

PRESENTATION TUNE-UP

... avoiding seven common traps

Whitepaper #15



We are a presentation society. Presenting has become so much a part of our daily lives that PPT is no doubt more relevant today than MBA, CPA, or CFM. Has presenting become so much like breathing that we approach it without thinking?

Are we doing presentations simply because we are on the agenda? Are we doing them because somebody wants an update? Are we presenting by rote? Are we on auto-pilot?

As I think about this, I wonder if the "art of presenting" has become all too familiar. Have we forgotten the power ... the purpose ... and the opportunity?

A presentation's objective is to impact others and motivate a desired response. Yet sometimes we fail and end-up wasting everybody's time. How do we ensure this doesn't happen?

This whitepaper raises awareness of seven potential presentation traps and provides guidance on avoiding them.

Trap #1: No Storyline – Stories usually unfold as a sequence of events including set-up, detail, and resolution. By focusing on ambitions, stories make our discussions memorable.

At its core, presenting is about communicating a message to an audience. Here the tendency is to present what we want to say rather than what the audience needs to hear. Gaining their understanding, support, and involvement is often best accomplished by building a compelling story that is relevant to their personal interests, priorities, and motivations.

When we lack a compelling story, we risk sending the wrong message and are more likely to stray off-subject. While most of us are adept at filling the air with lots of tactical information, doing so without providing the proper context may prevent conveyance of the broader idea.

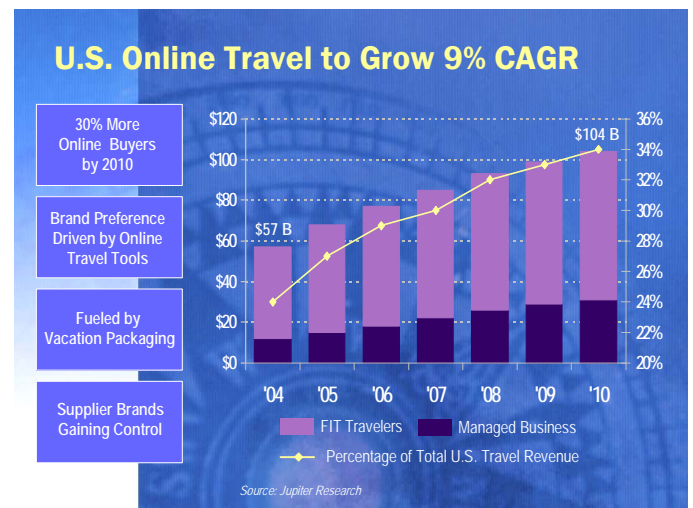
I recommend using these three guiding principles to ensure hitting the mark.

1. Foster Understanding – Identify 2 or 3 key points for people to remember. Make these the mantra and the takeaway.

Then develop a clear, well-focused message. One way to ensure this is by developing a brief synopsis that tells the whole story without embellishment. This 15-second teaser should reference the audience, describe their expected response and highlight why it is important to them. Deliver it both in the opening remarks and again at the conclusion.

2. Create Buy-in – Link the key points to things they understand and support. Try providing a 40,000 foot view to ensure agreement. Then present more specific details to further build the case. Back-up each point with examples, case studies, and/or statistics that reinforce the core message. Try to connect with the audience's hearts and minds through relevant explanations, metaphors, similes, and analogies that make complex information more meaningful.

3. Prompt for Action – Provide a call-to-action that precisely defines how the audience should respond to the message. Always clarify people's roles and responsibilities regarding next steps.

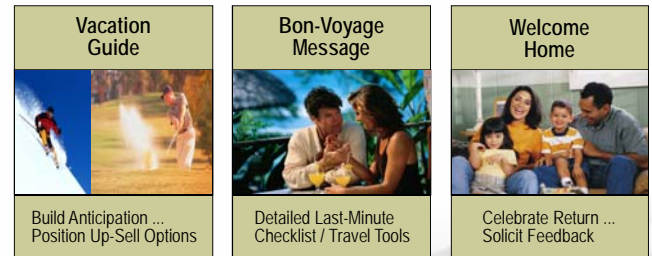


... Increase presentation flexibility with multi-purpose slides allowing you to tailor your talk to the audience

Skilled presenters are perpetually prepared to tell their story. Furthermore, the story structure facilitates real-time adjustments based on audience reactions.

Trap #2: Linear Organization – Historically most slide presentations were developed as a series of images presented and discussed in linear order using the “next” button. This demands that we correctly assess both the audience’s information needs as well as the duration of our talk. The problem with a linear organization is that it tends to trap us into a pre-defined rhythm and sequence. It can be very difficult to skip around or provide a different level of detail.

