

# Create Professional PowerPoint Presentations

Contributed by Todd Robertson

Developing presentations has become an essential skill in many lines of work. It's actually pretty easy to whip presentations together using PowerPoint or other presentation programs. However, it takes a bit of diligence to develop effective presentations. One of the biggest mistakes people make is putting too much content on a slide and in a presentation. Because slides are just a support to your presentation, a key tip to remember - LESS IS MORE. You can give outstanding presentations by just following a few guidelines.

In keeping your presentations simple and concise, there are some general guidelines that you should follow:

- Stay away from using your program's bells and whistles. All the tricky little transitions, sound effects and animation options can be a real distraction to your audience. Only use these tools when you want to highlight specific information or when they assist your message.
- Pick one or two simple slide transitions and stick with them throughout the entire presentation. Only use the melting slide transition if you are doing a presentation on global warming.
- Keep everything consistent - color schemes, fonts, placement of text, titles and graphics.
- Keep your images and photos to a minimum on each slide - too many can be very distracting. Also, put minimal text or graphic information on one slide. If there is too much information, people won't read it. If you have trouble fitting everything you need to say on the slide, create a new slide.
- Try to keep less than six lines per slide, and less than six words per line. A full screen of text just looks like too much to most audiences and they won't even look at it.
- Always remember that your slides are there to support your presentation. Many people just read the text off their slides and make the slides the star of the show. In that case why would they even be there listening to you?
- Be aware of contrast. Some projectors will not handle subtleties. So your text and information should be clear and legible.
- Step away from your computer about 10 to 15 feet with your slide on full-screen. This will help you see what is legible or not to an audience.
- Use professional graphics, photos, illustration, animation and video to support your information. A presentation with effective support media will set you at a much higher position as a presenter, and create lasting impact on your audience.

One of the first things you should do before putting together a presentation is to use an existing template or create a new one. This is something that often requires a professional graphic designer - so call Hyperspective if you need a good template design (selfless plug). With an understanding of PowerPoint, you can easily create your own template, or use one of the many free existing ones.

Another essential element in creating a presentation that is easy to read and professional is the use of fonts. There are some important guidelines to follow in the use of fonts:

- Your font sizes should range from 24pt to 32pt. Definitely do not go under 16pt, as anything smaller will become illegible. If you are intending to transmit presentations over the web, it is ideal to use font sizes on the larger end of that scale.
- Stay away from using all capitalized letters, except in circumstances where you want a message to stand out. All-caps are harder to read than lower case, sentence case or title case.
- Use sans serif fonts like Verdana, Arial, Helvetica and Geneva because studies show they are much easier to read, and

they are available on most computers if you are sending your presentation to others. A common mistake is using cool-looking fonts, narrow, condensed or serif font styles in presentations. They may look better to you, but audiences may have a much harder time reading your text. If it is hard to read, they won't read it.

- Stick to using a format of two or less fonts. Usually, you would use one font style for headlines, like Verdana Bold, and one font for the text content, like Arial normal. The main thing in using more than one font is being consistent with how you use them.

- Use font colors that provide the best contrast with your background. It is usually best to use white, yellow or very light color on dark backgrounds. You should use very dark colors, specifically, dark blue, black or dark gray colors on light backgrounds. Generally, red fonts don't work well on most backgrounds when they are projected.

Other key ingredients in a presentation are backgrounds, colors and charts. Using these elements wisely can make your presentation pop, but poor choices can ruin it.

- First and most important, find a color scheme with 2-3 colors and use them consistently throughout the presentation. Remember, text colors need to be in high contrast to background colors - light to dark. Stay away from red and green colors. They don't project well, and can be unappealing if overused.

- Your backgrounds should be simple. If you choose to use simple textures, gradations or watermarks, they should all be very subtle. Backgrounds with too much detail will make your text illegible, and will be distracting. The best thing is to use a solid color. If you want a professional-looking designed background with some texture, flare or detail, it may be advisable to hire an experienced graphic designer.

- In creating charts and graphs, it's best just to use the PowerPoint wizard. Be sure to stick with the same or similar range of colors as used in your presentation color scheme. Having every color in the rainbow on a chart, might help distinguish data, but will look unprofessional and unappealing.

I have been designing and developing presentations for more than 15 years, and by sticking to the basics, have yielded tremendous success. Of course, these are just guidelines, and any rule is meant to be broken. But in general, following these guidelines will help you maintain a position of professionalism and expertise in the subject you are presenting, and increase your potential to captivate audiences and realize results.

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