to allow you to say 'What we need now is some really heavyweight support...' as a baby elephant actually walks across the platform behind you. The possibilities with visual aids are virtually endless.

Like all the skills involved in making presentations, while the basics give you a sound foundation, the process is something that can benefit from a little imagination.

Perhaps the most important visual aid is always to hand: it is you. Numbers of factors, such as simple gestures (for example, a hand pointing), and more dramatic ones like banging a fist on the table – No! – add power to a point, as does your general manner and appearance.

All sorts of things can be used as visual aids. At my daughter's wedding, a projected montage of photographs of her and her new husband as children acted as a backdrop to the wedding breakfast and speeches. When I started my speech I pulled out an enormous swatch of paper as I said, 'Now, I understand it's tradition to review the

bride's early life...'. This drew a little apprehension until the exaggeration became clear.

In a business context I once saw someone talking about mining equipment produce a substantial piece of rock. He described it as some of the hardest rock on the planet, then turned it towards the audience and showed as well as described how the equipment he was talking about had cut through it 'like a knife through butter' leaving a flat, mirror-smooth surface as testament to the equipment's prowess.

Items can be produced from a pocket (money); larger things from below the table or behind a lectern (a bottle of wine) or even unveiled rather as at an official ceremony (like a sheet being pulled from over a life-sized cardboard cut-out photograph of a person). Anything like this can work well, and, of course, it works best when it has real relevance and is not just 'clever'.

Then there is what I call a 'flourish'. Let me explain with some examples:

One kind of flourish (difficult to exemplify on the page without hearing it) is simply when at a key point the emphasis and meaning are exactly and very apparently right. Rather as the punch line of a good funny story must be just right, so a phrase, a summary or key point comes over to perfection. This may involve finding just the right turn of phase, delivering it with just the right emphasis and timing, and with a matching gesture that suits the moment, and carrying it out with apparent natural ease. It is, if you like, a peak moment of the animation that needs to constantly enliven any address. As such it is an exceptional moment. The whole talk cannot be like this, though some need, by their nature, more of this factor than others. Sometimes a particular passage simply lends itself to this, and inspiration fires it up as it is delivered. On other occasions the effect is well planned (with a slide to go with it). Sometimes too, it combines a little of both - the moment makes whatever was planned go really well. It can get too much though: listen to how politicians speak at, for instance, a party conference as they regularly finish a point with a sentence that seems to say, Isn't that true, isn't that well put – applaud now.

- Another kind of flourish involves an appropriate (again usually but not always thought-out) 'event' that is added specifically to enliven the proceedings. For example, I was once in the audience at a conference where one speaker (of several) made a dramatic start. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began, 'I know time is short, but in the hour I have available I will...'. The chairman, who sat beside him, looked horrified, tugged his sleeve and pointed to his watch. The speaker glanced in his direction for a second, and continued, 'Of course. I am so sorry. In the half an hour I am allocated...' He paused, lifted his notes, in the form of A4 sheets, and tore them in half lengthways down the page, thus apparently halving the duration of his talk. He threw one half over his shoulder, and then continued with every member of the group giving him their complete attention. The feeling in the room said unequivocally, 'This should be good.'
- On another occasion I saw someone involve a member of the group he was addressing to create such a flourish. He was setting out some changes in policy affecting budgets. There were cutbacks and much carping about certain expenses, now disallowed, though as someone had said it was only a fiver. He asked if anyone had a £5 note. Someone handed one over. He promptly tore it up, sprinkling the pieces across the table to the clear horror of the volunteer. 'But it's only a fiver,' he said, going on to contrast the attitude of many people towards what they see as 'company' money or 'my' money. A slide with a short movie clip of notes fluttering down and forming a stack made the point about how small sums mount up. It made a dramatic point (though it cost him a fiver! as he did repay the money later). I have some worthless South American notes I keep for similar purposes.
- Even so small a thing as a man removing his jacket (suggesting informality or a workshop environment) can inspire confidence. I saw this done once in two stages: first the presenter slowly removed his jacket, and then the braces that were revealed. It got a chuckle and made a point, amidst comments about 'getting down to work'.

Such actions need an element of creativity, but you can plan their inclusion in what you do. There are, of course, dangers here. There is nothing worse than a dramatic gesture that falls flat, so you need to progress with some care. I once saw a presenter fail to make a magic trick work – that was embarrassing (almost more so for the audience than for the presenter). The more complicated or dramatic something is, the more sure you must be that it – and any accompanying slides – will work. The combining of a number of factors, both verbal and physical, to create particular impact is something that adds to the overall impression a speaker makes. When done well it is seamless. In other words, the whole thing flows smoothly along, there is variety of pace and emphasis and an occasional flourish is reached, smoothly and naturally executed as a high point in the presentation's progress, then the flow continues. The intention is for the emphasis achieved to be more striking than the method of achieving it.

Sometimes a slide can be an integral or significant part of such things. On other occasions any slide would just distract; attention needs to be solely on the presenter for a moment and it is very much a B key moment.

Any speaker does better if they are a little animated. Gestures and the like create a feeling of energy and enthusiasm. Perhaps some of this can be linked to slides. As a final example here, I recently saw a speaker, who was working a slide show using a remote control held in his hand, walk to the screen as he spoke, reach out and apparently bat a box on a chart into a new position on the right rather than the left-hand side of the screen. There was momentary surprise expressed. I'm sure people quickly realized that he had just pressed a button, but it looked wonderfully neat and, despite being an unashamedly theatrical gesture, did his standing with the audience no harm at all.

There are also things that are done which should not be done, and these can cripple a presentation, so in Chapter 4 we turn to what to avoid.

4

What to avoid

In this short chapter the intention is to flag – bullet-list style – the main hazards: those things that alone or together weaken what is being presented or, at worst, lead to a crash-and-burn-death-by-PowerPoint-type presentation that achieves little or nothing.

The chapter begins by recapping, although there is no other significance to the order; everything here might be prefixed by the words 'never forget'. This section also provides a quick reference to refer back to on occasion.

So, DO NOT:

- Use too many words on a slide enough said about this, though it is perhaps worth emphasizing that this means both not having too many words on a slide and also not having too big a proportion of slides with words on.
- Use too small a typeface this often goes with the too-many-words error, of squeezing in all of what it is felt should be said, and worse, reading it out. A too-small typeface simply compounds the problem, and makes it likely that people will not be able to read

what is shown (something for which some people may be grateful!). A sensible type size will act to limit what can be said: see the box below, which illustrates different typefaces (it is useful to experiment with something similar in PowerPoint projecting slides in the sort of room you must present in to see what works).

Can you read this?
Can you read this?
What about this?
Is this better?
And this?
Surely this is clearer?
Better still?

- On a screen in a room (sufficiently large to hold say 30 people) 32 point type may need to be the norm. With (over)complex slides the problem is made worse and the word element suffers. An apology makes things no better. I have heard presenters put up a slide and say, 'I am afraid you won't be able to read this, so let me read it.' Oh dear. You should be concerned about legibility.
- Write full text slides are not letters or reports. When words are necessary they should highlight, summarize and point up what is being said. What are more often needed are headings, keywords and pointers to deeper meaning that link to the spoken word.
- Use slides which are inappropriate to your audience this might include using inappropriate jargon the audience does not understand.

- Have anything politically incorrect on your slides this is similar to the previous 'do not' but worth a separate note.
- Omit spellchecking from your preparations incorrect spelling (and grammar too) matters, with some audiences more than others, and is highly likely to be noticed when it is shining big and bright on screen. Mistakes on slides appear BIG.
- Use one slide when two (or more) are necessary it only takes a second to click on to another slide. There is no more reason a point should be able to be encompassed on a single slide, than that one discrete area should be able to be written up in a one-page letter, or contained to one page in a report or brochure. Often a good way of improving an existing presentation is simply to split long slides into a greater number (while not overdoing the proportion of slides that are checklists).
- Read any significant number of words verbatim the dangers have been mentioned. This, compounded by presenters facing away from the audience as they do it, is one of the worst mistakes made in using PowerPoint; it is a sure cause of 'death'.
- Use a set of slides that are all words the proportion of slides with a visual element may vary (as the intention and topic dictate) but ignoring the need for a visual element always weakens what is done.
- Think that a necessarily wordy slide can be compensated for by adding a piece of clip art - doing this just makes a tedious, overbearing slide into a tedious, overbearing slide with a dull, standardized little picture on it; illustrated rubbish rather than just rubbish. It fails utterly to address the problem or make a wordy slide work better.
- Overuse basic PowerPoint features a host of things are possible. For example words can be faded in, zoomed in, dissolved and much more. None of this sort of embellishment really changes the fundamental message of a particular slide, so adding some sort of tweak to a dull slide will not rescue it.

Use inappropriate humour – cartoons can work well on slides (though be careful of copyright), but if something is offensive or inappropriate in any way it can cause awkwardness. Cleverness is not automatically funny; I saw a car company describing themselves as the 'torque of the town' – a play on words that has no real purpose and just raised a groan. I like Figure 4.1, which surely epitomizes the 'meeting from hell' and can make a strong point with no need of a caption.

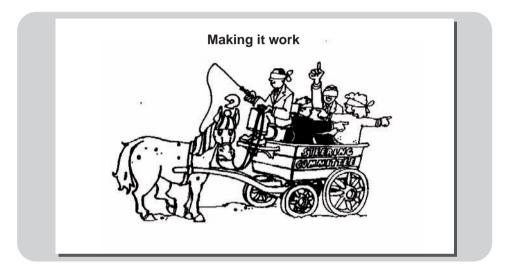


Figure 4.1 The meeting from hell

- If you build up a bank of cartoons, there is no reason you cannot reuse them and many pictures, including Figure 4.1, might lend themselves to several captions, thus extending the number of occasions on which they can be used.
- Leave slides visible on screen after you have moved on this happens when you are past one slide and not yet ready for the next. A finished-with slide distracts (it's better to use the B key and have nothing showing for a while).
- Try to use a slide when it will not do the job slides cannot do everything. If a complex chart or graph has to be studied it is better to pass copies round a group than struggle with something people

Client Net Promoter Score

NPS is positive but low

recommendation is mainly associated to being satisfied with the Client's service, which is a result of improved Male customers and customers with 1 to 2 accounts are the strongest advocates of the Client. The positive customer service and better pricing

Most Important Reason for Recommendation Most Important Reason for Recommendation Loyalty/have been with provider for a long time Happy with service provided/like main bank Staff was not polite/rude/had bad attitude Not responsive/did not help me quickly Negative: Pricing: Rates/Charges/Fees Vegative: Convenience/limited network Rates are high/poor/uncompetitive Negative: Emotional/General/Other Positive: Emotional/General/Other Negative: Staff/Service Interaction Base = 144 Positive: Staff/Service Interaction Charge too many/excessive fees Never had a problem/no hassles Friendly/nice/treated me well Poor/bad customer service Negative: Service Process Positive: Service Process Good bank/provider/card Good programs/services Good customer service Negative: Timing/Delays % Giving % Giving reason 45% 14% 42% 17% 19% 20% 13% 24% 15% %9 %9 %6 8% %8 %/ Subtracting 37% 48% 15% 25% 2007 48% 11% 3% 12% 301 11-point recommendation rating scale: 0 (Would not recommend at all) to 10 Base = (Definitely would recommend) **NET PROMOTER SCORE** Promoters (rating 9-10) Detractors (rating 0-6) Net Promoter Score % rating 9-10 2-8 4-6 2-3 1-0

Reproduced with permission of Robin Birn, the author of The Effective Use of Market Research (Kogan Page). Research is an area of business renowned for long complex slide presentations delivered to report Figure 4.2 Too much complex information does not work as a slide on research findings.

can neither see properly nor understand on screen. For example, do not make the mistake (perhaps to try to save time) of just copying something like a page from a report and hoping it will work on screen. In all likelihood it will not. If nothing will work on screen, you may need to find another way to make a point. Figure 4.2 (on the previous page) simply overpowers with detail and is, in a word, unusable.

