



Build Your Business

An eNewsletter for
CEOs looking to
grow their companies.

High-value, "how-to" articles on customer-attraction, sales development, leadership, and best-practices in HR, IT, product development, communication, financial operations, engineering and M&A/value creation.

PowerPoint Makes You Stupid

Is your presentation a shapeless
"blob" of jumbled slides?

If it is, you're likely to fail in your next speech.

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DASH Consulting, Inc.
Strategic Media and Presentation Training

PowerPoint Makes You Stupid

Master communicators tell stories and
have one or two major points.
They're smart enough to not try and communicate
too much in a presentation. Are you?

I call it the blob.

You have to deliver a presentation. "Not to worry," you think, "I'll just use Bill's slide deck and add a few slides from Suzy's board presentation and combine them with that sales meeting PowerPoint I did."

Bad move.

You've just taken the easy way out and cobbled together a blob: an often-meaningless compendium of slide-ware that lacks a clear point. It's really tough to effectively communicate the blob. It's like trying to look good by assembling a wardrobe of borrowed clothes – an unlikely route to success.

As a presentation coach, I see a lot of blobs: untidy jumbles of bullet points and mismatched graphics that ramble and bore audiences; stiff; "Save As" masterpieces culled from slide decks that litter the corporate computer network. The most painful part of the blob? Watching an otherwise smart, capable, experienced CEO try to deliver it.

PowerPoint makes you stupid – if you don't think things through.

So here are three ways to develop smart presentations that are clear, concise, compelling and feature an abundantly clear message.

The common denominator in these three methods? No PowerPoint slides to begin with (oh, unclench those butt cheeks; you can add them later).

ONE

Go to your local coffee shop, or just somewhere quiet: conference room, spare office, your den - it doesn't matter. But shut off all your electronic leashes and just think for a while. Bring some sticky notes. Think about your audience and the key points you want them to understand after you finished talking. Think about how

much time you have and what stories and examples you can use to illustrate what you want to say. Write two or three words describing each idea on the sticky notes.

If you spend 45 minutes in think mode you should have dozens of sticky notes spread out on a table. Now organize them into buckets. It doesn't have to be precise. Just group the notes by general topic. Next, rank those groups by order of importance. Have you duplicated anything? Is there a clear message emerging? Can you think of a logical flow that connects the groups?

If so, congratulations, you've just built a presentation that just might make sense. If not, call in the cavalry. Get some help from trusted peers or colleagues and listen to their input. Then stand up, stand back and talk through what's on the sticky note collection. Does it flow? Is there a clear point?

TWO

Get a blank legal pad (or whiteboard) and draw several big squares on it. You're going Hollywood. On one corner of the pad/whiteboard scribble the "talk track" i.e. the words you'll be uttering - doesn't have to be a full written speech, just some key phrases, stories or statistics. Now think: If you were a Hollywood screenwriter what would be in the first panel of your storyboard - the second - the third, etc? When you have a word or hand-drawn graph in each panel, try out your "talk track." That is, stand up, stand back and talk through the draft presentation - out loud. It doesn't have to be perfect, of course, but does it work? Does it communicate your key messages?

THREE

Pretend you're a newspaper reporter or blogger. You have to write a story about your presentation. What's the headline? No, really. What is it? Force yourself to write down a 5-7-word headline for your presentation - you probably look at news online - if the article doesn't have an interesting headline, do you read it? So what's going to make your presentation interesting among all the other speeches the audience might hear that day?

Every other piece of content for that presentation be it a story, example, anecdote, statistic, metaphor, analogy, etc. has to help support the headline. Or it doesn't get included.

Think of these three approaches as "Weight Watchers for Words." Using any one of them will help you get just the right amount of content - and all three approaches will free you from the shackles of PowerPoint, which while a fine product is often mis-used to produce blobs of meaningless nonsense that do nothing other than waste audiences' time.

When it comes to standing up, standing back and talking out your presentation, you won't want to do it. It'll feel dorky.

Do it anyway.

There isn't a master communicator who doesn't practice obsessively and out loud. It's what separates great speakers from good speakers. It's what comedians do all the time: they test material out loud.

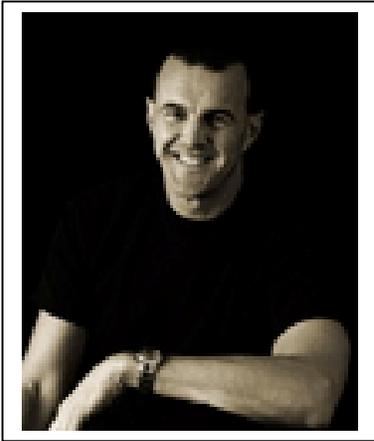
If your material passes muster, try it on a few colleagues. Try and avoid people who report to you; you're looking for impartial, honest feedback. Stand and deliver the first 5 minutes of your presentation and solicit their input. What did they hear? Will it resonate with the target audience?

