



Presenting well: from death by PowerPoint to winning colleagues and influencing people

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This paper is about delivering effective and memorable presentations. For some, presenting or delivering a speech can be a daunting task. Even people who are comfortable making presentations can have off days. Why does this happen? When presenting essentially the same presentation to different groups, how can some go so well, and others so appallingly? And why is it important to deliver good presentations?

Making presentations great is important because it helps you to:

- Get your message across
- Get cash/business case approved
- Promote your service
- Share innovations/information effectively

There are three key points to presenting well; planning, delivery, and practicing/refining. In an emergency management context you could say it's PPRR – Planning, Presenting (delivery), Reviewing and Refining.

P = Planning

Planning is important¹. Plan your presentation as you would any paper, report, or essay. The components of planning are:

Goals: What is the goal of the presentation? Why are you doing it? Define your goals. I have tried this, and it really does focus your presentation²³.

Benefits to the audience: Why should they listen to you? This is the “What’s in it for me (WIIFM)” concept. Define benefits for the audience and state them to the audience in your introduction.

Structure and content: A number of authors and experts advocate breaking your presentation content down into five minute sections or chunks⁴⁵⁶⁷. Plan each section, and include brief

¹ Read, Nick (2003). Give a presentation ... who me? *Employment Today*, 89(December):30-31

² Moll, Cameron (2009). 20 tips for better conference speaking. Authentic Boredom [webpage] accessed 20-02-2009 from http://cameronmoll.com/archives.2009/02/20_tips_better_conference_speaking/

³ Brogan, Chris (2009). Make better presentations – the anatomy of good speech. Chrisbrogan.com [webpage], accessed 02-03-2009 from <http://chrisbrogan.com/make-better-presentations-the-anatomy-of-a-good-speech/>

⁴ Schmidt, Jacqueline J and Joseph B Miller (2000). The five-minute rule for presentations. *Training and Development*, 54(3):16-17

⁵ Baker, Glenn (2003). Getting it right. *New Zealand Management*, 50(2):54-57

introductions and conclusions. Make each section independent. Decide which sections are the most important. If you are running out of time, you can skip some sections, and focus on the more important ones⁸.

Storytelling and or humour: Think about whether you can include storytelling, and or humour if appropriate⁹. Relating experiences can provide your audience with context. If you are uncomfortable with the concept of storytelling, then use “case studies”. To illustrate my point in a presentation to our Senior Management Team I have used a real story about recordkeeping in the NZFS – using stick figures. This is an example of using humour and storytelling!

Audience: If you are inviting people to attend your presentation, and somebody else is organising this for you, be clear about who you think should attend, when they should be notified, what the presentation is about, and where they should be going. Do this well ahead of time. Provide your meeting organiser with all promotional material. This comes from my own experience, and was the reason for a presentation “tanking”. I organised seminars months in advance, and proceeded to deliver them around the country. This worked very smoothly until I got to location X. My meeting organisers had booked a room, but apparently no people. They had been sprinting around that morning trying to get people to attend. Instead of bringing some people in, they arranged videoconference loops – which did not work with the style of presentation I had planned. The results were not good.

Flexibility: Planning for flexibility may sound like an oxymoron, but it isn't. To me, planning for flexibility just means being prepared for whatever is thrown at you. The first time I presented to our Senior Management Team I was expecting everybody to wait until the end to ask questions – this is not the way they work. I wasn't bombarded, but I wasn't expecting the level of banter, or audience participation that occurred. The presentation went very well, and I coped with the early questions by answering them, or saying “that's coming up soon”. The next time I presented to that group I was fully prepared for questions at anytime. My “tanking” experience above, really couldn't be salvaged too much at the time ... but I made sure that I changed my presentation for the afternoon session, which went a lot more smoothly.

P = Presentation (Delivery)

This is actually also about planning – planning your delivery. It has been argued that delivery is as important as content. Moore says that a great presentation is about 93% delivery, 7% content¹⁰. I am not sure about that, but I do know that you agree that delivery is important. The results of my unscientific survey showed that 90% of you said that for the best presentation you had ever seen, the “Speaker was engaging”, and 90% of you said that the “Speaker knew their stuff” (Figure 1).

So what makes a good delivery? You do. You are the key.