Robin Birn's comments on this make an interesting digression: see below.

Robin Birn's presentation experience

A market research presentation is the chance for a researcher to address the business issues agreed for the project and use their experience and knowledge to provide guidance on the implications of the research findings. Given the nature of many research projects and surveys there are plenty of complexities involved. Despite this Robin is clear: 'A good market research presentation needs to deliver to the audience the Ah Ha! experience by being short, clear and interactive.' A presentation in this field is characterized by the need to interpret findings, so what is being presented is twofold: information and the interpretation of that information.

Let Robin continue:

But this is not the only problem. Take a look at a typical slide (Figure 4.2) from a customer satisfaction survey. Imagine sitting in a presentation which has been scheduled to last an hour. It reports on an international survey that has been completed over the last four months and you want to know how satisfied customers are in a particular country this means that you need to listen to the presenter and absorb the information on each slide with only just a minute or so spent on each slide.

And look at this slide - it spells out a conclusion in the main banner spanning the top of the slide, and details information about two survey questions below. So it asks the reader to absorb three things. What convinced me that this format was not appropriate were the comments made by the Global Insight Director of the Global Financial Services organization when presented with a six page slide deck summary of the survey in the 26 countries. He asked questions showing that there was so much information on each page that he simply could not digest and interpret the information as the presentation and discussion progressed. Key points were failing to register.

Example of a good chart

A good chart must be legible and clear. This is simple to plan and execute provided the potential problem is recognized and the matter is given some thought.

Look at the chart below (Figure 4.3) – it combines words and graphics effectively, it communicates the key information simply and it can be seen by the person sitting at the other end of a table from the projector or at the back if sitting in a theatre presentation room.

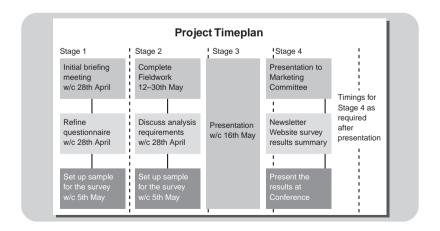


Figure 4.3 An example of a good chart

Robin summarizes:

Market research presentations need to be effective in communicating many facts in a short time. They should:

- optimize visual simplicity;
- structure data so the main message can be read at a glance;
- incorporate graphical information;
- use large typefaces select a minimum for the typical meeting room in which you operate;
- take into account that lower case letters are easier to read than block capitals;
- use colour and pattern effects to help to differentiate elements in a graph.

Robin is someone who is not only a good presenter, but must make presentations on topics that involve the far end of complexity in the range of what typically goes on in organizations. His views reflect experience both of trying to do this clearly, and – more important – of audience reaction. This is good advice regardless of the area in which you work. Figure 4.3 is a good example too, and all this reinforces the 'do nots' – especially about complexity and legibility. Every slide must present a clear message.

Use colours that are difficult to see alongside each other – the place this happens the most is with graphs. If when you say 'look at the red line', the groups cannot tell it from say a brown one, it is

not only difficult to make the planned point, it looks very unprofessional too. An additional hazard can be the unthinking use of corporate colours of some sort that simply do not suit slides and fail to work or assist legibility.

- Neglect to give some direction where necessary. If you need to say, 'Look at the red line on the graph here and particularly at how it rises at the year end,' then do so. While people are searching for something that apparently they should be looking at, they are not concentrating on listening.
- Overuse a pointer while some direction is necessary (see the previous point) pointers are most often used because there is far too much information on the screen and in a vain hope of making sense of it. Better to simplify the slide. Besides, pointers tend to look pretentious (at least I cannot find a satisfactory way of using one), and laser pointers tend to be so small as to be difficult to see or disturb the eyes of the audience.
- Neglect to pause where necessary allow people time where required to read or simply take something in; you don't need to talk non-stop all the time.
- Skim over slides without making them properly visible sometimes this happens because a presenter is doing a short version of an originally longer talk and slides are skipped. Whatever the reason, audiences hate it. It looks like evidence of poor preparation (and such a feeling might cast doubt on other matters) and they wonder what they are missing and why. If you overrun your time and decide to skip a couple of slides, tell people what you are doing and why (offering details later perhaps); or better still, make the skipping invisible to the audience.

Never forget: you can skip slides just by typing in the number you want to move to and pressing Return.

Note: it is worth knowing – and using – other similar features. Pressing Home brings up the first slide, pressing End brings up the last. If you press F1 when in a slide show, you will get a list of the commands you can use to fine-tune the way it runs.

- Spend hours creating some sort of graphic magic that adds nothing. Just because something is technically possible (and PowerPoint software has depths of possibility of which most people are utterly unaware see page 99) does not mean it is worth including. Horses for courses: for most purposes a straightforward approach is all that is needed and is what is cost-effective provided it is well judged and accommodates the principles reviewed here. You do not want to become unproductive or to have what should be a powerful message submerged by bells and whistles.
- Lose clarity by using words that are so different from those on the screen that people lose track and wonder where you are up to. For example, if the word on the screen is 'objectives', don't start talking about 'goals' (or if you do and mean to, explain what is going on).
- Ignore the realities of attention span people's attention builds gradually, is maintained at a peak for a while, then the natural tendency is for it to decline. The duration of this is rarely more than 20 to 30 minutes. The variety and pace of a presentation (and also breaks and complete changes of activity, such as moving from presentation to discussion) can extend or restart this. After a real change you may hold attention for another 20 minutes. Slides must contribute to the overall variety.

Also, with the nature of the equipment in mind... DO NOT:

Fail to check the equipment. I regularly see presenters floundering because of some technical glitch. For example, in a meeting room a projector and its connecting lead might be incompatible with a laptop brought in from outside. Check, check and check again. In the days of overhead projectors (OHPs), the worst that could happen was that the bulb went, and usually this could be easily

changed. Most machines had two and they could be changed at the touch of a switch; still can be, for that matter. Now what is used to show slides is very much more complicated and inevitably very much more vulnerable. Some presentations are sufficiently important to make some sort of back-up a good idea. For example, consider printing copies of transparencies that can be shown on an OHP in the event of disaster striking if this would be a sensible insurance (or have a paper handout copy ready).

The concept of contingency is worth a thought. What do you do if disaster does strike? You have been warned. Even small things matter. I saw a presentation recently where some benighted gremlin was causing a delay in the system. The click to bring up the next slide did nothing for about four seconds. This was judged no great problem, certainly not one worth delaying the start for, yet after 30 minutes of this it was so, so annoying (and acted as a real distraction).

- Fail to check the controls things can be set up in different ways. What key you need to press to advance or go back needs to lodged firmly in your mind. A remote control is good, allowing you to move around, but hang onto it and if you need to put it down to free your hands for something else – remember where you put it (a regular parking place helps here).
- Obscure the view by standing in the audience's line of sight. Check beforehand where to stand (or not stand: you may want to move about).
- Ask if people can see you should know they can. Your preparation, rehearsal or checking should confirm this. Besides, it is a little like the story of a boring presenter saying, 'Can you hear me at the back?' In the back row someone shouts back, 'Yes, but I'm prepared to change places with someone who can't!'

Everything listed in this chapter (and a few more points to be raised in the next chapter) is so much common sense. But all these faults occur all too regularly. Some, like being aware of the positioning of everything and keeping out of the audience's line of sight, take both thought and practice. Others are easy enough to avoid with a

70 The PowerPoint Detox

moment's thought. They mount up too: one may annoy, a whole raft of them can have an audience set to walk out or throw things. Most bad practice occurs unthinkingly and stems from an automatic pilot approach. Conscious effort to build up the right habits pays dividends.

Now, with the major potential errors in mind, let's move to some positive points.

5

Best practice

Now, some positive things – so, where shall we start? Well, let's follow the fact that many presentations start like this – with a title slide.

Death by PowerPoint?

- A short seminar about how to use slides to enhance your presentation
- Conducted by Patrick Forsyth, Touchstone Training & Consultancy, on 22 July

Figure 5.1 A title slide

Title slides

What exactly is something like Figure 5.1 for? Most people would readily agree that the first few things that are said in a presentation are disproportionately important – 'first impressions last' as the saying has it. Get off to a good start and the audience like it, and what you need to do next then becomes easier. The 'its-just-like-all-theintroduction-slides-vou've-seen-before' slide is surely not going to be found interesting, much less striking or memorable, and reading your name as you introduce yourself risks people wondering what the matter is with you.

One rationale of this is that people need to know your contact details, but this is surely best at the end - a slide you can leave up so that people can note your telephone number or email address afterwards. Maybe it is better positioned at the end of a handout and not in slide form at all, maybe you can pass business cards around to those who want one – and maybe you can get off to a better start without following this convention (although at a later stage a handout might well benefit from a title page).

The picture of the three men (shown and described on Figure 1.6) is an example. Maybe a lighter touch is appropriate, like the sign used in Figure 5.2 (superimposed on the image of a door) on a slide starting a talk about assertiveness.

Never forget: every presentation that uses slides has one that goes first, and creating the right one deserves some thought.

What next? Given that you have a good, well-prepared presentation to make, the rest of the slides follow. You need a mix, each chosen as the best way to make a point, yet giving some movement, variety and visualization. As achieving this starts with preparing the overall presentation, bear in mind the details of this already discussed. During

ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING CENTRE Don't knock - just barge in

Figure 5.2 A title slide with a lighter touch

preparation you need to link what you want to put over in the form of slides with the kinds of slides that you will use. These, and some of the devices used in them, include the following.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF SLIDES

Ice-breaker slides

This phrase, much used in training, refers to slides that appear early on (before or after a title slide) and that are to some degree separate from the content. They are designed to:

- impart information;
- influence the mood or thinking of the audience;
- pass the time (before the formal proceedings start).