After you go through the above process, then - and only then - crack your laptop and start thinking about visuals. So far as I know it is legal in all 50 states to deliver a presentation and NOT use PowerPoint slides. But if you do, remember slides are just a visual aid – not the entire presentation. Want to talk about your company's contract with General Motors? Don't put the details up on the screen, just put the GM logo or a photo of its nearby plant, and then talk through the details. If you write it, they will read it – instead of listening to you.

I've used this process with lots of Fortune 500 executives and generally three things come out of it. First, they hate being videotaped and critiqued without the security blanket of slides. Second, they typically cut about 50 percent of their slides - because after developing the words first, they often say things like, "Oh, I don't need that slide; I'll just talk about that topic." Third, they often realize that PowerPoint makes them stupid.

Now I know what you're thinking – who has this kind of time? Well, respectfully: you do. We all do. You have 15 minutes a day to become a better presenter – you shower, you jog, you drive to work. Use that time to carve out a few minutes and practice out loud. If Apple boss Steve Jobs can spend four to five hours rehearsing his hour-long keynote presentations, you can find some time. Your audience will thank you for it, and most importantly when it comes to the big presentation, you'll avoid the blob.

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Author's Biography

Dave Yewman is a communications expert who coaches senior executives on how to present more effectively. Over the past decade he's advised executives at numerous companies including, Adidas, CBS, Clif Bar, HP, Microsoft and T-Mobile on how to master non verbal communications when speaking. He is the author of "On Getting to the Point" and a former senior public relations agency executive. Yewman was the general manager of Weber Shandwick's Portland office as it grew from three to 25 people.



What does your company do? And why would anyone care?

Those are two simple questions to which companies often have long, complicated, jargon-filled, boring answers. And that's a shame because every company has a good story that can be used to attract different audiences such as investors, prospects, customers, partners, reporters and even employees.

In a nutshell, DASH Consulting uses video to help companies get to the point by coaching executives on how to develop a clear, concise, compelling narrative about what their company does. It's simple. But often neglected. As one client put it, "Videotape is ugly. But it works."

Does it ever. Here's how we do it:

Media Training

We've worked with companies and their PR firms to deliver positive media training sessions for more than a decade. Our sessions include follow-up refresher courses and a private, individual, digital CD-ROM of you on camera. The CD is sent to you twenty-four hours after the session and also includes personalized coaching tips and examples.

Presentation Training

There are a few simple steps that can help you become a good public speaker by fixing any verbal, vocal or visual tics that negatively impact your presentation style.

Elevator Speech

We help companies develop clear, concise explanations that meet the "So What? Who Cares?" test. We interview company executives and in many cases use videotape to capture the right language – language that's the most critical component in effectively selling your product, service or company.



*Additional insights and value from leading authorities
in their areas. Articles in the February, 2011 publication:*

Are you Leaving Money on the Table?

Mark Paul

You may be stunting your corporate growth and company value due to your team's mispriced offerings. How can your team learn what the market will bear?

How to Align Information Technology (IT) with your Business Needs

Manoj Garg

You know IT is needed for business success. Yet, sometimes you have a nagging feeling that you are not getting value from your investments. This article discusses how to align IT with your business.

Maximizing Sales Velocity Despite Economic Headwinds

Bill Etheredge

Have you allowed the downturn to be a convenient excuse for recent financial performance? This article strips away the superficial convenience of financial downturns and shows how to *capitalize* on it.

Using HR to Boost Company Performance

Iris Sasaki

If you are interested in dramatically increasing your employees' and managers' performance, there is a little-known secret that will leverage your strengths – and those around you – to accomplish far more.

What Does a Lost Customer Cost You?

Patrick Wheeler

This article discusses that affect that losing customers has on your business, which could amount to 10% to 20% or more.

Clueless in the C-Suite

Tom Cox

CEOs and others in the C-Suite can find themselves in a bubble, an alternate reality, detached from what's really happening in the business. Figure out if you're in a bubble and how you can get out.

Maximizing the Value of Your Exit Strategy

Brent Freeman

Do you have an exit strategy for your company? Do you know what you need to do to get the maximum value for your company? This article will give you 6 ways to maximize your company's value.

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How to Take Your Products International

Richard Biggs

Exporting isn't simply an add-on to your existing business. It should be part of an overall strategy to develop your business. This article takes a close look at the opportunities and threats that exporting can bring to your company.

The Secret to Building a Stronger Business

Alexander Stein

Your company's most valuable asset: a psychologically savvy chief executive. In this article, learn how to deploy yourself more effectively.

How to Minimize Project Risk

Mike Miles

Are your projects often late? Do unexpected events impact your projects? This article addresses how CEOs can create an environment for others to identify and manage project risks.

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