We gain flexibility by incorporating multi-purpose slides containing a wealth of information that enable us to extemporize to the audience’s particular needs.



... Increase visual variety by breaking away from slide templates and visualizing bullet points



... Improve your ability to find or skip details by using a “home” slide with hyperlinks to relevant slides

Another non-linear technique is to build the presentation around a “home” slide (e.g.: diagram, button bar, or agenda) with hyperlinks to subsequent, more detailed pages. Much like a web page, this approach provides great flexibility for adjusting delivery as the presentation unfolds.

Trap #3: Over Reliance on Bullets -- Given strong deadline pressures we frequently do not have enough time to craft both a compelling story and high-impact images. Oftentimes, we find that producing page after page of bullet points is the most expedient use of our time.

While the function of presenting is to communicate, bullets are not always the best format. Look for creative alternatives to illustrate bulleted information and maintain audience interest.

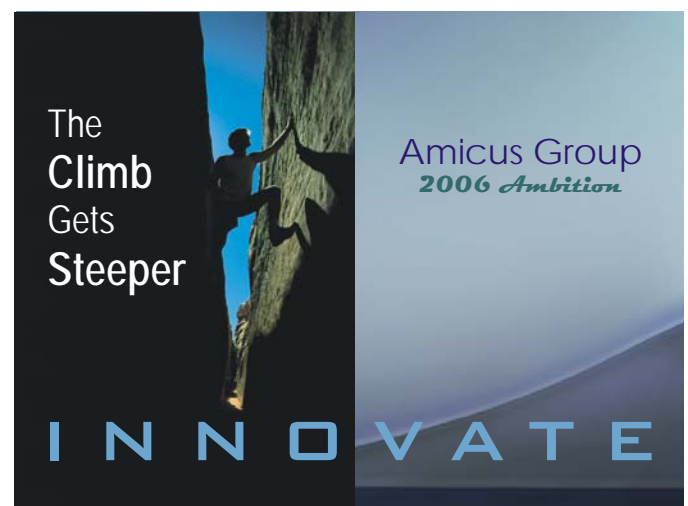
Trap #4: Bad / Boring Visuals – Audience’s sub-consciously judge us on the quality of our slides. Poorly designed graphics project a non-professional image, demonstrate a lack of respect, and contribute to negative impressions that can complicate our ability to communicate.

While there are situations where we can be forgiven for presenting bad visuals, we might be better off skipping them entirely and simply telling our story. Doing so appropriately focuses the audience’s attention on us rather than the bad visuals.

Yet slides are important. They serve two distinct purposes: 1) by triggering discussion points they help us presenters remain focused on the storyline; 2) they enhance the audience’s comprehension / recall of key points.

Attributes of a well crafted presentation are:

- ✓ **Conceptual Title Slide** – Oftentimes we underestimate the importance of the title slide. As the first image presented, it sets the tone of our presentation. Thus it is important that



... Create an eye catching conceptual title slide that establishes a theme for your presentation

we spend time creating an eye-catching title slide that incorporates strong conceptual imagery. This imagery should be maintained throughout the presentation.

- ✓ **Use Slide Titles to Advance the Story** – Each slide’s title should convey the essence of the point. As such, it should be strong, powerful, and informative. Make them dynamic and interesting similar to news headlines (e.g.: *Revenues Skyrocket in Q4*) rather than generic sounding ones that don’t move the story forward (e.g.: *Q4 Sales Report*).
- ✓ **Simplify: Pare and Prune** – Less is more. Make each slide more dynamic and legible by eliminating clutter, irrelevant points, and “dead” words. When you think it’s too simple, it’s probably right.
- ✓ **Emphasize Critical Information** – Clearly identify the most important information. Visually enhance it ... depict it prominently.



... Emphasize key facts, provide visual cues, minimize text

- ✓ **Incorporate Visual Pacing** – Avoid showing too many similar-looking slides in a row. Break the visual monotony and spice-up the graphic appeal by incorporating relevant photos, charts, tables, and diagrams that best match the story and project the message. Develop distinctive visuals to clearly signal transitions.
- ✓ **Proof Meticulously** – Prior to presenting, have a fresh set of eyes proof slides for errors and graphic issues. Also test in-room equipment to verify “last row” legibility. Improve color contrast or font sizes where necessary.
- ✓ **Communicate Graphically** – Design each slide to capture the audience’s attention, visually distinguish various types of information and where possible, illustrate the big picture. Also consider graphically organizing the presentation around an enlightening diagram that represents all the sections and highlights the one currently being discussed.