Information might include details of the timetable, or a note suggesting members of the group get themselves a cup of tea or coffee before the start. A slide designed to influence mood or thinking might pose a question (for example, 'What's your greatest fear about presenting?' – asked ahead of a talk about how to present containing a discussion about just that). It might inject a light note (with a cartoon, say) or prompt participation. A slide might be shown saying, 'Introduce yourself to your immediate neighbours in the group.'

A slide designed to pass the time, shown as people assemble perhaps, might pose a problem for group members to work on individually or with a neighbour. For example, Figure 5.3 is one I sometimes use ahead of training sessions about business writing. It can be made to make the point that you write better if you are aware of language.

Just to show that rules are made to be broken, this example has a good many words on it, but it is actually designed for the group to read to themselves and take time over. If you are interested, the answer is shown on page 130; you may want to take a moment to think about it before you look it up.

An exercise

◆ As you scan this short paragraph, try to spot what is unusual about it. Half an hour is normal for many to find a solution that is both logical and satisfactory to its originator. I do not say that anything is "wrong" about it, simply that it is unusual. You may want to study its grammatical construction to find a solution, but that is not a basis of its abnormality, nor is its lack of any information, logical points or conclusion. If you work in communications you may find that an aid to solving this particular conundrum. It is not about anagrams, synonyms, antonyms or acrostics, but it is unusual. So, why is that?

Figure 5.3 An ice-breaker slide

Checklist slides

Presentational structure

- The beginning
- The middle
- The end

Figure 5.4 A checklist slide

The simple checklist slide, illustrated by Figure 5.4, is useful as a kind of serial agenda. It makes clear to people what the presentation or a part of it will cover. Sometimes it makes sense to show this sort of thing complete, even to show it a number of times as you move through the agenda, as this when the audience can benefit from understanding the total shape of what is coming and where a particular current topic fits in. On other occasions you are better adding additional points as you go.

Although checklist slides are close to the kind of slide best got rid of (or minimized as a proportion of the total set of slides), they certainly have a role, and realistically in terms of the time, effort and cost of creating slides must play their part as they are the simplest and quickest to originate. For most purposes not every slide can be fully illustrated.

Note: another way of improving retention with what are essentially lists is to make the list into a shape: see Figure 5.5. In this case, people remember the triangle first, that there were three points and then they are more likely to remember what the points themselves were. Similarly this works with a square design (four points), a star (five points) and so on. Other symbols might be used in a similar way, for instance a ladder to present points in sequence, jigsaw pieces linking two elements together. Again elements of such slides can be built up as pieces are added progressively.

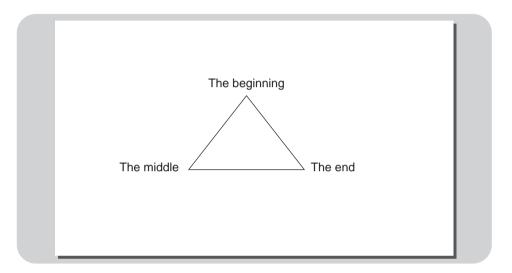


Figure 5.5 A shaped checklist slide

Such slides may be simple, but they can still have some element of illustration as part of what puts over their message, as with Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 is from a marketing training course and used to explain the nature of markets. It shows that they either simply consist of a group of people with a common interest, of more specific groups (products sold to the medical world, illustrated briefly by the initials NHS), or of narrow groups (doctors, or narrower still, heart surgeons, illustrated by the stethoscope). It also shows how some products (beds in the example) are sold to various markets all of which are different in nature and in their requirements. It presents an example, that of the differing requirements of those buying beds for hospitals, homes or prisons, and illustrates that markets have a geographic basis too. Such a slide can be shown complete or highlight different elements in turn as each is segued in one by one. A progressive approach could be one

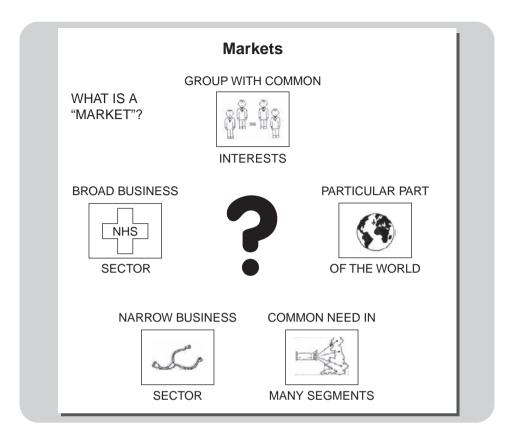


Figure 5.6 An illustrated checklist slide

example at a time, illustrations first, then a description; a variety of different sequences are possible.

Diagrammatic slides

A variety of things are useful here, but all must be kept sufficiently simple to be clear. The example shown in Figure 5.7 is also from a marketing course. It illustrates the sequential nature of the cycle of activity that constitutes the marketing process; the shading on the right hand side of the slide (colour on the real slide) highlights the internal factors such as pricing, the others being activities linking the organization with the external market.

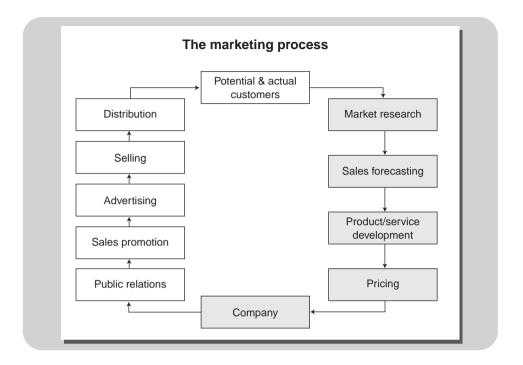


Figure 5.7 A diagrammatic slide

Similarly, Figure 5.8 shows the marketing (promotional) mix using a target device to create a striking image. This fits the message too, illustrating the fact that different methods of promotional activity operate more or less directly with potential customers (the details do not matter here, but selling is a direct, one-to-one interface whereas advertising is more of a shotgun method often directed at broad groups from a distance).

Colours are important to Figure 5.8 (although they cannot be shown here) and must be picked to differentiate clearly between segments of the target. Another slide in this vein is Figure 5.9, which illustrates the role of a sales manager (here the shaded boxes represent the short term activity, the open boxes the long term – another example where colour must be imagined).

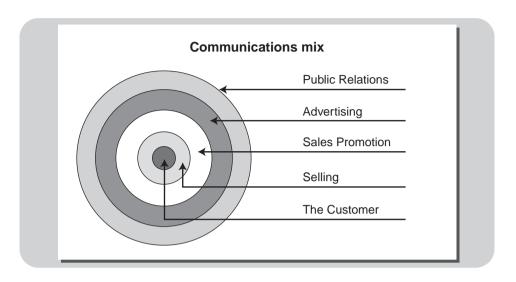


Figure 5.8 Another diagrammatic slide

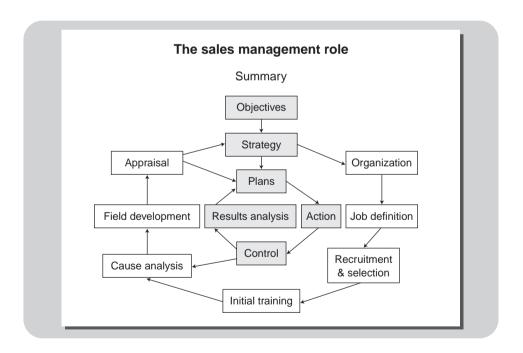


Figure 5.9 A diagrammatic slide using colour

Such slides demonstrate the principle of 'a picture being worth a thousand words' very clearly. One classic device (in fact originally devised by Florence Nightingale) is the pie chart (used three times in Chapter 1), which makes a point in an instant that might take many sentences involving figures and still risk being confusing. Bar charts are another example of something usefully visualized.

Note: Rather than plundering reports and brochures and reusing what may appear there, it is much better to make a new slide simplifying the information and drawing out and featuring only the point you want to make.

Never forget: do not use existing charts, turn them into slides and then refer to only one part of them as you speak.

A number of simple devices are useful here. Figure 5.10 shows a simple bar chart, an excellent way to make comparisons (one that colour enlivens).

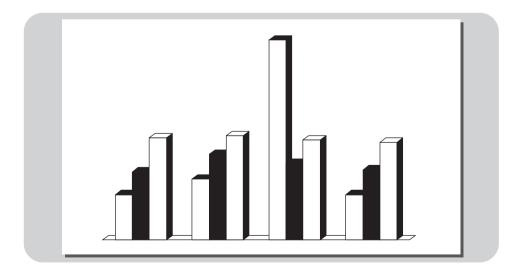


Figure 5.10 A simple bar chart

With diagrams the greatest danger is confusing by presenting too much information, or too much at once or on one slide (look again at Figure 4.2 on page 63). Such charts almost always need originating specially for a slide in order to keep them simple and prevent people either missing the message because it is buried in a mass of information, much of which is either irrelevant or not referred to for some reason, or resenting the fact that they appear to be missing something. 'Wait a minute, what was all that?' If a lot of information is essential, it may be necessary to spread it across a number of slides or handle matters another way, perhaps with a handout that can be studied in detail.

Graph slides

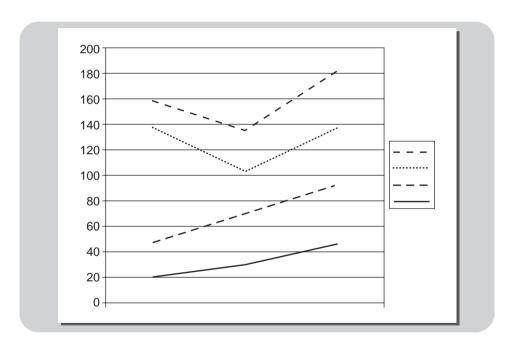


Figure 5.11 A graph slide

Figure 5.11 is just a simple representation of a slide. Again it is necessary to avoid too great a level of complexity and keep things simple. You might:

- use more than one slide to make a point;
- add different lines progressively as your explanation unfolds;
- watch for the numbers that identify what is going on: they must be legible;
- be careful of colour clashes reducing legibility.

Dealing with greater complexity

Assuming you are clear about every section of your message and have things organized in bite-sized pieces, then you have to decide just how to best put a point across. Charts can express a fair bit of detail in a semi-visual way, especially if they are well designed and used.

As an example of such a chart, here is one that explains a particular principle and describes a quite complicated situation. Appropriately in a book, it is illustrative of the way in which books are sold. It is what is called a market map for the publishing industry: that is, a flow chart showing the various distributive channels involved in the marketing process. The following shows how this might be used.

The first version of the slide (Figure 5.12) is designed to be shown alongside an explanation making the overall point – books must be got to market, but how exactly? The complexity involved in the process could then be indicated just by adding a couple of additional arrows between publishers and customers.

Then one element can be added on, perhaps starting with what most people would think of first – retailers – Figure 5.13. Then the various other channels could be added progressively to complete the picture – Figure 5.14.

