The science & design of persuasive business presentations: a workshop

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1. Tell your audience why they should care

Listeners are more engaged if they understand:
- Why a topic is important or relevant
- Why they should be involved
- What's at stake

Web data has shown that many of the design “best practices” that I learned were wrong

fMRI technology has shown that many of the design “best practices” that I learned were wrong

What we'll cover

- Business presentation definition
- Presentation science
- Presentation graphic design improvements
- Presentation instructional design improvements

What we'll do

- Several interactive exercises covering the material
The way we present information in business has evolved dramatically.

A "Business Presentation" is the presentation format that we give when conducting business.

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The TED talk format is engaging, but it is not well suited to business.

TED Talks and Business Presentations have different attributes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>TED Talk</th>
<th>Business Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant theme</td>
<td>Inspirational story</td>
<td>Logical argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative driven by</td>
<td>Words</td>
<td>Visuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance type</td>
<td>Linear/Scripted</td>
<td>Interactive/Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protagonist</td>
<td>Presenter/Audience</td>
<td>Idea/Company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Business Presentations need to weather challenging, often contradictory, conditions:

- Need to be easily shortened: “You have only 10 minutes, not 30.”
- Need to stand on their own without explanation: “Sorry, something’s come up and I can’t be there. Please send your slides.”
- Need to be non-sequentially accessible and adaptable: “We only want to hear about …”; “Provide more detail on ….”
Hypothesis: the best path between originating and receiving an idea is the shortest

**Originate** ➔ **Transmit** ➔ **Receive**

Information Theory ➔ Cognitive Load Theory

**INFORMATION THEORY**

By boosting the signal-to-noise ratio, we can design better presentations

**COGNITIVE LOAD THEORY**

By understanding the brain processes involved in learning, we can design better presentations

Cognitive Load Theory builds upon the widely accepted model of human information processing
We need to optimize the use of Working Memory

Load imposed by:
- how information is presented
- the learning task
- processing information, constructing and automating schema

Improve through:
- better graphic & instructional design

Working Memory can process both words and pictures simultaneously

Working Memory is limited

This is your brain on “word heavy” presentations

Our visual system is >100x more efficient than our hearing

What matters most is how you view yourself

2. Use visual and verbal channels

Pictures with word-based explanations work best

2. Use visual and verbal channels

Place labels as close as possible to the corresponding graphics

Dr. Seuss, One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish
WORKSHOP EXERCISE
MAKE YOUR POINT WITH VISUALS

Instructions
- Use the crayons and paper on your table
- Sketch the very, very first image that comes into your head
  (If something doesn’t come to mind, move on to the next example)
- We’ll compare examples afterward

“Client’s Return on Sales ranks fourth”

Exercises
- The task forces are moving in opposite directions
- The age distribution of the firm differs sharply from its clients

GRAPHIC DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

3. Remove all marks that don’t support your idea

LEARNING OUTCOMES
1. First point
2. Second point
3. Third point

Unnecessary marks cause "split attention"
3. Remove all marks that don’t support your idea

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**
1. First point
2. Second point
3. Third point

4. Provide a consistent format so people know where to look

**REASONS SLIDE TEMPLATES WORK WELL**
- Provide a consistent structure
- Font sizes are consistent and readable
- Color and design is consistent

5. Don’t use decorative fonts

There are many fonts that are easy to read. Any of them are fine to use. But avoid a font that is so decorative that it starts to interfere with pattern recognition in the brain.

6. Choose color & contrast to improve legibility

Which of these headlines is easiest to read?

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Which of these headlines is easiest to read?
INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS

7. Break information into manageable chunks
One concept per slide
Maximum of four bullets per slide

Which of these is easier to remember?

