

# Power Without Powerpoint

*Advice from an expert on how to create successful presentations*

by Margo T. Krasne

**W**ould you like to improve your new business pitch or client presentation? You can start by getting rid of Powerpoint. Most likely, it's doing you in.

I will admit up front that I'm on a campaign to rid the business community of its reliance on computer slide programs and the resulting slide presentations. I find them deadening. They take me back to classrooms with teachers who put me to sleep rather than the ones who kept me engaged. The teachers who never preached. Who involved me. Allowed me to think. To interact positively with the information presented. And isn't that what you want your clients to do? To stay involved. To think. Interact. And say, "Yes!"

**Successful pitches forge relationships between client and agency.** Pitches that have clients feel listened to, not talked at. That makes clients feel they're participating even if they never utter a word. I don't care if it's a credentials pitch or a final to a potential client, or a presentation of work to an existing one. Just as the best advertising is about the consumer and not the product, an effective presentation is about the client, not the agency. So why does Powerpoint prevent you from creating a truly effective pitch?

**Powerpoint is not structured to build a cohesive, powerful, emotional story.** Powerpoint has no emotive builds. It's just a lot of starts and stops. A *New York Times* article ["Words Go Right to the Brain But Can They Stir the Heart?" April 17, 1999] had an accompanying graphic showing what Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech might look like in Powerpoint. Trust me, you would not be moved.

Even more important, **Powerpoint prohibits you from thinking strategically or creatively.** The reasons why clients come to you in the first place. Computer slide

programs inhibit creative thought by tying you down to a format. You don't create ads by formula. Why create your presentation—which just happens to be your strongest ad for your business—by formula?

As for the argument that Powerpoint helps scattered thinkers to organize their thoughts: Anyone can organize their thoughts better using the old "cut and paste" than on Powerpoint. Index cards or Post-it notes are the way to go.

Flipchart-sized Post-its or large sheets of paper tacked up around a conference room

that moment, he or she becomes a thorn in your side. Think of how your clients feel when you ask them to look at a slide, decipher it and listen to you at the same time. Two diametrically opposed parts of their brains cancel each other out so that nothing gets in.

As for presenters reading slides aloud, personally, I find it demeaning. I believe audiences are perfectly capable of reading on their own. And, as we all read and take in information at different speeds, someone who reads to us at a pace slower or faster than our own causes dissonance and dulls our comprehension.

Of course, there are times when slides with words can be helpful in explaining a complicated concept. But a visual should be something that pertains to seeing; an

aid, something that helps or supports. If a visual aid does not assist a speaker in getting the message across, it's a hindrance. It's as simple as that.

Now, as to Powerpoint being a time saver. Trust me, it's not. Clients often come to me stymied as to how to say what they want to say using Powerpoint. They would do better to use that time figuring out what they want to say, period!

And no, it is not easier and faster for one presenter to pick up and present someone

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allow all involved to see if the presentation covers all bases, has strong transitions, and clearly builds to a dynamic conclusion. Regular size Post-its spread out on a table work great for an individual's presentation.

For those who believe that slides help audiences follow along, think of this: **None of us can read, listen and digest information simultaneously.**

Have you ever had someone hand you something to read, and then continue to talk to you about what you are supposed to be reading while you try to read it? No matter how close you are to the person at



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else's slide deck that's been created on Powerpoint. A presenter who must use someone else's material still needs time to decipher the meaning behind the slides as well as create transitions and momentum.

I'm often asked to edit slide presentations. I admit I do so with a very active red marker. I find that most of the slides brought to me do not correspond with what the presenter is trying to say.

The meaning got lost as the presenter tried to fit the thinking into Powerpoint's formula rather than the other way around.

Keep in mind that when word slides are used, they must be used judiciously and crafted so that the audience can get their meaning at a glance. This requires "bullets" that all begin with the same part of a sentence, i.e., all verbs, all nouns or all adjectives. Powerpoint does not correct mistakes in the structure of bullet points.

Again, it takes time for clients to decipher a slide and even more time for clients to decide where the information should be

filed in their brains. They do not have the luxury—as you do right now—of rereading a paragraph if their mind wanders or if they lose their place because they have been looking at the presenter. (Something you do want audiences doing as that's where the relationship is built, not with the screen). And, no one can ever take information as quickly as you can dish it out. So, while you may think you can move along more rapidly because you're using word slides, the exact opposite is true.

Last, but certainly not least: A great looking slide is meaningless if the presenter can't talk the talk.

All that time spent reworking slide—moving this word, switching that bullet point, nit-picking right up to the bitter end—would be better spent rehearsing.

None of us speak the way we think. We think in thoughts, not completed sentences. No wonder presenters often find themselves fumbling for words. It takes time to get a thought from the head

out of the mouth.

If we keep changing what we mean to say, but don't practice aloud how we are going to say it, then we will not be able to speak with conviction.

And, if we can't speak with conviction, what difference what the hell the slide looks like?

I am not negating the use of visuals. I think visuals, flip charts, mock-ups, the actual product, can immeasurably enhance a presentation.

All I am asking you to do is get rid of computer programs that limit your creativity and require you to think on their terms instead of your own.

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