Relationship Marketing Strategies



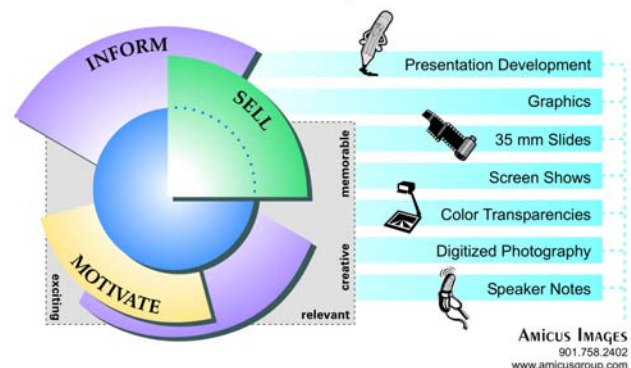
... Express your thoughts through graphics that illustrate key concepts

While PowerPoint enables anyone to create slides, developing high-impact visuals demands time and a critical eye ... as well as a basic understanding of universal design principles. A designer’s objective is to control what viewers perceive when viewing a composition by deliberately arranging every element.

The trick is to strike a balance between unity and variety. Too much unity and the slides become visually boring and repetitive; too much variety and they can look chaotic or disconnected.

When your audience demands to be impressed consider hiring an experienced professional to design your slides. We have been designing presentation graphics for nearly 20 years.

PRESENTATION DESIGN & PRODUCTION



Trap #5: Data Overload – While building a strong rationale for your views is critical, presenting too much data can be counter-productive. Why? It changes the focus from you to dull, lifeless, and sometimes trivial data. This tends to overwhelm the audience by forcing them to discover what’s really important. As a result you risk a mass zone-out and open the door to unproductive tangential issues.

As presenters it's our job to select, highlight, and talk about the data that best fits the storyline. We can make each point even more obvious by removing unnecessary chart elements, simplifying data labels, and adding insightful analytics. In the process, we may opt to present the data in a different format. Always retain the original data-dump as an appendix.



... Use photographs to connect emotionally

Trap #6: Failure to Interact – In reality, presenting is a dialog or exchange of information where the presenter does most of the talking. As such it is important to capture and maintain audience interest from the beginning. We do this by setting clear expectations, establishing and maintaining eye contact with someone in the audience, and continually monitoring their reception to ensure they “get it.”

When we neglect to “connect” with the audience, we tend to present what we want to say rather than what they need to hear. This can greatly decrease their attentiveness, response, and support of our message.

Often, we gauge our success by the questions that are asked. These indicate the degree of audience agreement, understanding and/or confusion.

By anticipating questions and preparing brief responses in advance, we gain credibility and are more likely to build consensus. When asked an unanticipated question, we can give ourselves time to formulate a response by rephrasing it.

Trap #7: Reading Your Slides – Great speakers are skilled at making scripted, teleprompter speeches sound spontaneous and natural. However there's a big difference between a teleprompter and slides. Teleprompters provide all the words and guidance on their delivery.

Slides are meant to trigger our discussion and focus our storytelling. As such, they purposefully lack crucial detail and demand further explanation. Thus, we can't possibly capture an audience's attention by reading slides.

Furthermore, reading slides insults the audience's intelligence and can give the perception that we are either unprepared or insecure in our views.

As presenters, we must tell the story in our own natural and spontaneous words. By doing so, we demonstrate our passion and confidence.

With passion ... our voice becomes more animated by naturally accenting key points with changes in pitch, volume, and tempo. With passion ... we constantly gauge the audience's reaction. With passion ... we express ourselves through meaningful facial and hand gestures.

When we simply read slides, our delivery oftentimes becomes monotonous and boring. This is especially true when presenting bullet slides.

Confidence comes from thoroughly knowing the facts, the story, and trusting our ability to communicate with conviction. Remember, the show must go on. If doubt takes over, our credibility nosedives. Practice helps to build confidence.

Conclusion – We have all seen incredible presenters who have spent years sharpening their presentation skills. All are passionate about sharing their stories. We can become just as effective by avoiding these seven common presentation traps.



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The Amicus team develops innovative and compelling business strategies for world-leading service and leisure-time brands — hotels, resorts, travel services, vacation packaging, casino gaming / entertainment, as well as other experience-driven organizations.

Amicus focuses in four primary disciplines: brand-building, loyalty / direct marketing, customer care, and enterprise strategic planning.

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