

Are You Using Too Much Technology in Your Talks?

Written by Patricia Fripp

We sit in the audience and watch spectacular audio/video presentations with PowerPoint, Director, and banks of coordinated slide carousels, and we think, "Wow, if only I could do that!"

Without a doubt, audio/visual has added showbiz impact to business and professional speakers' presentations. However, just because it is available, doesn't mean we have to use it! Here is another point of view.

I am an exceptionally high-tech marketer and get good business and prospects from my Website, e-mail newsletters, MentorU online learning, and other high-tech parts of my business. In my work as executive speech coach and presentation trainings, more and more managers are telling me, "Our CEO used to be a really great speaker before he had PowerPoint. Now he relies on it so much that he is less effective at motivating our sales force."

Two executives from a Fortune 100 company came to me to develop a speech about their new product. They spent some time describing it, but I didn't really understand. I knew if I didn't neither would their prospects. Finally, I asked, "How will this change the way your customers do business? Tell me about the impact it will have on people's lives? Who has used this successfully that we can quote?" They walked out with a great speech, supported by PowerPoint for added illustrations, but not overwhelmed by them. One commented, "What a great process! Usually we put together 40 PowerPoint slides and then decide what to say in between."

That's exactly the problem. Misuse of technology can turn speakers into mere readers of captions for slides. A recent survey of captains at Fort Benning, GA cited "the ubiquity of the PowerPoint Army" as a prime reason why the Army is losing too many bright young officers. "The idea behind most of these briefings," it said, "is for us to sit through 100 slides with our eyes glazed over." (Reported in the Wall Street Journal.) Here's another example from my own work.

A group of Lockheed engineers and astronauts were very proud of their very expensive four-color view-graphs. Near the end of an all-day speaking school and coaching session, I reminded them of the importance of connecting emotionally with the audience by telling stories. Then I asked one gentleman to play a game with me. Would he pretend that the power had gone off and he had to repeat what he had just said without slides? He did so, becoming animated and enthusiastic and making

great eye contact. Without exception, everyone agreed he was a much stronger presenter when he looked at his audience and was more conversational. That made him look more flexible and spontaneous. "What a difference rather than just narrating slides," they said. After that all were eager to try the same.

Dan Maddux, the Executive Director of The American Payroll Association who has hired professional speakers for 17 years, says his favorites use little or no audiovisuals. "We use IMAG (Image Magnification) at our over 2000 person Congress. Every time your PowerPoint slide is on the screen, you aren't!" he says. "Most disappointing," he says, "is when dynamic speakers totally overshadow themselves and their performance with their slides."

Technology is terrific -- as long as it supports and enhances your connection with your audience. Our Corporate clients have communication departments that can do technology better than most of us. What we speakers have is story telling ability! If they could run our presentation without us, why would they pay us big bucks?

In the end, your message depends on creating pictures in the heads of your audience, not on a screen. Use your unique stories to stimulate your audience's most powerful sensory organs, their imaginations.



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