

Tips for Creating Engaging PowerPoint® Presentations



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Published on www.lorman.com - December 2017

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Tips for Creating Engaging PowerPoint® Presentations

Many business leaders use PowerPoint® (PP) presentations to communicate essential information to fellow executives, employees and potential investors. Business leaders often choose PowerPoint® because it is easy to use and is bundled with Microsoft Office® software. The program also provides businesspeople with a strong means of visual communication.

It is important that businesspeople keep in mind that not all PP presentations are created equal. Some presentations excel at engaging viewers, while others only inspire boredom. This paper provides plenty of easy-to-follow design tips for business leaders who want to take their PP presentations to the next level. Executives who have little to no experience with visual design should be sure to carefully review the first section of this paper.

The Basics of Visual Communication

Visual communication is the art of speaking to others through design. Visual communication is used in business presentations, print advertising, online marketing and a myriad of other fields. In order to create strong PP presentations, business leaders must first familiarize themselves with the basics of visual communication.

Remember that it is important to have a second or third person to evaluate all PP presentations and designs. Even businesspeople who have a strong background in visual communication will make design errors on occasion. A second set of eyes can be used to ferret out such problems and to refine presentations.

Color

Color has both psychological and emotional effects on human beings. Social psychologists have long studied how marketers use color in order to sell products. Business leaders can take a cue from the marketing playbook and use color in order to persuade their audiences.

It's important to remember that colors have different connotations in different cultures. Business leaders who need to make presentations to audiences in foreign countries may wish to do a bit of research before designing PP presentations. All information presented about color in this guide is pertinent to a Western audience.

Red is generally considered to be a strong, aggressive color. Marketers who wish to quickly engage an audience and ignite their passions often use red. Business leaders who want to communicate their passion for an idea or product may also wish to use red.

Blue shares the strength of red without the connotations of aggression or passion. Blue is often used to communicate a sense of loyalty and trustworthiness.

Yellow often brings out strong feelings of happiness. Viewers tend to subconsciously link yellow with positive thoughts about the sun. For many years, psychologists believed that yellow also had a tranquilizing effect on individuals. This theory has since been dismissed.

Green is often associated with the spring and new growth. Businesspeople who wish to change a company's image or launch a new campaign may wish to use green in their PP presentations. The color is also connected to the idea of forward movement in many cultures.

Gray is a neutral color that communicates a certain sense of seriousness and posterity. While many business leaders believe that gray is boring, the color is actually an excellent choice for PP presentation backgrounds.

Black is generally connected to death or mortality in Western culture. Most businesspeople choose to avoid using black for PP presentation backgrounds.

White is often associated with new life, innocence or honesty. While it can express important sentiments, white backgrounds may cause some viewers to suffer from eyestrain.

Font

The font or fonts used in a PP presentation are an extremely important visual communicator. In general, businesspeople should avoid using fonts that mimic handwriting or look overly childish. There has long been debate about whether serif or sans serif fonts are easier to read. Most literacy experts now agree that there is no significant difference between the two in terms of readability.

When designing a PP presentation, it is essential that business leaders use no more than three different fonts. Using too many different fonts can make a presentation look visually confusing. Remember that there is nothing wrong with choosing one font for the entire presentation. If some text needs to be set apart, it can be made bold or italic. Avoid writing an entire presentation in italics as they can be hard to read.

Avoid using a light-colored font on a dark-colored background as such fonts are very difficult to read. It is best to use a dark blue or black font on a light-colored background. Use a gradient color pattern in the background to ease eyestrain.

Iconography

Business leaders must carefully consider the *icons*, or visual symbols, that they use in PP presentations. When possible, executives should use graphics with which

viewers are familiar. Use consistent company logos throughout a presentation. Avoid using graphics and clip art that are overly cute or childish.

Layout and Design

When making a PP presentation, business leaders must carefully weigh the overall layout of each slide. Filling slides with too much or too little content can be visually distracting. Aim to fill about 75 percent of the slide with written information. The remaining 25 percent of the slide can be filled with borders and graphics.

Make sure that text is always vertically centered on the slide. Text does not need to be centered horizontally but should be justified. The same margins should be used on all four sides of the text. If viewers will be given printed handouts to accompany the presentation, be sure that they are numbered to correspond with each slide.

Best Practices for Organizing Your PowerPoint® Presentation

The overall organization of a PP presentation can have a serious impact on the presentation's overall effectiveness. Each presentation should have a clear beginning, middle and end.

Many business leaders will benefit from thinking of a PP presentation as a newspaper story. Be sure to provide

information about the *who, what, when, where and why* of the story. Investors in particular will feel more confident if all their questions about a given company or product are answered in the course of a presentation.

Create a Sense of Flow

Creating a sense of flow in a PP presentation is key to engaging an audience. Make sure that there are clear transitions between slides. Provide information about what will be covered next in the presentation at the end of each slide. Doing so will make it easier for viewers to follow along with a presentation.

There are a number of tactics that can be used to create flow in a presentation. The simplest tactic is simply to identify a beginning, middle and end and to link these pieces with pertinent information. Another tactic is to outline the *story* of the presentation. Business leaders who are struggling to create flow may wish to use the following formula, which is suited to a wide variety of presentation topics.

Introduce a problem. In this step, the presenter focuses on explaining to the viewer the problem which a given company, product or service will address. The problem should be stated in a simple, straightforward fashion so that viewers do not become lost or confused.

Introduce your company or product. Provide brief background information about your company or product. This will serve as a platform for the next phase of the presentation.

Explain how your company or product addresses the problem. Now that you have stated the problem and have provided information about your company or product, you can provide information about how you propose to solve the problem. Be sure to focus on the specific qualities of a product or the particular strengths of your company.

Restate the problem and solution in one slide. Close the presentation by crafting a value statement that identifies the problem and your proposed solution. Remember that you can think creatively when identifying the problem that your company or product solves.

Choosing Strong Graphics

It is important to choose strong graphics that can be integrated seamlessly with your presentation. Do not choose graphics simply for the sake of filling space on the slide. Whenever possible, stick with simple graphics such as those used on traffic signs. Such graphics tend to be universal and will not trigger negative reactions in most audience members.

If using flowcharts, make simple charts in Word and cut-and-paste them into PP. Some versions of PP support the creation of charts. Avoid using colors that clash with your presentation's overall color scheme when making charts.

A Final Note on Creating Engaging PowerPoint Presentations

The key to creating an engaging PP presentation is keeping things simple. Avoid making slides that are jam-packed with written or visual information. Such slides are difficult to read and may confuse your audience. Remember that clean, solid borders and professional fonts will always make a good impression on an audience.

It is also important to rehearse a presentation prior to delivery. Time the presentation to ensure that it is neither too short nor too long. Make sure that you have created a strong sense of flow from the beginning of the presentation to its end.

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