The fourth version – Figure 5.15 – repeats the third, the full picture, with one channel highlighted (no doubt in colour in reality) so that discussion can be focused on that in context of the full picture. Numbers could be added (in another colour) to show the percentage of sales that goes along each route, and the whole picture can be expanded (see box).

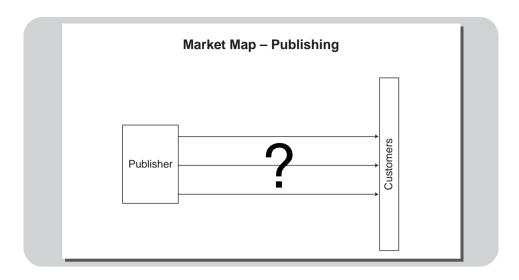
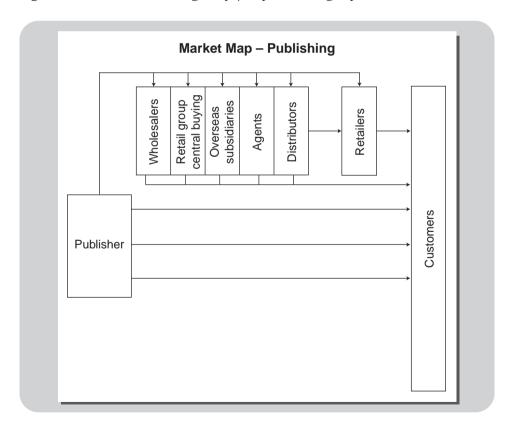


Figure 5.12 A marketing map for publishing - phase 1



A marketing map for publishing – phase 2 Figure 5.13

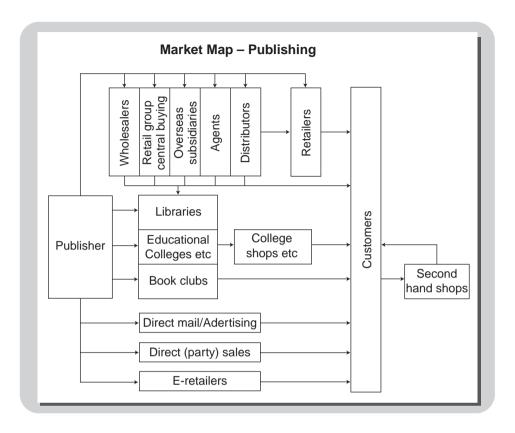


Figure 5.14 A marketing map for publishing – phase 3

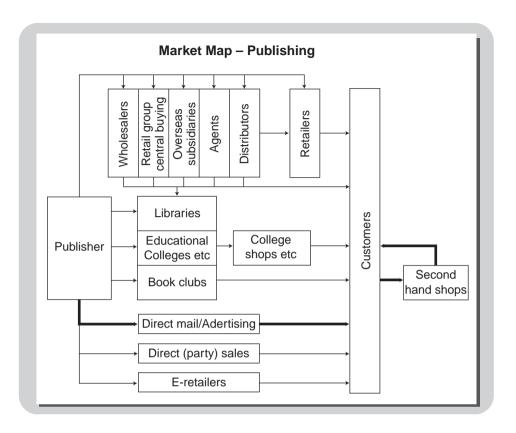


Figure 5.15 A marketing map for publishing – phase 4

Market map

A detailed example must be about something, and while the concept here is ultimately straightforward, a market map is not just a device to explain the complexity of the various chains of distribution that exist in every industry (and which are more complex in some than others). It is designed to remind marketing people that distribution is a marketing variable: that is, an organization can decide which channels to work through, which to major on and perhaps which to leave on the sidelines or ignore. Such decisions must be predicated on the basis of fact, so an analysis of what proportion of business is flowing through the different channels is necessary – hence adding in sales

figures. Many of the ways in which products and services are made available result from this sort of analysis, and the market map provides a very useful device in planning and implementing marketing strategies.

Although this slide can be used by gradually exposing its total content, it in fact ultimately presents one overview as well as facilitating detailed analysis. It is a good example of how much information can be put over through something illustrative. Note: the process of moving through such a slide adding elements as you go is described by the verb 'segue'. Additional slides could be used with this and designed to enhance the visual image involved. For instance, as retailers are talked about a picture could be shown of a bookshop. Figure 5.16, kindly provided by Waterstones, shows their flagship Piccadilly store (once famous as the Simpson building). As e-retailers are mentioned, a page from the Amazon website could be shown.



Figure 5.16 Photographs could enhance the marketing map presentation
Reproduced with the permission of Waterstones



Figure 5.17 A webpage could also illustrate the presentation

In the last example (Figure 5.17), also designed to add a visual element to the explanation of the market map, perhaps a page could be selected that has some relevance rather than at random; obviously here I picked the one shown! Thank you to Kogan Page for permission to reproduce this one.

Pictures, photos and cartoons

Illustrations come in various forms and may serve different purposes. The first is simply to add an actual image to a description. For example, I have recently had a second travel book published: a light-hearted account of a journey in Burma.

It is important to me to promote this (which is why I am choosing it as an example here!), and as Burma has a certain topicality I have been arranging talks about the trip and the book. I can wave the book at the audience, and I hope some will come and look at it (buy it?) after the talk, but a slide simply showing the book's cover adds to the impression people have of it and their likelihood of purchasing a copy. Such a slide (shown here – Figure 5.18) could also be left showing

during a questions and answers session; details of purchase options could be added too.

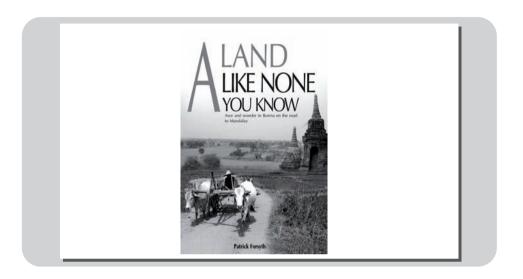


Figure 5.18 A book cover provides some (self-)promotion

Obviously pictures used may vary from a product shot to an example of an advertisement and much more (like the shop in Figure 5.16). Digital cameras make some such slides easy to create, downloading a photo you have taken onto your computer and then into your slide package. In addition, there are various photo libraries you can use such as iStockphoto (see the box).

A source of pictures

Various sources of pictures exist. A convenient one that you can access from your desk is iStockphoto (www.stockphoto.com) which is very easy to use. It has an excellent search facility. You input what you want, specify in what form (it offers audio and video material too) and up pops a selection of photos in thumbnail form. Clicking on a photo shows it in a larger size and you can also check what it costs to download. All the pictures

are put in by users, they are royalty free, download cost varies, but you buy credits from the site and everything is priced in that way. So, you might order three pictures and pay 1, 6 and 5 credits each for them. Turning this into money it makes it a very economic resource. Check it out if you think your presentations could do with some more illustrations. Figure 5.24 on page 98 is taken from this site. It cost a few pence over £8.00 and left sufficient payment to buy something else too.

Note: One caveat: beware of taking photos from anywhere that might infringe copyright. Doing so could cost you a lot of money.

A presentation cannot always be content, content, content. There have to be asides (peripherals), albeit of points made which are designed to link and strengthen the overall message or a part of it. For instance, a story or anecdote may be told. I like the classic tale described below.

A medieval king is crossing the forest with his entourage on a hunting trip. On a series of trees they see a painted target, and in the exact centre of each there is an arrow. 'What incredible accuracy,' says the king. 'We must find the archer.'

Further on they catch up with a small boy carrying a bow and arrow. He is frightened at being stopped by the king's party, but admits that he fired the arrows. 'You did shoot the arrows, didn't you?' queried the king. 'You didn't just stick them into the targets by hand?' The boy replies, 'Your majesty, I swear I shot all the arrows from a hundred paces.' 'Incredible,' said the king. 'You must accept a job at the palace. I must have an archer of such brilliance near me. But tell me, you are so young, how do you achieve such accuracy?'

The boy looked sheepish. 'Well,' he said, 'first I step out a hundred paces, then I fire the arrow into the tree... and then I walk back and paint the target on the tree.'

It's a story that can be linked to various business topics, such as objective setting. A simple illustration can go neatly with it: see Figure 5.19.



Figure 5.19 A simple illustration to a story used

This sort of thing is not difficult to achieve; maybe you even have someone in your organization that can draw to a suitable standard – and enjoys so doing. (This one is reproduced with permission from Management Pocketbooks, whose unique-format publications are excellent – I have written several.)

Cartoons were referred to earlier, and Figure 5.20 is a good example. It needs a caption and is designed to take the following: 'It was an average year. That means not as good as last year – but better than next.'

A quick search on the internet will show you a host of freelance cartoonists, and with their websites showing samples of their work, it is easy to find someone whose style you like. The cartoon at Figure 5.20 was drawn by Roger Penwill (go to him via www.penwill.com) and it proved a quick and easy matter to pass over a brief and get back something suitable; highly recommended.

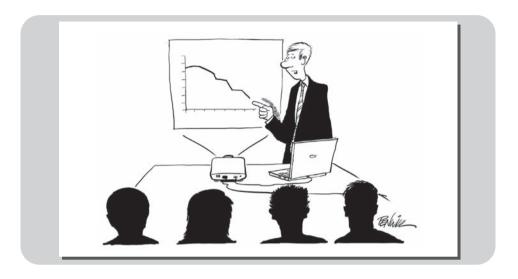


Figure 5.20 A cartoon slide Source: Roger Penwill (www.penwill.com)

You can even have a 'cartoon' with no picture, making it easier to create. Watch out for signs, quotations or quips that might work on their own, save them and use them as and when appropriate. I was reminded of one recently that could be useful, one of many spoof signs that appear in offices.

IN CASE OF FIRE: grab the files and run towards the flames

Another 'picture' example uses a simple symbol – well actually two Chinese characters: see Figure 5.21.

This is a good example of an initially meaningless slide. If it is shown first with the characters only (as in Figure 5.21) it can only prompt a 'what's this?' response (well, unless you are Chinese, of course). Then, with words being added in (Figure 5.22), it can be explained.



Figure 5.21 A 'symbol' slide using Chinese characters



Figure 5.22 The 'symbol' slide explained

This is the word 'crisis' written in Chinese. Interestingly, it is made up of two characters: the first means chaos, the second means opportunity. Again this is a useful device to make a point; and not a bad way of thinking about, or responding to, a crisis.

There are many different options here, and the trick is partly simply to ring the changes, while being sure that any chosen option suits the point you are trying to make. Consider the following:

- pictures;
- maps;
- drawings;
- cartoons;
- caricatures;
- silhouettes;
- symbols (£, \$, ! and more);
- quotations (famous or otherwise).

See too if you can think of others or combine some of these into useful combinations.

