Break the presentation barrier!

door

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The introduction of presentation software and the increasingly higher quality of projection from beamers have, together, ensured that 'digital' presenting has become the norm. Unfortunately this situation has also led to new habits that are seldom positive either for the speaker or the listener. Let's take a closer look at some of the dangers *and* a number of solutions.

Originality

The Danish writer and philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, once said: "Everybody is born as an original, but most people die as a copy." Imagine you're one of the 8 speakers at a congress. The other 7 speakers all use presentation software and the beamer… with varying degrees of competence and success, contact and boredom-factor. You're there representing your company, and you want to set yourself apart from the others. Are you *also* going to use the beamer… or are you going to find other ways of giving your presentation? What can you do to stand out in the minds of the audience, those you wish to influence?

A destructive form

It seems that most speakers regard the three parts of their presentation – their personal performance, what they project, and the handout – more or less as one and the same thing.

The software makes it easy for the speaker to 'dump' everything he knows about the subject into the ready-made templates. Although some speakers are more skilful in using the bells and whistles of the software, the beamer is used chiefly as a 'digital overhead projector'.

In extreme form, each slide is projected all at once, so that the listener is immediately confronted with a considerable amount of information. The speaker begins to talk about what's at the top of the screen, while the listener is busy reading everything he sees... down to the bottom of the screen.

With a click on the 'print handout' button, the so-called handout pops out of the printer: an exact copy of what the speaker projects during his presentation.

Because the speaker has gathered everything he knows about the subject and organised it logically to project on the screen, in the end there's very little for him to add personally!

Three-in-one

Part of the new paradigm is to consider the three parts as separate and distinct elements. Combine these, and you have a powerful tool to produce an original, valuable and useful presentation.

Remember, too, that the desired result of all true presentations – especially in the business world – should *always* be an *action*: clear, specific and measurable. When you present, as many do, 'just to inform', you're wasting everybody's time and above all *your* energy.

The new paradigm encourages you to experiment with a more sensible approach: distribute all your 'instruction materials' as soon as they're ready, and organise a meeting at a *later date* to give a short presentation regarding the *implications* and *consequences*, but **not** about the content itself. Concentrate above all on the action and follow-up you expect, and discuss, support and motivate *this*!

- *What you provide as documentation*

An informal analysis indicates that at the most 5-10% of participants will ever look at the handout you provide along with your presentation. Perhaps it then makes more sense *not* to provide a handout, and certainly not one that is simply copies of all your slides. What then?

✓ Write a short, running text of 1-3 pages, with an occasional illustration and many headers to make it more attractive and readable. To emphasise specific items within paragraphs, use **bold** *and italic*, but do not <u>underline</u>. Offer this text to your participants at the conclusion of your presentation.
✓ Don't print anything beforehand. During your presentation offer the possibility of receiving *additional*, supporting material with perhaps more detailed information. Those who want it should give you their business card with their email address and the word 'handout', and perhaps even their specific area of interest. Send a pdf file (Adobe Acrobat) within 24 hours along with a brief, enthusiastic note in which you thank them for their interest. Take this opportunity to encourage the recipient to undertake the required action.

Note: if your listeners can follow your presentation from the handout they've got in front of them, then *you* are redundant!

- *What you project on the screen*

Your presentation software helps you to present and visualise details which support what you say in an attractive way.

Note: 'text' is **not** a visual aid! Use diagrams, illustrations (*not* 'clip art'), photos and an occasional key word.

Make modest use of the technical possibilities offered by your program. Above all, use the simplest ways of building up your slides a little at a time, so that you *only* project exactly what you can discuss and add to *at that moment*.

Note: if your listeners can follow your presentation from the screen, then *you* are redundant!

Remember, too, that there are many other visual aids available to use: a box, some bricks, a piece of piping, a glass jar full of coloured liquid, a handful of fake money… the only limitation is your imagination and creativity in making whatever you use *relevant*.

The 'visualizer' is a special projector incorporating a camera. It allows you to project images of three-dimensional objects which you want to demonstrate as part of your presentation.

The flipover is your simplest, most effective and flexible support to your presentation for groups up to 20-30 participants. However, it's up to you to *learn* how to use this properly… but that's another story!

- *The oral presentation*

Ensure that you have something to say! Paraphrase what you project. Introduce what the listeners will see *before* you project it. Talk around it, add examples, and above all stay in contact with your audience by – for example – asking closed questions to which you expect an affirmative answer.

The biggest difference between the written words you project and the words your listeners hear is your *non-verbal communication*: variation in tone, volume and speed of speech (which also means your ability to be silent!), functional movement (which also means your ability to stand still!), gestures, eye-contact, and facial expression. This 'packaging' is essential in transmitting your motivating energy to your listeners.

True, your choice of language is also important, but always *less* important than the packaging. Remember to use the present tense, the active form of the verb, verbs instead of nouns, adverbs instead of adjectives, and above all be *positive*. These are incidentally just some of the reasons why complete sentences are *forbidden* on the screen!

Finally…

If you are able to apply at least some of these recommendations in *your* presentation, you may be sure that you will come across as more original… and probably as more *authentic*. You may be equally sure your listeners will feel that you're there for *them*, instead of playing a subsidiary role to your so-called visual aids. Consider the truth of the statement: you do business with *people*, not with computers, companies… or projection screens!