

# Engineer the Use of your PowerPoint Slides More Powerfully

From [Mackays Musings](#) - Steve Mackay – IDC Technologies

Dear Colleagues,

I think you will agree that most of us have used PowerPoint slides at some stage in our careers. However, I often cringe when I see how slides are used in presentations – boring, rambling and not particularly useful – with an endless list of them thrust at a disinterested and confused audience.

It is certainly impossible to deliver a good technical presentation without some use of PowerPoint slides – especially using graphics and diagrams in the engineering field - a great way to keep attention and explain complexity. After all, most engineering professionals appreciate a diagrammatic representation as opposed to boring text.

The expression: **Death by PowerPoint** is certainly a very real concern.

## **Avoid Baffling your Audience**

However, many presenters go off at a tangent and think their PowerPoint presentations are absolutely brilliant. Riddled with bulleted text which is baffling to the audience. but serve as a crutch to the presenter to remember what to say. And the PowerPoint slides are treated as the actual stand-alone presentation which can be referred to later by those who couldn't attend the session.

## **Bullet lists are Useless**

Bullet lists are absolutely useless. Conveying a lot of information in a few dysfunctional bits of text. Often riddled with silly little bits of clip art which have no other meaning apart from disinterested decoration.

And as you know – if you send the slides (with bits of disjointed text) to someone who couldn't attend your presentation but who wants to follow your presentation – you are absolutely wasting your time. You are the presentation. Not some set of disjointed PowerPoint slides.

## **Graphics are the Key**

Graphics on slides are a very powerful way of connecting with the audience. A suggestion from a guru on the subject (Edward Tufte) who remarks:

*“Graphical excellence is that which gives to the viewer the greatest number of ideas in the shortest time with the least ink in the smallest space.”*

## **Written Notes Add Enormous Value to your Presentation**

A solution is to actually put together written notes in the notes section of the PowerPoint slide. You probably recoil at the thought of putting everything into notes. But a set of PowerPoint's on their own are absolutely useless for later review. Unless the notes are attached.

## **A Few Suggestions**

A few suggestions to really liven up your next PowerPoint presentation:

- Use well thought out graphics rather than demented disjointed bits of text
- Use headings and text where absolutely required (but not as an aide memoire for yourself) – focus on the audience's needs
- Avoid meaningless clip art, garish colours and animation unless they add value
- Keep your presentation simple and understandable
- Try and give comprehensive supporting notes to your presentation for the audience to review later
- Prepare and practise your presentation thoroughly and understand your audience's needs – YOU are the presentation (your slides are purely an accessory)

Thanks to the IEEE and Susan de la Vergne for some sobering thoughts about the uselessness of most powerpoints presentations.

Probably especially relevant to presentations:

*In your thirst for knowledge, be sure not to drown in all the information.*  
(Anthony J. D'Angelo)