'Flipchart' slides

Having worked in training for quite a while I have seen some changes. Back in the olden days, state of the art involved flipcharts and overhead projectors (OHPs). They are, especially OHPs, in much less use now, but they had their advantages, not least the ability they gave the presenter to doodle as they went along. An acetate roll running across the surface on which slides are placed makes this easy, and if the slide is tucked under the acetate then emphasis can be added as simply as drawing a red ring round something. Even those with no artistic ability at all could create a visual image more likely to stick in the mind than words alone.

There is no reason why (not least to save time and money) you can't do the same today, importing your sketchy images into PowerPoint to

make a simple slide. Figure 5.23 is an example. It just makes a point; in this case describing the way in which communication between two people (or a presenter and their audience) has to be made to be received as it is sent, despite the 'fog' of potential difficulty the receiver's nature and situation puts in the way. Perhaps the faces here are better than most of us could hope to draw, but much simpler ones could be used; you could even just put A and B on either side.



Figure 5.23 A flipchart-style slide

If you think you cannot do something like this, check out the possibilities in an excellent book: *The Back of a Napkin*, by Dan Roam (Portfolio). It will convince you that you can do this sort of thing, and that it is useful to do so – it helps solve problems and sell ideas. Taking the concept towards PowerPoint is a useful application. Note: there are many websites that can be helpful in creating slides and enhancing their visual element. One such is www.graphita.com which allows you to enhance pictures with signs, symbols, speech bubbles and more. It 'doodles' well too. Log on, sign in and give it a try.

Now let's turn to a slightly different consideration, one that many presentations have as one of their intentions.

Being persuasive

Presentations have all sorts of intention, but many in business are persuasive or need to have a persuasive edge. This might be directed at customers or from a manager to the board; the precise application need not concern us here. Nor is there need to go into detail of the techniques of persuasion (or sales) – I have written separately on this in The Gentle Art of Getting Your Own Way (Foulsham Publishing) – but three key points affecting slides are worth mentioning.

Identification with customer

Customers dislike a 'standard spiel'. They rightly view themselves as individuals and want to be treated as such. Not all businesses sell something bespoke, where the description of it needs to be tailored to the individual customer, as with a whole range of products from accountancy to certain kinds of travel. Nevertheless, anyone trying to put over a case - for a product or idea - does well to personalize it. This can easily be done graphically on slides used to present formally to a customer. You might use the customer's logo on slides and/or use pictures of their office, plant, product or people.

The point is not to inform them, they will know what their product looks like of course, but to demonstrate that your approach and ideas are focused on them. This is a small, but perhaps significant, touch that can also add to the visual element of a presentation.

The weight of argument

A frequent criticism of presentations is that they are too long or use too many slides – or both. In this case, one point deserves emphasis:

Never forget: always ask for an indication of the length of presentation required or expected when presenting to a customer (or anyone else).

Fair enough, you may make strenuous attempts to keep the number of slides manageable, but if there is one thing more likely than anything else to make you keep adding another slide and another slide, it is trying to make a persuasive case. Doing so can easily become an 'and-another-thing'-type presentation as you try to add any and every tiny point that may weigh in the balance and prompt a positive decision.

Here some interesting research points the way. If you want to persuade, do not over-egg the pudding. For sure, too few selling points can have insufficient weight and may well end up failing to convince. But too many can be wrong too. It can easily make a presentation become tedious (and overlong), and can even smack of desperation. It creates a danger that the case is weakened.

The greatest chance of selling successfully is with five points. Actually I must not be quite so didactic about this. The best chance seems to be when something between four and seven points – fundamental reasons to buy or agree – are made. That is not to say that anything else makes success impossible, and of course you may want to spend time describing each one and providing evidence about it, but this seems to be the optimal approach. That may mean five points and five slides, or five points and three slides about each of them. It might also sensibly mean a summary slide that gives the core rationale for saying 'yes' in one chart. But it surely does not mean dozens of slides wandered through in an 'and-another-thing' style to the point where the audience glazes over or goes into a coma.

If the number of points and thus slides is limited, then those slides that make the key points had better be good ones.

Description of benefits

People don't buy products or agree to ideas. Rather they are convinced by the benefits of agreeing to a proposition. Without going into detail about the techniques of persuasion let's acknowledge that benefits are defined as things a product means to or will do for people. Features are simply factual statements about it. Certain classic sayings may be old but they catch the essence here pretty well. It is said you

should 'sell the sizzle not the sausages', or as was famously said by the CEO of a cosmetics company, 'in the factory we make chemicals, in the market we sell hope'. How unkind that last one is, but it makes good sense. All persuasion involves powers of description, and that must be done from the customer's perspective.

Consider an example: the television series Star Trek is now a legend across the globe. The original series may have started slowly, but it gained cult status, spawned several spin-off series across many years and led to a series of successful films. Financially it is one of the most successful such franchises ever made. Yet it may be difficult now to remember how different it was at its inception from other series broadcast at the time. The originator, Gene Roddenberry, had to find a way of pitching his programme idea to the networks. He thought he had a truly novel idea, yet knew that those he sought to persuade were conservative and that many new programmes were accepted primarily because they were actually rather like something already existing – the classic known quantity.

One of the most successful series on air at the time (early 1960s) was the Western series Wagon Train. But the circumstances of the characters, a tight-knit group, moving on to pastures new, and with each episode involving what happens to them in the new location and with the people they met there, were essentially similar to his idea for a space odyssey. He sold Star Trek by describing it as Wagon Train in space. At the time this was a well-chosen analogy. People understood and, despite the risk of something so new and different, he got agreement to make the programme. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Linking a message to a photograph

Whatever sort of description is involved (in the case of Star Trek a comparison with something well known, Wagon Train) it had better be good. Consider another more down-to-earth example: a company which sells cooking equipment to hotels, restaurants and cafés. One product is a range of flat grills. The company offer different sizes, but one such might be better described as being able to cook a dozen eggs at one time rather than saying it has a surface area of 300 square

centimetres. Saying something about how the grill will cook not only allows a benefit to be described (the measurements are features), it is also a much more descriptive way of putting it to any restaurateur – they can surely see in their mind's eye how much better the grill will be than the smaller model they have now, and can contemplate coping with the rush at breakfast (something to ask about and mention) more easily. It puts things in the customer's terms.

It is also easier to visualize: see Figure 5.24, which shows bacon and eggs on a grill (again the original is in full colour).



Figure 5.24 Bacon and eggs says it all

There are various ways of doing this. For instance, maybe two picture slides could be involved: one showing a queue, the other breakfast food grilling. This is surely much more powerful than a picture of a grill (seen one, seen them all).

Perhaps some words can then be added as a second stage to summarize or highlight what is said, but the picture leads the message. Remember that the sequence here involves thinking about:

the customer and what product might suit them;

- the product;
- consideration and decision about how to describe the product –
 then slide(s) and illustration(s) (photo, line drawing or whatever);
- the summary words used with the picture.

Sophistication unlimited

PowerPoint can do extraordinary things. Buried in that seemingly simple piece of software is a resource that can produce visuals that are unbelievably striking: full of colour, movement and images, and which truly deserve the term 'visual aid'. There are bells and whistles here in abundance, including the ability to add movie footage and sound – dialogue, music, sound effects and more. The full potential of this is somewhat beyond our brief here, but if you are interested check out the book Killer Presentations, which I wrote with Nick Oulton (published by How-to-Books). His organization, m62 Visual Communications, is a leader in this field, so much so that it has been described by the vice president of IT giant Symantic as follows: 'these guys know more about PowerPoint than anybody else on the face of the planet'. Its focus is on marketing presentations, and the sales pitches involved in big ticket selling, but the description and illustrations of what can be done simply amazes many people. Four slides, each shown as a conventional text slide and as a more visual one (Figures 5.25 to 5.28) are shown here for interest. Remember that all of these can be built up part by part rather than shown complete.

The book also provides links to Nick's website so that readers can see a moving presentation as they read about it. For anyone wanting more examples this is well worth a look (www.m62.net), and is recommended to readers as it will help you visualize the effects of colour and movement just hinted at here. I have seen Nick present a number of times and am still surprised by what is possible when I see his slides. Realistically, except for certain applications, the time (and cost) of preparing such sophisticated slides is beyond most people; hence the ideas in this book.

Who are we?

- m62 visualcommunications offer clients service across the three major time zones from offices in;
 - ♦ New York
 - ◆ Liverpool
 - ◆ Singapore
- m62 visualcommunications also service clients on a local level with agents, located in;
 - Denver
 - Spain
 - Paris
 - Benelux
 - Sweden
 - South Africa

Figure 5.25 Marketing presentations: a textual slide...

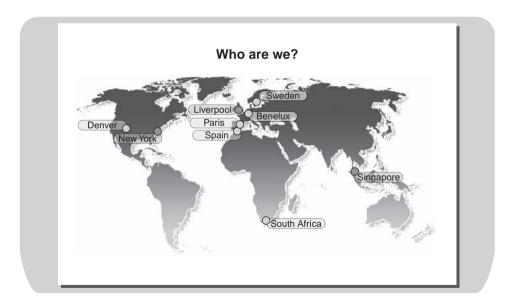


Figure 5.26 ... and a visual one

What do we do?

- m62 visualcommunications cocoon a presenter with a suite of services to offer a complete solution for all presentation needs
- Messaging using mnemonic techniques to effectively structure a presentation
- ♦ Visualization using diagrams to convey messages
- Presentation design ensuring that presentations look professional and impressive
- Multi-media increasing effectiveness with emotive multi-media to maximize attention
- Presenter support coaching services enabling presenters to give a smooth and confident delivery of their material
- ◆ Content management system to maximize efficiency when trying to compile a presentation from existing content

Figure 5.27 Marketing presentations 2: a textual slide...

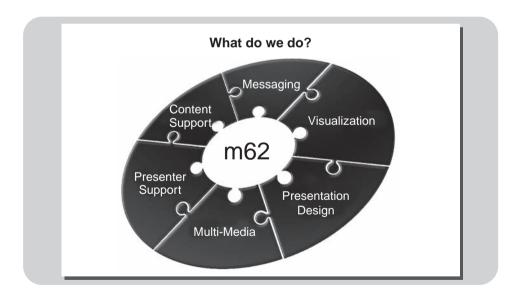


Figure 5.28 ... and a visual one

A final idea

As a last point (well, before the Afterword and the Appendix that is!), always store your slide presentations safely. They can save you time in preparing new ones.

Safely means labelled in a systematic and clear way. I must confess I have computer files marked only with a presentation date or using a phrase like 'Onwards & Upwards presentation: Singapore' without even a date. As I talk regularly on the subject involved - career management – this is not, I admit, very clever. You should probably keep a paper copy (maybe linked to notes about what you said and how you said it, duration and any other useful details), and certainly you should have a backup file to your computer copy – on something like a separate hard disc drive – and kept offsite. Fire will destroy any number of backups if they are all in the same desk.

Never forget: although a past presentation may be a good starting point in preparing another one and working that way saves time, it is not a panacea.

