

Stop with boring presentations!

By Michael Moesslang (www.michael-moesslang.de)

Long before there were computers there were bad presentations. And there still are. All of you who attend presentations regularly experience this by suffering hours of boredom where conference speakers fail to use your and their time wisely. Most of the presentations are too detailed for the audience, use visuals that are far too complex, and generally show a lack of passion from the orator.



When you think of technical presentations, you may think of dark rooms, masses of slides, and a voice at the front of the room narrating in detail “the facts” for the audience. However, there are definitely exceptions and ways to deliver a speech that manage to reach the goal content wise and at the same time persuade and entertain the audience. The worst belief is that your presentation has to be like presentations have always been in your

company as it’s “the standard”. Being standard—another word is mediocre—never leads to convincing. And isn’t this what it is all about? To really convince your audience? Lots of technicians think they are not in sales and therefore they do not need to be convincing. So very wrong. To convince an audience is selling observations, conclusions, and projections. That is also sales, is it not?

To reach your audience and have it leave satisfied and impressed after your presentation, you’d better think about breaking several of these standard “patterns” and relate to some of the rules of human communication. One of these is to speak in a clear and understandable way with as few technical abbreviations or terms as possible. Never assume that your audience has the same level of technical knowledge you have. Slides filled with masses of text in small fonts do not support the impact of your words, they destroy them. Visuals are far better and should clearly show what you wish to point out. Never forget that your audience will see the visual—maybe a technical illustration or a spreadsheet—for the very first time. They will need time to understand and are not able to listen to you during that process. People cannot read and listen at the same time. To get and keep an alert audience you are best speak with suspense and use loops. A loop is a teasing announcement creating suspense. In the following time the audience will wait curiously for the later clarification of facts and therefore stay with you.

The rule is that a slide’s function is to support the orator and what he is going to tell his audience. The slide itself can never be the presentation and the orator never be the simple reader of its content. That leads us to the rule that a slide should only show as much as the

audience is able to read and understand within a second or two. Most slides are filled with text or visuals that show much too complex illustrations. The perfect slide is not the one being over-completed with information, but the one reduced to the max. Meaning, there is nothing more to be deleted. What are possible solutions?

- Write only keywords instead of sentences
- Use more slides with fewer bullet points
- Let every single bullet point only fade in when you mention it
- The same is valuable for visuals: show each part only when explaining it

That leads to another point: timing. Most orators click their slide, read it to themselves and then to their audience. This is the best way to bore them. A more exciting way needs preparation and eventually a function of PowerPoint most people don't use. You'll need preparation to know exactly your content and when to say what and how. Rehearse several times. Now you are able to start with your segue and at the very moment you say the keyword, click to show it on your slide. That makes your presentation much more professional and creates higher impact.

This function of PowerPoint might help you: *Presenter View* is mostly not found and therefore seldom used by orators. Using *Presenter View* is a great way to view your presentation with speaker notes on your laptop, while your audience views the notes-free presentation on the projected screen. You find it—depending on your version of PowerPoint—at *slide show > Set up Show...* and then in the lower right part of the panel, called *multiple monitors*. Check *how presenters view* and you will have the two different screens as soon as you have a second screen or projector connected. That helps you create perfect segues to the next chart or bullet with the right timing.

If there are only keywords on your slides you cannot use them as handout. You need to prepare an extra more detailed handout for those that have not attended your presentation. A handout always is a separate document with additional information. As a simple way to create a functional handout use *notes pages* in your presentation. You can print out pages with a small view of your slide on top of the page and below notes. This is only a little more work but will achieve much better results.

If you need more notes than there is space on one page, duplicate your slide and use this duplicate for the rest of your text. In the presentation you can use *hide slide* to not show this duplicated slide on the screen.

These points were important for a presentation that supports you. Nevertheless it's you who has to convince your audience. That means once again to rehearse each of your presentations several times, I suggest usually six to twelve times. That sound like a lot of time. But it is worth it. Imagine what and how you can improve.

- You will discover duplication in your presentation only when speaking it out loud
- You will find perfect transition from one subject to another
- You will assimilate your content and therefore know what to say when
- You will improve your body language including facial expression and use of the stage
- You can improve your vocal variety and identify parts that you want to emphasize

The best way to practice is to find a quiet place, maybe your office or living room. Stand upright and visualize your audience in front of you. Then speak your presentation out loud as if there were an audience. The first three or four times you might need notes. Then you know your content and can concentrate on important details like segue, voice, body language etc.

If you are going to get up in front of your audience and say that the design of your strategy matters, that the design of your software or hardware matters, that your content matters, then at the very least the structure and visuals you use also need to be the result of incredible

design. Then, and only then you can give presentations better than the rest out there. And win over your audience.

Make your presentation as short as possible. If there is a preset time, think about not to use the full time. Maybe the rest of the scheduled time you can discuss with your audience. The reason is that the attention span of any audience gets shorter and shorter. The younger your audience, the shorter the span. That has to do with their habits using entertainment, TV, the internet, multimedia cell phones and all this stuff. An orator the audience loves to listen to is speaking in a highly fascinating way. He uses the following techniques to create suspense.

❑ Do not start by saying “Hello”, “Good morning”, “Thanks for being here” or reading them your agenda, this is boring. Start for example with an ice-breaking statement out of your presentation that is surprising. Don’t argue whether it is right or not. The structure of your presentation now leads to the culminating point when you explain why your statement is true. Or could be true under some circumstances. If you want to greet your audience, do so after your ice-breaking statement.

❑ Do not use more than three arguments to persuade your audience. If there are more, use them afterwards in a discussion or when you will be asked questions. Your first argument is the one with the middle range of convincing power, the second the one with the weakest convincing power and the third and last the one with the highest convincing power.

❑ Use loops as in motion pictures: Open the loop by announcing something without giving out details, then change the plot—maybe you go back into history or to the reasons that led to the announced something—and when there is enough tension close the loop by giving the announced details to the audience.

❑ Use short breaks to create tension. If you use a word or a number that is important, you can exaggerate it by making a short break before the word: “This year we have created a new product, it’s called ... 9K7” I call this technique “speak with a colon”. The colon is the place where there is the break and—as important—the important word (or expression) is at the end of the sentence. You wouldn’t write a text like this, but when speaking you can use this. Instead of saying “The 9K7 is our new product.” you change the syntax: “Our new product is called: 9K7.” And the colon is a noticeable break. To make a break noticeable by the audience the best way is to count silently up to three. This is because an orator has a different perception of time than the audience. A 1-2-3-break seems to be very long for you, however, not so for your participants.

Outstanding presentations never come from acting like the rest of folks out there. It is extremely hard work to get there. But the result will be that you make more profit with less effort. Be an outstanding presenter, - those that are the ones who lead.

Yours sincerely
Michael Moesslang

Michael Moesslang, Dipl.Kommunikationswirt BAW, Dipl. Master European Business Trainer, Author for Personal Impact and Rhetoric captivates his audiences with keynote speeches and seminars on the subject of „PreSensation®“. With his integrity and professional authenticity he convinces his international public. He understands how to integrate with his participants effectively and therefore ensures sustainable results. As an expert in his field he includes insights from psychology and behavioural science. Michael Moesslang has gained his experience as keynote speaker and lecturer – also for St. Galler Business School - in more than 1000 speeches and presentations. www.Michael-Moesslang.de