All hands on deck – Top 10 rules for great PowerPoint presentations

written by Stephen Lautens | September 16, 2022

Presentations have been an essential business tool since Microsoft first bundled PowerPoint into its MS Office Suite in 1990. (Fun fact – PowerPoint was originally Apple Macintosh only.) So why is it that over 30 years later companies and IR teams still struggle with creating attractive and informative "decks"?

Part of the problem is the ease with which team members can create and edit presentations. Presentations are passed around for "input" from the technologists, geologists, IR professionals, compliance officers, and then the C-suite, with everyone tweaking content and making helpful suggestions. Everyone has different priorities and concepts of what information is important to convey, and the result can be a horse built by committee.

Presentations have layers built up over time through edits and additions, adding pages and new bullet points instead of being rethought and rewritten. Eventually they get bogged down with too much or old data, or lose focus. Deciding what to leave out of a presentation is as important as what to put in. **Keep it to 20 slides or less. For everything new you put in, take something old out.**

Planning a presentation begins with the message. Too few companies ask the two basic questions: **"Who is our audience and what is our message?"** The audience is very different in a technical briefing than an investor road show. A geologist or

technologist may happily sit through 40 pages of data, but a high net worth prospect is already thinking about the next person waiting in the lobby looking for funding.

A useful and simple trick almost no one uses is to **watch a real person flip through your deck.** Anyone who has sat down for a pitch meeting with a new prospect knows that the first thing they do is flip quickly through your printed presentation. Next time, watch carefully what slides they look for first and which ones they linger on as you talk. That is the content most important to them. Let that guide your next edit. It doesn't matter what you think is the most important part of your message. Be guided by what your audience cares about. Move up and beef up those pages.

Your message should start with a summary or "call to action" page at the front. Too many companies put it at the end. It's your elevator pitch to grab the attention of a jaded investor looking for a reason to fund or reject. Everything that follows supports the summary. It's the hook, so remember to put your best foot forward. **Order your slides to lead with your strengths**, whether it is the team, the project, recent discoveries, sales, or the market opportunity. Follow up with more detailed slides to drill down or provide background.

There are literally thousands of websites that tell you the technical rules for creating better presentations. Here are some of the most obvious but often ignored mistakes that separate good from bad presentations:

1. **Don't use dark backgrounds with white text.** People still print presentations – whether to read offline or to circulate at trade shows or meetings (remember those?). Dark pages are hard to read and no one will thank you for using up all their ink.

2. **Keep fonts simple and only two sizes – title and text.** Turn off PowerPoint's "automatically resize font to fit text box" feature. It is evil. It will make your slides look like ransom notes. Don't make margins and text boxes jump around from slide to slide.
3. **White space is your friend.** Don't feel the need to fill the space on a slide. Not only is it easier on the eye, fewer words mean greater focus and impact and the likelihood they will be read. You'll hear about the 5/5 rule for presentations – only 5 words per bullet point and only bullets per slide.
4. **Graphics – whether charts, maps or images – should be clean, legible and sharp.** Strip away irrelevant data or layers so readers can focus on what's important. If labels are too fuzzy or small to read, re-do them.
5. **Proofread, and then proofread again.** Check not only for spelling but consistent and accurate punctuation. Accuracy and attention to details says a lot about your professionalism.
6. **De-jargon text and labels.** Not everyone is an industry expert and no one likes to stumble over acronyms or abbreviations. Don't make your reader feel stupid.
7. **Keep it short – 20 slides maximum.** A short deck keeps it interesting and forces you to think about your core message and selling points. Create a second optional deck of technical or background data for those who are really interested.
8. **PowerPoint has a ton of fun animations and slide transitions. Don't use them.** They are distracting and don't translate to the printed page.
9. **Keep it up to date.** A presentation on a website that is six months old gives the impression that you haven't done anything lately or are too lazy to update. Updating also should make you rethink the presentation and make

adjustments based on feedback and new developments.

10. **Have your base presentation template designed by a graphics professional.** You only need to do it once and you can use the template for years. It’s a small amount of money well spent.

With a little bit of work, no one ever has to read (or write) a long, confusing, or ugly presentation again.