You always need to make sufficient changes to create something absolutely right for each presentation, or it shows. You end up going away from the brief, and both you and the audience can suffer. Sometimes it is better to start with a clean sheet of paper and leave what you have done in the past on one side.

Now, having reviewed the main possibilities for 'non-death slides', and so that you can combine approaches to using slides with the basic personal techniques of preparing and delivering presentations, the Appendix summarizes those skills. Meantime, there is a good deal here that will allow you to create something radically different - and more interesting and explanatory – from what has sadly become the 'death by PowerPoint' norm.

If you want just one rule to note, one that will inevitably lead you in a better direction it must be:

Never forget: do not create verbose slides and read lengthy text verbatim off them, and particularly do not do so facing the screen.

Having this principle in mind as you start to prepare your next presentation will make you view the content (what you will say) and the slides (what you will show to support and enhance your message) separately. That in turn will make both elements stronger and the totality of the presentation you make more likely to be found interesting and to achieve its purpose.

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Afterword

The golden rule for all presenters is to imagine that you are in the audience.

— David Martin

When PowerPoint arrived it changed the face of presentations and quickly became the norm. Make a presentation. Get out the PowerPoint. In many ways this has helped presenters and audiences alike.

But... there is always a but. For some reason – lack of knowledge or experience coupled with the worry many people have of making a formal presentation – habits, and in many cases bad habits, together with sheer laziness, have become a ubiquitous part of its use. The world is full of people firing off bullet points and reading overlong sentences, muttering into their shoulder as they turn backwards to look at the screen. Too much of this sort of presentation is based on imitation. Inside organizations, and externally too, people see presentations being done and copy how they are made. This is a good way of picking up good practice too, of course, but it is the bad habits that seem to be passed on most easily.

Never forget: do not fall foul of a case of the bland leading the bland.

Precisely because so many presentations are poor – why else would the phrase 'death by PowerPoint' have entered the language so firmly? – there is an opportunity here. This book does not suggest throwing the baby out with the bath water, it does not suggest approaches that will cost the earth and take forever in preparation. Small but significant changes can turn many lacklustre presentations into something better and perhaps something special.

There are things here to avoid, in some cases very much to avoid, and a host of ways of strengthening what you do to make your visual aids clearer, more able to strengthen and enhance what you say and make your whole presentation more likely to achieve its objectives.

What next? Well, if you feel there are changes you can make, begin to make them. Experiment, try things in different ways and, above all, switch off that automatic pilot and really think about the slides you create. Do not be put off. Arnold Bennett said, 'Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts.' Perhaps this fits here. The next presentation you prepare may take a bit longer than usual but you may be surprised by how much you can improve what you are doing, and how quickly this can be done.

Is change worthwhile? Without a doubt it is. The ability to make a good presentation is vital to so many people (it is reckoned there are more than 450 million users of PowerPoint worldwide – that's right!). For many of them it's vital to their jobs and to their careers too. If this is true of you, then detoxing your current ways and trying something else could be the best thing you ever do regarding your presentations. Ask those you speak to. Check how well you are achieving your intentions. Powerful presentations don't just happen, but if you make sure they do the dividends can be huge.

One more thing: thank you for buying this book (if you did), for taking the time to read it and... no, that is not a good conclusion, and nor are slides that say:

'Thank you'

Slides that say 'thank you' amidst a mass of verbiage are particularly to be avoided; especially if they are designed to be read out (as Figure 6.1).

And now

One last slide: as we come to the end of the main text, over the page you will find an Appendix, I'm not sure... did I say?... this last section is designed for those readers who may want a little guidance on the more personal skills of preparing and making a presentation. It summarizes the process and... but I did make this clear at the beginning so... perhaps you began with this first. Never mind... Thank you.

Figure 6.1 How not to say goodbye

In many circumstances it is fine, often necessary and polite to say 'thank you'. But not as the last thing you say. Presentations should finish on a high note, the nature of this depending on the nature of the occasion. So, starting the last few minutes of a presentation with thanks - 'Thank you for the invitation and for your time. Perhaps I could just take a couple more minutes and make a final point...' does make sense. Then, with courtesies catered for, you can speak on and conclude with a call to action or whatever is suitable. That said, and with my 'thank you' intentionally placed at the end to make a point, I need another way of finishing.

108 The PowerPoint Detox

George Bernard Shaw said, 'I am the most spontaneous speaker in the world because every word, every gesture and every retort has been carefully rehearsed.' I bet if PowerPoint had been around in his day he would have given careful thought to every slide too. So should we all.

Appendix Presenting successfully: the business equivalent of an open goal

In this final section (or the first if this is where you are starting) the essentials of the skills of presenting are reviewed. Most of what makes for a good presentation is common sense, though there is a degree of organization – perhaps orchestration is a better word – involved. Always remember that presenting puts you in a powerful position. If you can calm any nerves that threaten to interfere, then you can think positively about it and that will help you achieve what you want.

A significant opportunity

It is precisely because of this that presentations present a real opportunity. If you can do the essentials well (and you can), then you will positively differentiate yourself from others who, from ignorance or lack of care, do an undistinguished or poor job.

It is worth quoting here a phrase used in a training film about making presentations, where a character describes presentations as being the 'business equivalent of an open goal'. Well put; this is not overstating the point and puts it in a memorable way (the quote is from the excellent film *I Wasn't Prepared for That*, produced by Video Arts Limited).

So motivation should not be in doubt here. There are few business skills more worth mastering than that of presentation. Without them you not only feel exposed, you *are* exposed. The trouble is the ground does not mercifully open up and allow you to disappear along with your embarrassment. It is more likely that the result is much more real – no agreement, no commitment, or the boss saying ominously 'See me afterwards.'

There are good reasons for having fears, but all can be either overcome or reduced to stop them overpowering your ability to work successfully. It may help to think of things as a balance. On one side there are things that can, unless dealt with, reduce your ability to make a good presentation. On the other there are techniques that positively assist the process. The right attention to both sides improves your capability.

Much here is about the positive techniques. But let us get the negative side out of the way first and start with a little more about possible difficulties (some of which are inherent to the process) and how to overcome them.

The hazards of being 'on your feet'

We communicate so much we tend to take it for granted. Indeed we regard much of it as easy, and people may well say of a presentation that they know they could so easily go through the content if sat comfortably opposite just one other person.

The first rule here is simple. Ease of communication should never be taken for granted. As has been said, it needs thought, care and precision, and this is doubly so when you present formally. With most

presentations you only get one crack at it, and often there is not the to and fro nature of conversation that establishes understanding.

This means every tiny detail matters. Presentations are inherently fragile. Small differences – an ill chosen word or phrase, a hesitation, a misplaced emphasis – can all too easily act to dilute the impact sought.

At least communications problems constitute a tangible factor. If you resolve to take care your communication will be better and understanding more certain. You can work at getting this right. Many of the elements reviewed as this section continues assist this process, but what about less tangible fears?

Presenters' nightmares

Whatever you fear will make making a presentation more difficult, it is probable that others think the same. Asking groups on workshops I conduct on the subject about their worries usually produces a very similar list of factors.

The top 10, in no particular order, are listed here with some thoughts about overcoming them:

- Butterflies in the stomach: if you are nervous, then you are likely to appear nervous. Without some apprehension, which can act to focus you on the job in hand, you would probably not do so well. Much of this feeling will fade as you get under way (and knowing this from practice helps), but you can help the process in a number of ways, for instance:
 - taking some deep breaths before you start (nerves tend to make you breathe more shallowly and starve you of oxygen), and remember to breathe as you go along (running out of breath to the point of gasping is a surprisingly common fault);
 - taking a sip of water just before you start;
 - not eating a heavy meal before a presentation;

- or eating nothing (or rumbles may join the butterflies);
- alcohol (except possibly in extreme moderation) really does not help; at worst it may persuade you that you can do something you cannot and make matters worse as the truth dawns.
- A dry mouth is easily cured. Take a sip of water. Never attempt to speak without a glass of water in front of you. Even if you do not touch it, knowing it is there is a comfort. And beware of fashionable fizzy water, which can have distracting side effects!
- Not knowing what to do with your hands. The best solution is to give them something to do hold the lectern, a pencil or the remote control for your slides, make the occasional gesture then forget about them. Thinking about them as you proceed will make matters worse.
- Not knowing how loud to speak. Just imagine you are speaking to the farthest person in the room (if they were the only one there you would have little problem judging it). Better still, test your volume beforehand.
- A hostile reaction: the vast majority of groups want it to go well. They are disposed to be on your side. The only thing worse than knowing that you are not presenting well is being in the audience. Think about it.
- Not having sufficient material: this can be removed completely as a fear; if your presentation is well prepared you will *know* there is the right amount.
- **Having too much material**: as with the point immediately above; enough said for the moment.
- Losing your place: also tied in with preparation (and something else reviewed in detail elsewhere) your notes should be organized specifically so that it is unlikely that you will lose your place (and so that you can find it easily should you do so).

- Drying up: why should this happen? Dry mouth? Take a sip of water. Lose your place? Organize so that this does not happen. Or is it just nerves? Well some of the factors already mentioned will help – so too will preparation. And if it does happen, often it takes only a second to resume: 'There was another point here, ah yes, the question of...' The problem here can be psychological; it just feels as if you paused forever.
- Misjudging the timing: this is something else speaker's notes can help with specifically.

All that is necessary for so many such problems or thoughts is a practical response, something that acts to definitely remove or reduce the adverse effect. Thinking of it this way helps too. Try not to worry. No doom and gloom. It will be more likely to go well if you are sure it will - more so if you work at organizing so that every factor helps.

But few people can speak without thought. Mark Twain said, 'It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.' Preparation is key to success, and it is that which we turn to next.

Preparing to present

This topic is also dealt with in Chapter 3. Imagine that you have a presentation to make. Maybe you have one to be done soon (if not, bear in mind that this is a task that most organizational jobs do not allow you to avoid). Few people will simply do nothing about it until the day and then get up and speak. So what do you do? Let us address some dangers first to lead into what is best practice here. What you might do is think of what you want to say first, then think of what follows – what you will say second, third and so on – and then write it down verbatim. Then, perhaps after some judicious amendment, you read it to the group you must address.

Wrong, wrong and wrong again. This might sound logical, but it contains the seeds of disaster. We shall pick up some alternative approaches as we continue. As it is a straightforward factor to address, let us take the reading aspect first.

Do not try to read verbatim. Some people think, at least until they have more experience, that having every word down on paper and reading them out acts as a form of security blanket. After all what can go wrong if you have everything, right down to the last comma, in black and white in front of you? Well, two things in particular.

First, you will find it is really very difficult to read anything smoothly, get all the emphasis exactly where it needs to be, and do so fluently and without stumbling. The actors who record novels, and other books, as audio works deserve their pay cheques: real skill is involved here.

