Presentations and the Dreaded Powerpoint

Notes from Jonny Baker put together for CMS Comms training event July 2012

Communication

We have all seen presentations that inspired us and we've all seen ones that make us wince! You can learn as much from ones you don't like as ones you do. Get a notebook and head a page "presentation observations" and record your insights from what you experience. Try googling 'worlds worst powerpoint' or 'how not to present' or something and see what you find.

The heart of presenting is communication. You have something to say, to get across, to grab the attention of and make an impact on your audience. How can this be unforgettable? If people don't feel your passion it's not worth doing! So make it a memorable experience that you had to be there for.

What do you want to say?
It sounds simple but really distilling this down is a big part of the battle.

Who are you saying it to?
Put yourself in the audience's shoes. Are they informed already? Are they motivated or unmotivated? Do you need to grab their attention? Will they respond to a deductive or inductive approach?

How are you going to say it?
However much time you spend on the content of a presentation, you should be spending at least as much time again on thinking how to communicate that content. The content is the easy part.

What medium will you use?
There is huge variety available so use your imagination. There is no right way. It doesn't have to be powerpoint!

The power of a good idea and a good story
It's not about slick technology. It's about ideas and stories on which everything else hangs.

Less it more
Keep it simple, focussed, and distilled. Once you have put it all together what could you leave out to sharpen it?

Be yourself
You will communicate best when you are comfortable and able to be yourself and play to your strengths. Find your own style and approach. But don't let fear stop you exploring new ways and ideas.

My Approach to Powerpoint/Keynote

[I am not an expert in any way on this - in fact I have never been asked to talk about it before. So take what is useful but develop your own approach. But this is as simple as I think I can make my approach reflecting on it...]

It's a visual format so use **images**!
Fill the screen with one image that has an impact in some way - it is arresting, tells a story, is ambiguous, shocking, amusing, surprising, begs questions. It adds punch to what you are saying or opens the way for what you are saying.
It's very rare that I use more than one image in a slide - there are a lot of cluttered messy slides around that mean well but end up looking hideous.
Use your own photos - you can't beat that because it connects with your context and story. If you are not taking photographs why not?!
Use other peoples - (see resources section below)
Use at least 800x600pixels wide nothing less. If you are enlarging it to highlight a section use higher resolution than this so it doesn't pixellate.
Don't use any clip art ever!
Avoid cheesy Christian shots (you can overdose on sunsets, rainbows and crosses!) and indeed cheesy shots in general.

If **words** are necessary use one or a short phrase.
Never put the words on the screen that are word for word what you are saying to then read along with - aaarrrgh!
Choose a font you like and stick with it
Sans serif are better for short words and phrases
I hate Times Roman - why use the default?!
Comic sans is a crime - delete it from your machine.
Use black or white unless you have good reason to do something else
Avoid drop shadow
Beware too many bullet points
Beware three point sermon slides beginning with P!
Place the text over part of the image that makes it visible and consider whether to create a box as a background for the text to make it visible.
Avoid all transitions unless good reason to use
I do sometimes add a whole quotation that I think is particularly powerful to fill the screen but use this in small measure. It's the one thing you could read off a slide!

Movies dropped in can be powerful.
Find out the formats to use that work with the software you are using. Generally speaking you can change the format (see resources section below).
Don't show any movies smaller than 640px wide and don't stretch them larger or they will look fuzzy. Place the movie in the centre of the screen with a black background. Set it to start on a click.
Use your own - most cameras and phones will shoot movies now
Use other peoples (see resources section below).

Audio, especially with images can be powerful. I never add sound effects. Find out the technical format info that will work with your software. If it doesn't work, change the format (see below).

I always have **stories** at the heart of a presentation. How can they gain emotional presence through the use of a slide - e.g. a close up of a face, a sequence of images, a shot that tells its own story?

Think about your **beginning** and **ending** slides. The first slide will arouse interest and may be up for a while before you begin. The last slide will linger in the mind and again may remain on the screen when you sit down.

Think about a creative slide that introduces you, that tells a story about you.

I only ever use fade to transition between slides. Other **transitions** are often naff and gimmicky.

I almost never use corporate branding bars. The challenge with them is how the aesthetic of the bar fits with the rest. One way round this is to top and tail with the branding bar.

I very very rarely use a template.

