

Best Practices for Slide Design

PowerPoint is a powerful business tool but only if it is used to its best advantage. Matt Thornhill, President of Audience First, a Midlothian, VA business that offers presentation training says, "PowerPoint makes slides; it doesn't give presentations. Remember that you are creating slides to support a spoken presentation." With that in mind, here are eight things you can do to create powerful slides to support your presentations.

1. Keep it simple. Don't use too many words or too many graphics. Figures and numbers do not translate well on screen. Refer to figures and numbers in your handouts where they can be digested more thoroughly, later. If you need to emphasize a statistic in PowerPoint, consider using a graphic or image to convey the point.
2. Use fonts judiciously. Use the same font for your entire slide set and use no more than two complementary fonts (i.e. Ariel and Ariel Bold). Regardless of what font style you choose, be sure the text can be seen in the back of the room. A font size of no less than 24 pt should be used for general text. For titles or headings, use 36 to 44 points
3. Use color well. A white or light background with black or dark text works best. A screen image with a dark background and light text will wash out, but dark text on a light background will maintain its visual intensity.
4. Don't use cheesy or tired clip art. If you found your image in the clipart library that came with PowerPoint, your audience has seen it 1000 times. Use outside images and graphics for variety and visual appeal.
5. Limit bullet points and text. The best slides may have no text at all. Remember the slides are meant to support the speaker, not make the speaker superfluous. Well designed slides are worthless without the presentation that accompanies them; you'll know you have achieved this when someone who missed your presentation asks you for your slides and later tells you they had no idea what the point of the presentation was.
6. Use bullet points properly. Bullet point should never contain full sentences. Use bullet points to deliver key ideas. Remember the 6 x 6 rule: bullet points should have no more than six words and there should be no more than six bullet points on the screen.
7. Have a visual theme. Similar to the library of clip art available in PowerPoint, it's probable that your audience has seen every template which is available through the program. Go online to find other PowerPoint designs that are available or create your own with a simple background and color scheme.
8. Avoid movement of slide elements. While moving text or graphics around on the slide may look like fun, it's very distracting to the audience. Avoid the "build" animation feature unless it is imperative that your points be revealed slowly.