

Overcoming Death by PowerPoint



Are you happy with OK?

Do you want to settle for adequate?

“The way we speak in Public is a snapshot that reflects our personality we want that image to be sharp focused”, so says Richard Dick Henning’s, of the Foothill College Celebrity Forum.

Why is it important that we are sharp focused?

- Because we only get one opportunity to make a good first impression, we better get it right.
- In his book “Managing The Professional Services Firm” David Maister’s says that the number one marketing technique for this type of company is hosting, organising and speaking at their own small-scale company seminars, to educate and inform their clients. Secondly to speak at conferences where they can demonstrate their expertise on a particular subject to a wider audience. Thirdly to write articles around the area of their expertise again to promote and encourage business.

Who would want to listen to me?

You might say to yourself, I have nothing original to say so let me remind you of a quotation by Harvey Penick which I particularly like:

“Originality does not consist of saying what was never said before, it consists of saying what you have to say, that you know to be true”

The secret of presenting an interesting talk is to speak from your own experience, tell a story of what you have learned through your life’s experience and people will be interested in listening to you. Once you have decided on your topic, then you need to think how can PowerPoint enhance this talk and if it can’t, don’t use it!

How to use PowerPoint

So first and foremost make PowerPoint a support to your presentation (not your notes) If I went to dinner in your house and you sat with your back to me all evening, talking over your shoulder, I would not be very impressed. Neither am I impressed if you present, with your back turned to me reading off a screen. Think about using pictures, sounds, DVD clips, colour and movement that is what attracts and holds peoples attention.

My suggestion as a rough guide is that you need one slide per five minutes of the talk. So if you are talking for an hour you are talking about ten to twelve slides max. When you have to use words, the golden rule is a maximum of five lines per slide with 5-6 words per line. Remember that words on a screen are not visuals.

Room set-up

From a logistics point of view, arrive at least an hour before you are due to give your presentation, make sure the room is set-up to suit you. Wherever possible get out from behind the lectern that most hotels and business environments provide, it is only a blockage to you connecting with your audience.

Place your laptop discreetly in front of you so that if you do need to read what is on the slide, you can see the laptop screen and do not have to turn around to see the projector screen. Make sure that the lighting in the room is suitable so that the people at the back of the room can see the pictures and slides that you present.

Structure your Talk

Open

We have now finished with the logistics let us look at how you are going to open.

My belief is that if you do not get people's attention with the first picture / slide or your first twenty words you have not hooked them and you are wasting your time.

Look at how the experts do this; if you go to a James Bond movie, within the first 30 seconds before the credits even roll they are straight into an action sequence to get your attention. When you buy a CD you will find that the best track is invariably the first track on the CD, again to get your attention.

You need to think long and hard about how you are going to get your audiences attention within the first 20 seconds. Is it going to be a picture or a combination of picture and sound, is it going to be a quotation, is it going to be something humorous or are you going to do something dramatic, what is it?

Do not start with (as I hear with most presenters) some form of apology, keep the apology to yourself, if you have not had time to prepare there is no need to tell anyone, they will know.

There are a number of formats you can use for making your presentation but that is a subject for another day, you need to research and decide on the format you are going to use for your presentation. In this article we are simply going to talk about having an opening, a body and a conclusion to your talk.

You have opened, you have got their attention in the first 20 words and they sitting up saying to themselves this sound like it's going to be interesting. So what happens next?

The Body

You are now in the body of your talk and they need to know very quickly what the meat of your talk is. Make one major point and one point only, you can compliment this point with facts, quotations and statistics but you must not confuse people. Simply put, you must have decided well in advance what is the one key point you will leave your audience with? It is advisable to perhaps repeat this in a couple of ways, there is an old adage “ tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them - and then tell them what you have told them”

The Close

When you come to the close of your talk it is worth remembering Lord Mancroft’s advice “ *A speech is like a love affair, any fool can start it but to end it requires considerable skill*”. What are you going to do to keep peoples attention right to the end; it is often useful to remind them what you said at the beginning:

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or

Do you want to be a better speaker?

Research has shown that the biggest mistake of presenters is that they fail to call for action. What action do you want the audience to take? What do you want them to start or stop doing? What do you want them to do more or less of?

Make it absolutely and abundantly clear what action you require and leave it ringing in their ears as you are hearing applause ringing in your ears.

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