⁶ Allen, Richard (2008). Presenting to managers: making your presentation meet your objectives. *New Zealand Management*, 55(4):19

⁷ Allen, Rich (2009). Lest they forget: using brain science to make training unforgettable. *Training and Development in Australia*, February:15-16

⁸ Schmidt and Miller

⁹ Brogan

¹⁰ Moore, Patricia (2002). The good, the bad and the very ugly. *NZ Business*, September:33-39

Figure 1

1. Think about the best presentation you have ever seen, or the best public speaker you have ever seen. What made this presentation/speech so good? You can select more than one option if you like.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Speaker knew their stuff		90.0%	27
Speaker was engaging		90.0%	27
Speaker spoke to you not at you		46.7%	14
Subject material was interesting		70.0%	21
Presentation was just long enough		46.7%	14
Speaker spoke clearly, and didn't use jargon or technical language		50.0%	15
Speaker used humour and/or storytelling		70.0%	21
	Other (please specify)		5
	answered question		30
	skipped question		0

Speaker credibility: Remember how I said earlier I was not a presentation expert, and that this was something you shouldn't say at the start of a presentation? You need to establish your credibility from the start¹¹¹²¹³. First impressions really count¹⁴. The audience needs to know that you are an expert, and that you know what you are talking about. Make sure your speaker profile is good, and ask the convenor to read it out when they introduce you.

Body language: Make sure your body language is positive. Push your shoulders back, with your head up. Stand with your feet slightly apart, one foot slightly forward – this will help you stop swaying. If you think you are going to be nervous, and may rattle your notes, put them down (you know your presentation off by heart – you aren't going to need notes). Make eye-contact.¹⁵

Voice: Project it out to the audience. Your shoulders should be back, your head is up, and your voice is going out to the audience.

¹¹ Schmidt and Miller

¹² Morgan, Nick (2001). The kinesthetic speaker: putting action into words. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(4):113-120

¹³ Allen

¹⁴ Read

¹⁵ Baker


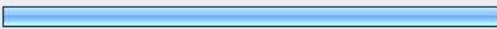


Slow down: Change the pace of your delivery¹⁶. Take pauses. This is good because it helps the audience identify important bits. Pausing also gives them time to process what they are hearing. They will be more likely to recall what you have said if they have time to process it.¹⁷

Audience: Find out about your audience¹⁸. Who are they? What are their general experiences? Do some research. During the presentation, look for non-verbal cues. Are they engaged?¹⁹

Technology: How you use technology is important. To PPT or not to PPT is completely up to you. I have been advised to not use PowerPoint, and I chose to ignore that advice. Sometimes I don't use it. It really depends on the situation.

If you do use technology, use it well²⁰. 72.4% said that the “best presenter” used a slide-show or OHP, and 81% of people who answered that way said the presenter used a mixture of text and graphics to illustrate points (Figure 2). For an excellent summary of how to use slide shows, see Alexei Kapterev’s fantastic slide show²¹ (the link is below). Thank you to whoever mentioned this presentation in the survey comments section.

Figure 2

3. If the speaker used Powerpoint or OHP during their presentation, how did the use it?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Text on slide matched what the speaker was saying almost word-for-word		0.0%	0
Text on slide complimented what the speaker was saying (perhaps the main points only)		9.5%	2
Mixture of text and graphics to illustrate points		81.0%	17
Graphics only		9.5%	2
Other (please specify) 			8
answered question			21
skipped question			9

Find out how the technology works, and use it to your advantage²². I talked earlier about my not being prepared for an unplanned videoconference presentation. For me, presenting via videoconference is my latest presentation challenge. Have you been involved in presentations

¹⁶ Schmidt and Miller; Morgan; Read; Moll.

¹⁷ Allen

¹⁸ Morgan; Baker

¹⁹ Morgan

²⁰ Baker; Moll

²¹ Kapterev, Alexei (?pos 2008). Death by powerpoint (and how to fight it). Slide Share [web site] accessed 04-03-2009 from <http://www.slideshare.net/thecroaker/death-by-powerpoint>.

²² Moll; Allen; Baker, Glenn (2003) Powerful pointers. *NZ Business*, September:38-40

where this has worked well? I would be interested to know – perhaps we could have a discussion over the ALIES list.

Venue: Find out about the venue. What technology is available? How are people going to be seated? How big is it? How small is it? What do you need to bring?

R & R = Review & Refine (Practice & Refine)

Practice makes perfect, and it doesn't really hurt.²³ It is another opportunity to go over your material.

Live audience: Practice your whole presentation to colleagues, family, whomever will listen. Set aside enough time for feedback.

Tape yourself: Seeing yourself on a small screen can be a scary experience. It is useful though. Ford²⁴ advocates going through your tape systematically. Is your message clear? Is your content coming through. What is your body language like? What is your pace like? How many "umms" were there? Does it flow?

Use the feedback you have gathered to fine-tune your presentation.

Conclusion

I have looked at how you may deliver effective and memorable presentations. I asked you to remember the PRRR of presenting: Planning, Presenting (Delivery), Reviewing & Refining (Practicing & Refining). Remember, that you are a very important part of your presentations. If you present well, you may get that business case approved, you may get your important message across, and you will share your innovations with your colleagues.

²³ Moll

²⁴ Ford, Lynda (2005). Caught on tape: how to use video or audio recording as a self-development tool. *T+D*, 59(12):63-64