I often produce **handout notes** but not slides for people to takeaway. Include mechanism for ongoing contact and feedback on those notes. I do not give the notes out before or during the presentation, but afterwards!

Is there a ritual or **a takeaway** you can give people that is incorporated into your presentation? That will help land the message and gives space for response and reminds people of it later.

For **the presentation itself**...
In advance I always find out what technology is there and if it fits what I need. In particular will there be sound, will the laptop be run from the back or front, do I need to transfer my presentation on a memory stick? If so I check the fonts transfer ok.
I get there ahead of time so I can check it is all working.
I generally have notes for myself (my screen has splits with notes on it - ask someone about this if you don't know what I'm talking about). These should be simple - cue cards, or a list of slides with prompts for you next to it.
I never read the talk out - ideally I know it.
I do not face the screen when I talk. Look at the audience. Make eye contact.
I try and exude warmth and humanness and show my feelings, excitement and passion - wear your heart on your sleeve.
I speak up and clearly. I try not to mumble and shuffle!
Be authentic.
Be you!

Resources

Imagination
Your best resource is our own creativity and imagination. Enjoy it, explore it, use it, develop it. See this as a fun adventure. As I suggest above get a page in a journal or notebook and start to take notes on communication you see that really works (and doesn't work) to capture insights and tips for yourself.

Media
There are hundreds of ways to present! Don't be limited.
One format for presenting I have used which is a challenging discipline is pechakucha, a format where you have 20 slides for 20 seconds with no text on them - see www.pecha-kucha.org
Another inspiring approach is digital storytelling - see http://www.photobus.co.uk/?id=534

Software
Powerpoint is ubiquitous but can be used well.
There are online programmes and other free versions to put slides and presentations together - such as sliderocket, 280slides (google presentation software or something similar to find out what's available).
Keynote is mac's presentation software which I generally use.
A fun one that is free and makes a change is prezi.com though it can make you go a bit dizzy!
Most photo software has a slideshow option to show sequences of images.
PDF files can be shown as a slideshow (on fullscreen mode) which is another way to present.

A Free Guide
There is a ton of advice out there on presenting which can be helpful but can be overwhelming too. Seth Godin has written a very simple guide on really bad powerpoint and how to avoid it which is the best simple guide I have come across which you can download here - http://www.sethgodin.com/freeprize/reallybad-1.pdf . You'll see I have taken a couple of his bits of advice on board.

Images
The photography session will give advice on taking your own photos and editing them.
The internet means that a ton of images are available to use.
I mainly use flickr.com which has a collection of images under a creative commons license. This means that permission is given to use them under certain conditions which you can read - generally non commercial use. To access this simply go to http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/ . When you find an image, click on it and then click all sizes and select large probably. Credit the photographer either very small in the corner, in your handout notes, or at the end of your presentation.
This article has some other suggestions on sources which may be helpful - http://www.prayerscapes.com/Links/copyright_free_images_and_photos.html

Movies
The filming session will give advice on taking and editing movies.
There are huge numbers available through the internet. The two big sources are youtube.com and vimeo.com

Some are available for download and there are a whole host of ways to rip a video from youtube or a dvd - google to find one that works for you. I have used a ton of ways over the years - my current main method is youtube5 - see http://www.verticalforest.com/youtube5-extension/

There are a number of ways of transferring video formats. The one I use is http://www.online-convert.com/ . You simply upload a movie and select the format you want it in and then download it - genius!

Audio
This is fairly easy - use mp3 which is widely used. If you need another format use http://www.online-convert.com/

A Geeky Friend
Everyone needs a friend who is a little bit more geeky than them but not so much so that you can't understand a word they are saying! Find one or two and ask for their help. CMS IT and Comms guys are really rather lovely and helpful. They love an excuse to get involved in helping others share their first loves of communicating and being geeks! Don't be shy.

Proost
I run a download media company (in my spare time!) www.proost.co.uk which contains a bundle of movies, albums, books of liturgies. Everything is downloadable and if you subscribe you can download what you like when you like for a year which is great value.

Copyright
Copyright is a nightmare. It exists to protect artists and should be respected. There are some centralising licenses re audio usage and film usage. Beyond that you've got to find a way to work with it that you feel is honourable, fair, ethical and pragmatic. The law can be an ass it has to be said!

Stay in Touch

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