How to Addict Your Audience to Your PowerPoint

By Cliff Atkinson (published March 25, 2003 at www.MarketingProfs.com)

If PowerPoint were classified as a drug, which one would it be?

Judging by its bad reputation these days, most PowerPoints would probably be classified as narcotics, sedatives or depressants.

But with only minor changes to the molecular structure of your thinking, this coma-inducing software can become a powerful force to addict your audience to the mind-expanding content of your presentation.

To get started, just follow this three-step prescription:

Step 1: Go Cold Turkey

The first step to depressant-free presentations is to take the dramatic step of going "cold turkey" from PowerPoint's most toxic traits:

Stop using templates . Templates restrict, constrain and force information into a small part of the screen, and make the viewing experience visually boring and tedious. If templates really worked in media, you'd see them in film and television. You don't see them, so don't use them.

Trim the text . Many presentations read like a brochure. But that's what brochures are for. If the screen is filled with text, your audience will read it, and not pay attention to you. Delete the text, and saturate your screen with images and color.

Lose the logo . Trust that your audience will remember who you are and what company you represent. Leave your logo on the first and last slide, and let the quality of the presentation in between be your most effective and memorable branding.

Just as every great book begins with a blank page, every presentation should begin with a blank screen, bursting with visual possibility.

Step 2: Find the Appropriate Dosage

In a medical context, a doctor will perform a thorough exam before prescribing the appropriate medication for your physical condition and history.

Likewise, your first and most important presentation procedure is to get to know your audience in advance, and to tailor your information to their needs. Unfortunately, there's no "magic presentation pill" that you can administer to every audience.

Many presentations make the mistake of being "All About Me." They go like this: This is Who We Are, this is Our History, these are Our Clients, these are Our Capabilities, and this is Why You Should Choose Us.

But where is your audience in all this? What about their problems? What about their concerns? What

about the solutions you're supposed to offer them?

If you're giving a sales presentation, go directly to your prospect's website, select their logo, right click on your mouse and Copy, open a blank PowerPoint slide and Paste. Build your presentation from there.

As you create your presentation, don't overdose your audience with too much information presented too soon. You're an expert in your domain, but your audience is not, so pace the information in steps. Every key concept should have its own slide, and if it's particularly complex, should be presented one element at a time, either with a layered build or over a series of slides.

Step 3: Develop Dependency

As you work out your pace and flow, keep your audience wanting more. This is good addiction, because you're feeding the healthy habit of "users" of knowledge. To get your audience into an addictive state, you can:

Give them less . Withhold key information from your slides. Leave something to the imagination. When you've cut back on text, you make your audience dependent on you to explain the interesting images on the screen. They should hang on your every word, and image. If you want to give them detailed text and numbers, print them out separately as a handout.

Be mysterious . Don't label or explain everything, especially not the obvious. The best PowerPoint presentations would make no sense to anyone who saw them without hearing the speaker. You want to make the presentation experience dependent on you to explain and solve the mystery.

Reveal the meaning from the middle . In a healthy presentation experience, there are three parties--you, your audience, and your media. You can craft a synergy between the three that's more than the sum of the parts.

Think of your entire presentation as a choreographed persuasive experience:

1. Establish a comfortable social atmosphere through initial conversations.
2. Present information through the use of intriguing images and graphics.
3. Unpack the concepts on the slide, in your own words that are tailored to the audience.
4. Engage the audience with the story about their situation, and dialogue with them.
5. Deliver the climax of the persuasive case in the very last slide, leaving them engaged and eager for more conversation.

Once you've managed to addict your audience to your PowerPoint, you can look forward to a much more stimulating experience for you, and leave them coming back for more.

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