

## 8 Mistakes Made When Presenting With PowerPoint® and How to Correct Them

by Jim Prost  
Prost Associates

How would you answer this multiple-choice question?

Which of the following statements best describes your view about presenting using PowerPoint®

- (a) My PowerPoint® presentations use every sound, clip art, and animation available.
- (b) My PowerPoint® presentation IS the presentation!
- (c) My PowerPoint® presentation enhances my points, is clear, clean, and concise, and my audiences walk away with a clarified message.

From the audience's perspective, answer c is the better choice.

Let's take a look at some common mistakes made when presenting using PowerPoint® and how to correct them.

### Mistake #1 - The Projected Image on the Screen Is My Comfort Blanket!

Solution: Set up your computer so that it is facing you; this way you can be facing your appreciative audience and you don't have to look at or read from the screen. The last thing the audience wants to see is the back of your head. What you are seeing on your computer screen is the same image that is projecting onto the screen behind you. At all costs, you want to make eye contact with your audience in order to engage them in your presentation.

### Mistake #2 - Leaving a Slide on the Screen Keeps the Audience's Attention!

Solution: A slide should only be on the screen as long as you are talking about related material – somewhere between 30 seconds and two minutes.

Tip: To blank out a screen just press the "B" key and it will turn the screen black; pressing "W" will turn the screen to white. This only works when you are viewing a show. If you pressed the "B" or "W" key, press it again and the screen will illuminate.

(Value-added hint: research has shown that audiences will remember your presentation best if they are allowed an opportunity to digest a new slide for a few seconds before you start speaking – especially if the visuals are complex.)

### Mistake #3 - I Have To Go Through My Slide Show in a Linear Fashion – i.e., Slide #1 Followed by Slide #2 and So On!

Solution: You can navigate through your presentation however you like; i.e., slide #1 goes first, slide #2 goes second, etc. But, if you want slide #23 to follow slide #1, just press "2" and "3" on the numeric key pad followed by "enter" and PowerPoint® will automatically go to slide #23 in your presentation. This will only work when you are in the *View Show* mode. This also is another good reason to print your slides as *Handouts* because the printout will have the slide numbers on them. I usually print my slides in handout form, 6 slides to a page.

#### Mistake #4 - It is Unfortunate That PowerPoint® Doesn't Provide a "Pen"\* Function to Use While Presenting!

Solution: For those of you who like the "John Madden approach"\*\*, you can press Ctrl "P" while presenting and a John Madden-style pen will come on the screen. Hold the left mouse key down while moving your pen around the screen and you too can analyze the "play". To make this work, go to the *Tools* pull down menu and go to *Slide Show* and choose your pen color (make sure it contrasts and compliments the background color of your slide).

\* The "pen" function allows you to write on your screen while you are presenting.

\*\* John Madden, a famous football announcer on television, is known for using a pen on the screen to show how a football play occurred.

#### Mistake #5 - Audiences are Wowed By All the Animations and All the Transitions I Use!

Solution: Less is more (see my complimentary article *12 Mistakes Made When Creating PowerPoint® Slides and How To Correct Them*). I recommend if the audience has a copy of your presentation that they can look at while you are presenting, show all the material on a slide at one time without any animations – the audience already knows what's coming next. On the other hand, if the audience will not receive a copy of your presentation as a handout, you should use some animation – again less is more!

#### Mistake #6 - The Room's Lighting Won't Have an Impact on My Slides' Visibility!

Solution: You should check out the environment in which you will be presenting. First, try to make sure that all lights that directly hit the projected screen are turned off (you may need to climb on a ladder and unscrew some bulbs!). To help the visibility of your slides, although light text on a dark background looks best in a dark or slightly darkened room, in a light room the dark background may look so faded that light text may not show up as well. For this kind of situation, it doesn't hurt to try dark text on a lighter background.

Let me digress. While we are on the subject of lighting - do not subject your audience to a presentation in a dark room! At all costs, try to have the most light possible without diluting the impact of the color of your slides. Other than in a movie theatre, a darkened room will put people to sleep – hopefully this is not one of your objectives. See my complimentary article *12 Mistakes Made When Creating PowerPoint® Slides and How To Correct Them*.

#### Mistake #7 - My Presentation is So Powerful that My Audience Will Be in Their Seats As Soon As The Break is Over!

Solution: I highly recommend using a break "timer"\*\*\* which is projected onto the screen to be used if you take breaks during your presentation. I use a count down digital timer and can even put my client's logo as the wallpaper behind the digital clock.

#### Mistake #8 - The Presentation Pop-Up Menu Helps Me Run Through My PowerPoint® Point Presentation!

Solution: Turn off the presentation pop-up menu – it is a sign of a Power(less) Point presenter. To turn off the presentation pop-up menu go to the *Tools* pull down menu, then to *View* and uncheck both the *Pop up menu on right mouse click* and *Show Pop Up Menu Button*.

Have fun with your next PowerPoint®! Your audience will appreciate the care you show by making a presentation that is lively, fun, and targeted towards them. And, you'll get a standing ovation!

If you have questions about this article, please email me at [jimprost@prostassociates.com](mailto:jimprost@prostassociates.com)