

Making Your Point With PowerPoint

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PowerPoint is suppose to help speakers make their presentations interesting and dynamic, but few speakers use it that way. They end up turning a potentially powerful presentation tool into a sedate-your-audience presentation nightmare. Instead of using PowerPoint to make their point, they drain their own presentations of life and vitality. What goes wrong?

Data Dump: Most PowerPoint presentations turn out to be “data dump”—a lot of information dumped on the audience but little interaction with them. Listeners are subjected to more information than they want or need presented in a boring, unfocused way. Accountants must be particularly careful not to fall into the data dump trap because accounting topics are so detailed and complex that it is easy to overwhelm audiences with too much data. When this happens, listeners go away remembering little if anything.

No Core Message: Whether it’s financial statements, contracts, or succession planning, presenters should choose three to five points around which they plan their entire presentation. These points comprise the “core message” of the presentation and should be expressed in short, complete, conversational sentences. Although PowerPoint helps presenters organize their thoughts in an outline form, it does not first prompt them to develop a solid core message. When this happens, listeners go away without any clear, compelling message.

Overreliance on technology: Many accountants, who are stepping into the speaking world as a way to serve their clients and market their firms, are turning to PowerPoint in hopes it will help them become effective speakers. PowerPoint has many capabilities but it cannot in and of itself make a presenter interesting. Color, sound, and technology will not automatically make presentations interesting and memorable. Too many speakers let PowerPoint replace them instead of enhance their message. When this happens, listeners lose the benefit of hearing a clear, interesting message delivered effectively from a strong, persuasive presenter.

PowerPoint cannot turn a weak message into a strong one or a poor speaker into a good one. It can, however, turn a good speaker into a mediocre one. PowerPoint creates a speaking situation that can easily reduce eye contact, stifle spontaneity, and discourage audience involvement—all vital elements of effective speaking.

Accounting topics such as contracts, financial statements, E & M coding, RVU’s, succession planning, or group practice income allocation need to be made interesting, dynamic, and easy-to-follow if they are to leave a good impression and lead to more

business. Here are three guidelines to follow to avoid falling into the bore-them-to-death PowerPoint trap:

Think of PowerPoint as a visual aid not as the presentation itself: Many accounting topics can be conveyed effectively through PowerPoint charts and graphs, but you must remember that charts and graphs only help make a point; they aren't the point. Before technology, the presentation was the focal point and the visuals were supporting aids. Now the presentation and visuals have been merged into one, much to the detriment of the presentation message. Think of PowerPoint as the frosting on the cake, not the cake itself.

Develop your presentation first and then your slides. Your presentation should consist of a core message expressed through a central theme, key points, and action statement which are then incorporated into your opening, body, and closing. This enables you to give an interesting, easy-to-follow presentation if the technology fails. Accountants who use PowerPoint without preparing their core message end up having a slide show with little impact or if something goes wrong, no presentation at all. Follow the proper sequence: presentation first, slides second.

Deliver your opening & closing without PowerPoint: The opening and closing are the two power spots in any presentation. Your opening must stimulate the interest of your audience, give them a reason to listen to you, and orient them to your topic. The closing must recap your core message, remind your audience that their time with you was well spent, and tell them what to do with the information you just gave them. PowerPoint makes it difficult to distinguish the opening and the closing from the body. A free-standing opening and closing will allow you to create a sense of presence, gain your listeners' attention, establish rapport, and drive important points home. To increase your effectiveness, begin and close without slides.

Excellent presenters look at PowerPoint as a tool that can help them make their point. If you want your PowerPoint presentations to be memorable, keep the emphasis on you and your message rather than on the slides. You'll have more impact and your audience will remember more.