8546796329
854 679 6329

8. Begin presentations with your recommendation or point

Dear Shirley,
I HATE you. Here are my reasons:
• You stole my boyfriend
• You insulted my mother
• You scared my cat

Gene Zelazny, Say It With Presentations

9. Ensure that your message is clear on EVERY slide

Types of Patent Applications
• Defensive Patents – protect your work
• Offensive Patents – protect against workarounds
• Combination Patents – enable partnering

A strong patent portfolio mix will advance your business goals
• Defensive Patents – protect your work
• Offensive Patents – protect against workarounds
• Combination Patents – enable partnering
Slide titles should be clauses that communicate your message

They help people re-engage when they re-focus
They communicate your message when you're not there to present

30% of the time we're not focused

WORKSHOP EXERCISE
COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE IN YOUR SLIDE TITLES

Rewrite the headline

JD Supra Report for 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Avg. Views/Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average AMLAW 100 Firm (1 – 100)</td>
<td>335,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average AMLAW 200 Firm (101 – 200)</td>
<td>192,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Firm (AMLAW 165)</td>
<td>447,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rewrite the headline

Adapt the slides you show & their order to fit your audience

You need to be a slide DJ
10. A hierarchical slide organization provides the flexibility to easily address changes

A hierarchical slide organization is flexible

“We’re short on time…”

“A hierarchical slide organization is flexible

“We only want to hear about…”

“A hierarchical slide organization is flexible

“Can you provide more detail?”

11. Use simple, straightforward language

Be culturally aware

“Sacred cows make the best burgers"

11. Use simple, straightforward language

Don’t use idioms

“Out of sight; out of mind.”

“Invisible things are crazy.”

Your message may not survive translation
12. Use charts to communicate quantitative information

Numerical data is hard to understand

Are these data similar?
The data

Can't tell
Numerical data is hard to understand

Numerical data is hard to understand

Are these data similar?
Analytics of the same data

Yes
Common analytics say that they are similar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean of x</td>
<td>9.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample variance of x</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean of y</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample variance of y</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlation btw x and y</td>
<td>0.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear regression line</td>
<td>y = 3.00 + 0.500x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charts show us complex data best

Are these data similar?
Charts of the same data

No!
We understand the patterns in charts effortlessly though our visual systems!

13. Each chart should have a message (not a topic)

Possible messages: pick one!
The number of contracts has increased
The number of contracts has been fluctuating
In August, the number of contracts reached its highest point
The number of contracts declined in two of the eight months

Gene Zelazny, Say it With Charts
Choosing the correct chart form depends completely on your being clear about what your message is.

There are five basic types of charts:

- **Pie**
- **Bar**
- **Column**
- **Line**
- **Scatter**

14. Use the appropriate chart for your message

**Pie Charts**
Show components

"Yellow products are 26% of sales"

**Part of a Whole**

**Bar Charts**
Compare quantities

"Region 1 had the most sales."

**Comparison**

**Column Charts**
Show changes in quantity over time

"Sales were highest in our most recent quarter"

**Time or Frequency**

**Line Charts**
Show trends

"Sales are increasing."

**Trend**
14. Use the appropriate chart for your message

**Scatter Charts**
Show correlations

"Product sales correlate with ad exposure."

**Correlation**

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**STEPS**
1. Determine your message
2. Identify the comparison
3. Select the chart form

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**WORKSHOP EXERCISE**

**CHOOSING THE CORRECT COMPARISON**

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**Revenues are forecast to increase over the next 10 years**

Component

Item

**Time Series**

**Frequency Distribution**

**Correlation**

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**The largest number of employees earns between $50,000 and $60,000**

Component

Item

**Time Series**

**Frequency Distribution**

**Correlation**

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The size of salary increases is not related to tenure

Component
Item
Time Series
Frequency Distribution
Correlation

In December, Litigation outperformed of all other practice groups

Component
Item
Time Series
Frequency Distribution
Correlation

The partner spends only 15% of her time on business development activities

Component
Item
Time Series
Frequency Distribution
Correlation

Using these principles, you can create exciting & versatile business presentations

References

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