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POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

How to Avoid Creating “Technological Distance” Between You and Your Audience

By Suzanne Bates

Let’s concede – once and for all – that PowerPoint is more often than not *deadly* to a presentation. In theory, it should make it more organized and professional. In practice, it’s creating what I call “technological distance” with the audience. Not only is PowerPoint failing to impress – it’s killing the natural connection that a speaker should be able to make with the rest of the people in the room.

PowerPoint was a revolutionary concept – a simple, fast way to create colorful computer graphics with easy to read charts and photos. But somewhere along the way, PowerPoint hijacked the business presentation.

What is “technological distance”?

If you look in the dictionary you’ll find several definitions of the word **distance**, including this: “emotional separateness or reserve; aloofness.”

What I mean when I say technological distance is the emotional separateness people feel when your PowerPoint takes center stage. Instead of paying close attention to you, they are reading your slides. This creates psychological “space” between you and others.

When people do not connect with you, they perceive you as more distant, reserved, and even aloof. When the room goes dark, and they see that slide presentation pop up on the screen, their attention immediately goes there. If the slides require any amount of “work” to read or interpret, many in your audience are going to tune you out. It’s virtually impossible to read and listen at the same time. And you can’t overcome that by “reading” the slides, because audiences are sophisticated. They will simply assume you haven’t prepared.

One of the best reasons to go to the trouble to make a presentation is to build a relationship with the audience. You want them to see you as an expert in your field; someone who has the

answers. When you do this you build a powerful personal brand. But when PowerPoint becomes the star, you are nothing more than a vehicle for the message. They'll forget your name before they are out the door.

Common mistakes:

One common problem we see business people make is starting their preparation by creating slides. As soon as they schedule a presentation, they turn on the computer and start messing with slides they already have on file. They spend hours organizing and reorganizing. If they don't have the slides they need, they create more slides. Usually these slides are impossible to read or interpret in the 20 seconds to a minute that the audience has to look at them.


Meanwhile, they've given little thought to what the presentation is really about. They haven't stopped to take inventory of what the audience wants or needs to know. The best presentations start with an inquisitive process – figuring out the audience – and then outlining and writing. All this should happen long before you ever open up the PowerPoint program.

A lot of presenters can't help themselves – they are addicted to slides. That's why I think it's time for a 12-step Program: Overcoming Addiction to PowerPoint.

So, I did a little research on the 12-steps for Alcoholics Anonymous. PLEASE don't be offended, this is tongue in cheek – there's no comparison between PowerPoint and real addiction! So accept this in the spirit in which it was intended – to make a point about how YOU can become the star of your own presentations.

12 Step Program Overcoming Addiction to PowerPoint

- 1. We admit we are powerless when using PowerPoint slides – our presentations are unmanageable if people are reading the slides and not listening to us**
- 2. Came to believe that there's a power greater than slides – and that it is inside us as speakers to learn how to be great**
- 3. Made a decision to believe in ourselves as speakers and develop the ability to connect with the audience – without PowerPoint**
- 4. Made a searching and fearless inventory of what we know about the audience so we can deliver a better presentation without slides**
- 5. Admitted to ourselves and others that we have not always done it right – we haven't always thought first about the audience. We've created slides first, and worked our presentation around it.**

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- 6. Are entirely ready to stop this practice of starting with the slides – since it almost always creates defects in the presentation**
 - 7. Humbly accept advice from others about how to make the presentations more interesting and relevant to the audience**
 - 8. Made a list of all the people we would like to reach and thought about how we could deliver more original, compelling presentations**
 - 9. Made amends to audiences we have already “distanced” because of our overuse of slides – and planned the next presentation to be our best**
 - 10. Continue to take personal inventory and work hard to make our presentations interesting, informative and original**
 - 11. Sought through meditation and brainstorming to come up with powerful stories, anecdotes, humor, examples and other ways to connect**
 - 12. Having had an awakening by performing these 12 steps, share our insights with our friends and colleagues to help make their presentations more dynamic, too.**