



IT Tips and Tricks 20 – Using PowerPoint Effectively

I'm sure that we've all suffered "Death by PowerPoint" where the presenter reads from the screen words that are so small as to be illegible; we're woken up by "flashy" screen transitions, and by the 94th slide we're ready for screaming! Hopefully, these notes will go some way to resolving this issue...

- 1. Limit the number of words or bullets on each slide:**
We recommend that 6-7 bullets should be the maximum on any slide. The presentation should not be a reading report! Only a few words or a phrase to emphasise or reinforce an idea are all that is needed.
- 2. Use a bold, simple and large font:**
Veranda and Arial (emboldened) are my favourites due to high screen legibility. Minimum font size should be 18pt but my average font size is 40pt to allow for easy reading in the back of the room. Also, keep the fonts consistent throughout the presentation and use no more than two different font types.
- 3. Use transitions wisely:**
You can always tell a new PowerPoint user who has just discovered slide transitions: words are flying in from every direction often with more sound effects than a StarWars movie. Speakers must keep in mind that **they** are the show – not what is on the screen. Transitions often distract from the message; Judicious use of transitions can help an audience know where you are going, rather than distract them.
- 4. Avoid stock templates:**
Stay away from the standard background templates that come with the program. Instead, use a custom template to make your presentation look different right from the start. Many are downloadable for free from the Internet (go to www.google.com and search on the phrase: "free PowerPoint templates" without the quotation marks). The alternative is to amend the Master template to your corporate style.
- 5. Choose a design template where the words are easily distinguished from the background:**
Avoid busy backgrounds, or ones with hard-to-read fonts, or fonts with equal colour density to the background (i.e. the worst case would be bright green letters on bright red field).
- 6. Let the audience know where you are going:**
PowerPoint is great to help audiences know where you are in a program. List the agenda (what will be covered), key points, use topic headers at the top of your slides, use thematic clipart for each subject area, use full screen titles to announce major presentation transitions, include a conclusions slide (what was covered). The more you help an audience know where you are going, the more they will stay with you and learn.
- 7. Remember what you are presenting:**
If your presentation is only to last for, say, 10 minutes as an introduction to your organization or product, then you don't want to have 50 slides; Similarly, if you are running a training course for a day, you probably need more than 10! A good average to go for is no more than 20 slides in an hour