Note: avoid at all costs the annoying mannerism favoured by many politicians of reading line by the line (especially from the teleprompter) and ignoring punctuation, so that all the pauses are at the line end: 'Good morning ladies and... gentlemen, I am here today to give you a... clear insight into our policy on....'

Most people speak very much better from notes which are an abbreviation of what they intend to say. If you doubt this, just try it. Read something out loud and see how it sounds; better still record it and hear how it sounds.

Secondly, certainly in a business context, you rarely need to be able to guarantee so exact a form of wording (there are exceptions, of course: a key definition or description may need to be word perfect). It is usually more important to ensure the emphasis, variety and pace is right, and that is what is so difficult to achieve when reading.

Preparation cannot be done in isolation. It links to two factors that are key to making an effective presentation. First, your purpose or objective – why exactly you are making the presentation? And secondly, the view that you take of your audience. As many would say that the audience is the first key essential here, let us start with that.

Your audience

Everything is easier with a clear view of your audience. First who are they? They may be people you know, men/women, expert or inexperi-

enced about whatever topic you must address; there are many permutations here. Most important, however, are the expectations of the audience; what do they want? Put yourself in their place. Facing a presentation what do you say to yourself? Most people anticipate its impact on them – will this be interesting, useful, long or short; what will this person be like, will I want to listen to them, how will what they have to say help me? Again the permutations are many (though usually not too complicated to think through), but bearing audience viewpoint in mind is a major factor in ensuring a successful outcome.

Specifically, any audience wants you to:

- 'know your stuff';
- look the part;
- respect them, acknowledging their situation and their views;
- discover links between what you say and what they want from the talk;
- be given an adequate message: so that they understand and can weigh up whether they agree with what is said or not (this is especially important if you are going to suggest or demand action of them);
- make it 'right for them' (for example, in terms of level of technicality);
- Hold their attention and interest throughout.

It is equally important to bear in mind what audiences do not want. This includes being:

- confused;
- blinded with science, technicalities or jargon;
- lost in a convoluted structure (or because there is none);

- made to struggle to understand inappropriate language;
- made to stretch to relate what is said to their own circumstances;
- made to listen to someone who, by being ill prepared, shows no respect for the group.

A good presenter will always have empathy for the group they address; and it must be evident to them. Often this is something guided by prior knowledge. But it can, of course, vary; you may well need to speak to groups you do not know well. Always find out what you can and make use of everything you do discover.

Some of what makes for the right approach here is an amalgam of the various techniques explored later. Some relate to immediate practical factors that every presenter should do well to remember. For example, while I would not presume to tell you how to dress for a presentation, it bears thinking about. Professionalism is, at least in part, inferred from appearance. Personal organization too has a visual importance. You must not just be well organized, you must look well organized. Walking to the front, however confidently, is likely to be spoiled if you are clutching a bulging folder spilling papers in all directions, and start by saying, 'I am sure I have the first slide here somewhere,' accompanied by fevered mouse clicks and a kaleidoscope of images as you attempt to find it.

Clear purpose

Rarely, if ever, will you be asked just to 'talk about' something. The most crucial question any intending presenter can ask themselves is simply:

Why is this presentation to be made?

If you can answer that clearly, it will be easier both to prepare and present. Let us be clear here – objectives are not what you intend to say, they describe what you intend to achieve. Apologies if this seems

obvious, but I regularly observe presentations (often carefully prepared and brought to training workshops in the knowledge that they will be subject to critique), which are poor almost solely because they have no clear objectives. They rattle along reasonably well, but they do not go anywhere. Objectives are therefore fundamental – and details about setting them are reviewed elsewhere.

How the group sees a presenter

Any business presenter must direct the group, must be in charge, and must therefore look the part. There are some people who hold that the presenter should always wear a suit; or the equivalent in terms of formality for a woman. Certainly appearance in this sense is important, although it should link to the culture and circumstances in which the presentation takes place. Similarly, you should normally stand up as opposed to sitting (there may be some sessions that can be run while sitting, but not many, and these are less our concern here). Not only does appearance then differ, but also most people will actually perform in a different and more stimulating manner when standing – it somehow gets the adrenaline flowing. If standing is the chosen option, stand up straight, neither stand stock still nor move about too much, and present an appearance of purposefulness.

The speaker is the expert, and is, or should be, in charge, and so appearance is a relevant factor.

How you see the audience

How you view the group is not, of course, simply a visual point. What is necessary is an understanding of the group, and the individuals in it, and an appreciation of their point of view and their way of seeing things. Presentations may well demand decisions of people. Do I agree? Can I see the relevance of this? Shall I agree with this point? So it is necessary to understand the thinking process that takes place in the minds of those in the group in such circumstances. This is essentially the same as what might be said about persuasive communication. This will not be investigated here; the essential approach

stemming from it is that anyone making a presentation must not simply talk at their audience, but rather tailor their approach based on an understanding of the audience's point of view.

Now remembering all this, one of the dangers is at once apparent. This is that the other person's point of view can be neglected, or ignored, with the presenter focusing primarily, or only, on their own point of view. You should ensure that you do not become introspective, concerned with your own views or situation; but instead use and display enough empathy to come over as being constantly concerned about others' views. This sounds obvious, but it is all too easy to find your own perspective predominating, thus creating a dilution of effectiveness. Even the most important message has to earn a hearing, and this is achieved primarily through concentrating on what is important to the group. Nervousness of the actual process of presenting may compound this potential danger.

Next we turn to the structure of the presentation itself, and review how one goes through it.

Probably the most famous of all maxims about any kind of communication is the old saying 'Tell 'em, tell 'em and tell 'em.' This can be stated more clearly as meaning that you should tell people what you are going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what it was you told them. This may sounds silly, but compare it with something a little different, the way a good report is set out, for instance. There is an introduction, which says what it is that follows; there is the main body of the document, which goes progressively through the message; and the summary which, well, summarizes or says what has been covered. The idea is straightforward, but if it is ignored, messages may then go largely to waste.

So practising to some degree what I preach, I shall split the presentation into three sections, and look at not only how to make each effective, but how to ensure that the three together make a satisfactory whole.

Before you speak

Having said there are three stages – which we review under the more businesslike headings of the beginning, the middle and the end – we start with another factor, which is either confusing or an example of an intriguing opening. In any case, it has been referred to before – preparation. It is that which creates your beginning, middle and end and everything else along the way.

Here I wish unashamedly to emphasize the point. Preparation is important – remember Mark Twain. If he was half as good a speaker as he was a writer it makes a point. So before we analyse a presentation, we need to think about how you put it together.

Preparation: key tasks

The key issues are to:

- Be able to answer the question 'Why must this presentation be made?' Have a clear purpose in mind, one that reflects the audience and the effect you want to have on them.
- Decide what to say (and what not to say).
- Arrange things in a logical order.
- Think about how the presentation will be put over (not just the pure content, but examples, anecdotes and any element of humour).
- Prepare suitable notes as an aide memoire to have in front of you as you speak (but not, as has been said, to read verbatim).
- Anticipate reactions and questions and how you will deal with these.

All this must be done with a keen eye on how long there is for the presentation so that what you prepare fits (you may need to decide the time; or you may be told the duration or have to ask what is suitable).

A final check

A final look (perhaps after a break following preparation) is always valuable. This is also the time to consider rehearsal. Rehearsal should be talking it through to yourself, to a tape recorder or a friend or colleague, or going through a full-scale 'dress rehearsal'.

If you are speaking as part of a team, always make sure that speakers get together ahead of the event to rehearse, or at least discuss any possible overlaps and any necessary handover between speakers. You are seeking to create what appears to the audience to be a seamless transition between separate contributors.

Ask: is this the sort of event where rehearsal is necessary and, if so, how should it be done? The simple, unequivocal answer is, yes, it is exactly where this is necessary. Ask, and how should it be done? In a nutshell: thoroughly, sufficiently far ahead and taking sufficient time.

Thereafter, depending on the nature of the presentation, it may be useful – or necessary – to spend more time, either in revision or just reading over what you plan to do. You should not overdo revision at this stage, however. There comes a time to simply be content you have it right and stick with it.

This whole preparation process is important and not to be skimped. Preparation does get easier however. You will find that, with practice, you begin to produce material that needs less amendment and that both getting it down and any subsequent revision begin to take less time.

Finally, as has been said, you need to find your own version of the procedures set out here. A systematic approach helps, but the intention is not to over-engineer the process. What matters is that you are comfortable with your chosen approach, and that it works for you. If this is the case then, provided it remains consciously designed to achieve what is necessary, it will become a habit. It will need less thinking about, yet still act to guarantee that you turn out something that you are content meets the needs – whatever they may be.

Now consider the presentation stage by stage and start, with appropriate logic, at the beginning, and see how you can get to grips with that.

THE STRUCTURE OF A PRESENTATION

The beginning

The beginning is clearly an important stage. People are uncertain; they are saying to themselves, 'What will this be like? Will I find it interesting/helpful?' They may also have their minds on other matters: what is going on back at the office, the job they left half finished, how will their assistant cope when they are away even for a few minutes? This is particularly true when the people in the group do not know you, or know you well. They then have little or no previous experience of what to expect, and this will condition their thinking (it is also possible that previous experience will make them wary!). With people you know well there is less of a problem, but the first moments of any speech are nevertheless always important.

The beginning is not only important to the participants, it is also important to the presenter; nothing settles the nerves – and even the most experienced speakers usually have a few qualms before they start - better than making a good start. Remember, the beginning is, necessarily, the introduction; the main objective is therefore to set the scene, state the topic (and rationale for it) clearly, and begin to discuss the 'meat' of the content. In addition, you have to get the group's attention - they will never take the message on board if they are not concentrating and taking in what goes on - and create some sort of rapport both between you and the group, and around the group itself.

Let us take these aspects in turn.

Gaining attention

This is primarily achieved by your manner and by the start you make. You have to look the part; your manner has to say, 'This will be interesting, this person knows what they are talking about.' A little has been said about such factors as appearance, standing up, and so on. Suffice it to say here that if your start appears hesitant, the wrong impression will be given and, at worst, everything thereafter will be more difficult. More important is what you say first and how it is said.

There are a number of types of opening, each presenting a range of opportunities for differing lead-ins. For example:

- A question: rhetorical or otherwise, preferably something that people are likely to respond to positively: 'Would you welcome a better way to ...?'
- A quotation: which might be humorous or make a point, which might be a classic, or novel phrase; or it might be something internal: 'At the last company meeting, the MD said....'
- A story: again, something that makes a point, relates to the situation or people, or draws on a common memory: 'We all remember the situation at the end of the last financial year when'
- A factual statement: perhaps striking, thought provoking, challenging or surprising: 'Do you realize that this company receives 120 complaints every working day?' (the fact that this is also a question indicates that all these methods and more can be linked).
- A dramatic statement: a story with a startling end, perhaps. Or a statement that surprises in some way. For instance, once, talking about direct mail advertising, I started by asking the group to count, out loud and in unison from 1 to 10. Between 2 and 3 I banged my fist down on the table saying 'Stop!' loudly. 'And that,' I continued, 'is how long your direct mail has to catch people's attention 2½ seconds!'
- A historical fact: a reference back to an event that is a common experience of the group: 'In 2000, when company sales for what was then a new product were just'

- A curious opening: simply a statement sufficiently odd for people to wait to find what on earth it is all about: 'Consider the aardvark, and how it shares a characteristic of some of our managers' (In case you want a link, it is thick skinned.)
- A checklist: perhaps a good start when placing the 'shopping list' in mind early on is important: 'There are 10 key stages to the process we want to discuss. First...'.

There must be more types and combinations of types of opening that you can think of. Whatever you pick, this element of the session needs careful, and perhaps very precise, preparation.

Creating rapport

At the same time, you need to ensure that an appropriate group feeling is started. In terms of what you say (participation also has a role here), you may want to set a pattern of 'we' rather than 'them and us'. In other words, say 'We need to consider...' and not 'You must...'. If this approach is followed then a more comfortable atmosphere is created. You may add – discreetly – a compliment or two ('As experienced people, you will...'), though without over-boasting; and above all, be enthusiastic. It is said that the one good aspect of life that is infectious is enthusiasm. Use it.

The opening stages need to make it absolutely clear what the objectives are, what will be dealt with, and how it will benefit those present. It must also move us into the topic in a constructive way.

This opening stage is the first 'Tell 'em' from 'Tell 'em, tell 'em and tell 'em,' and directs itself at the first two stages of the group's thinking process.

The middle

The middle is the core of the session. The objectives are clear:

- put over the detail of the message;
- maintain attention throughout the process;
- obtain acceptance of the message;
- anticipate, prevent, and if necessary handle, any possible objections.

One of the principles is to take one point at a time. We shall do just that.

Put over the detail of the message

The main trick here is to adopt a structured approach. Make sure you are dealing with points in a logical sequence. For instance, work through a process in a chronological order and use what is referred to in communications literature as 'flagging' or 'signposting'. Back to the three 'tell 'ems': you cannot say things such as 'There are three key points here: performance, method and cost. Let's deal with them in turn. First, performance...'. too much. Give advance warning of what is coming (this applies to both content and the nature of what is being said). Saying 'for example...' is a simple form of signposting. It makes it clear what you are doing and makes it clear also that you are not moving onto the next content point just yet. Putting everything in context, and relating it to a planned sequence of delivery, keeps the message organized and improves understanding.

This technique, and the clarity it helps produce, gives you the overall effect you want. People must obviously understand what you are talking about. There is no room for verbosity, for too much jargon, or for anything that clouds understanding. One pretty good measure of the presenter is when people afterwards feel that, perhaps for the first time, they really have come to clearly understand something that has just been explained.

You cannot refer to 'manual excavation devices'; in presenting, a spade has to be called a 'spade'. What is more, it has, as it were, to be an interesting spade if it is to be referred to at all and if attention is to be maintained.

Maintain attention

Here again the principles are straightforward:

- Keep stressing the relevance of what is being discussed to the audience. For instance, do not just say that some matter will be a cost saving to the organization, stress personal benefits. Will it make something easier, quicker or more satisfying to do, perhaps?
- Make sure that the presentation remains visually interesting by using visual aids and demonstrations wherever possible.
- Use descriptions that incorporate stories or anecdotes to make the message live. You cannot make a presentation live by formal content alone; you need an occasional anecdote, or something less formal. It is nice if you are able to both proceed through the content you must present and seemingly remain flexible, apparently digressing and adding in something interesting, a point that exemplifies or makes something more interesting as you go. How do you do this? It is back to preparation.
- Finally, continue to generate attention through your own interest and enthusiasm.

Obtain acceptance

People will only implement what they have come to believe is good sense. It is not enough to have put the message over and for it to be understood – it has to be believed. Here we must start by going back to understanding; nothing will be truly accepted unless this is achieved. Note that better understanding is helped by:

- Using clear, precise language language which is familiar to those present, and which does not overuse jargon.
- Making explanation clear, making no assumptions, using plenty of similes (you can hardly say 'This is like...' too often), and with sufficient detail to get the point across. One danger here is that in

explaining points that you know well, you start to abbreviate, allowing your understanding to blind you as to how far back it is necessary to go with people for whom the message is new.

- Demonstrations add considerably to the chances of understanding. These can be specific: talk about products, for instance, and it may be worth showing one. In this case, the golden rule is (surprise, surprise) preparation. Credibility is immediately at risk if something is mentioned and needs visualizing, yet cannot be. Help your audience's imagination and your message will go over better.
- Visual aids are of course also a powerful aid to understanding.

Effectiveness is not, however, just a question of understanding. As has been said, acceptance is also vital. Acceptance is helped by factors already mentioned (telling people how something will benefit them – or others they are concerned about, such as their staff), and the more specific this link can be made, the better the effect will be on the view formed.

In addition, acceptance may only come once credibility has been established, and this, in turn, may demand something other than your saying, in effect, 'This is right.' Credibility can be improved by such things as references and things other people say. A description that shows how well an idea or system has worked in another department, and sets this out chapter and verse, may be a powerful argument. Always with references this is dependent on the source of the reference being respected. If the other department is regarded in a negative way, then their adopting some process or product may be regarded by others as being a very good reason not to have anything to do with it. References work best when the results of what is being quoted are included. Thus the message says, they did this and so and so has occurred since, with sufficient details to make it interesting and credible.

Finally, it is worth making the point that you will not always know whether acceptance of a point has been achieved, unless you check. People cannot be expected to nod or speak out at every point, yet knowing that you have achieved acceptance may be important as you proceed. Questions to establish appropriate feedback are therefore a necessary part of this process, and in some presentations this must be done as you progress. It is also advisable to keep an eye on the visible signs, watching, for instance, for puzzled looks.

Handling objections

The first aspect here is the anticipation, indeed the pre-emption, of objections. On occasions it is clear that some subject to be dealt with is likely, even guaranteed, to produce a negative reaction. If there is a clear answer then it can be built into the presentation, avoiding any waste of time. It may be as simple as a comment such as, 'Of course, this needs time, always a scarce resource, but once set-up is done time will be saved, regularly.' You then go on to explain how this will happen.

If objections are voiced – and of course on occasion they will be – then a systematic procedure is necessary if they are to be dealt with smoothly. First, give it a moment: too glib an answer may be mistrusted or make the questioner feel – or look – silly. So, pause ... and for long enough to give yourself time to think (which you might just need!), and give the impression of consideration. An acknowledgement reinforces this: 'That's a good point, we must certainly think about that,' though be careful of letting such a comment become a reflex and being seen as such. Then you can answer, with either a concentration on the individual's point and perspective, or with a general emphasis, whichever is more useful to the group as a whole; or both, in turn.

Very importantly, never, ever bluff. If you do not know the answer you must say so (no group expects you to be infallible), although you may well have to find out the answer later and report back. Alternatively, does anyone else know? Similarly, even when you can answer, there is no harm in delaying a reply. 'That's a good point. Perhaps I can pick it up, in context, when we deal with....'

A final word here: beware of digression. It is good to answer any ancillary points that come up, but you can stray too far. Part of the

presenter's job is that of chairperson; everything planned for the session has to be covered, and before the scheduled finishing time. If therefore, you have to draw a close to a line of enquiry, and you may well have to do so, make it clear that time is pressing. Do not ever let anyone feel it was a silly point to raise.

After all this, when we have been through the session, the time comes to close.

The end

Always end on a high note (something that may mean the last slide you show needs careful selection). The group expect it, if only subconsciously. It is an opportunity to build on past success during the session, or occasionally to make amends for anything that has been less successful.

That apart, the end acts as a pulling together of the overall message that has been given. However you finally end, there is often a need to summarize in an orderly fashion. This may well be linked to an action plan for the future, so that in wrapping up what has been said is reviewed – completing the 'tell 'ems' – and a commitment is sought as to what should happen next. This is important. Most people are under pressure for time and, whatever else, you have already taken up some of that. They will be busier after even half an hour taken to sit through your presentation than would be the case if they had not attended, so there is a real temptation to put everything on one side and get back to work – get back to normal. Yet this may be just where a little time needs to be put in to start to make some changes. Their having a real intention in mind as they leave the session is not a guarantee that action will flow, but it is a start. It makes it that much more likely that something will happen, especially if follow-up action is taken to remind and see the matter through.

Like the beginning, there is then a need to find a way of handling the final signing off. You can, for instance, finish with:

- A question: that leaves the final message hanging in the air, or makes it more likely that people will go on thinking about the issues a little longer. 'I asked a question at the start of the session. Now let us finish with another'
- A quotation: that encapsulates an important, or the last, point. 'Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee, and just as hard to sleep after' (Anne Morrow Lindberg).
- Alternatively, choose something that, while not linked inextricably to the topic, just makes a good closing line. For example, 'The more I practise, the more good luck I seem to have' (which is attributed to just about every famous golfer there is), is one that might suit something with a training or instructional content.
- A story: longer than the quotation, but with the same sort of intention. If it is meant to amuse, be sure it does; you have no further chance at the end to retrieve the situation. That said, I will resist the temptation to give an example, although a story close does not only imply a humorous story.
- An alternative: this may be as simple as: 'Will you do this or not?' or the more complicated option of a spelled-out plan, A, B or C?
- Immediate gain: this is an injunction to act linked to an advantage of doing so now. 'Put this new system in place and you will be saving time and money tomorrow.' More fiercely phrased, it is called a fear-based end: 'Unless you ensure this system is running you will not' Although there is sometimes a place for the latter, the positive route is usually better.

However you decide to wrap things up, the end should be a logical conclusion, rather than something separate added to the end.

All of this is largely common for any presentation. Different presentations vary in importance, however. Some have more complex objectives than others; in simple terms you may want to inform, motivate, persuade, change attitudes, demonstrate, prompt action and more. Sometimes several of these must work together.

Consider an example. You want people to understand and take on board doing something differently. You want people not just to say that they understood the presentation and perhaps even enjoyed it; you want them to have learnt from it. The ways in which people learn are therefore important principles to keep in mind throughout. It needs patience as well as intellectual weight or 'clout'. It needs sensitivity to the feedback as well as the ability to come through it. As with many skills, the difficulty is less with the individual elements, most of which are straightforward and common sense, than with the orchestration of the whole process. Many people in business must be able to present effectively, to remain flexible throughout, and work with an audience rather than just talking at them.

Whatever it is you do – you make it happen. Thus you must plan to make it happen. You can rarely, if ever, 'just wing it'; a presentation needs care in preparation and in execution. Given appropriate consideration you can make it go well.

Footnote

The answer to the question posed in the example ice-breaker figure shown on page 74 is that the text contains no letter e. This is the most used letter in the alphabet, so this is unusual (and in fact it is somewhat difficult to write at any length and not use one).