How to

Pat R. Graves

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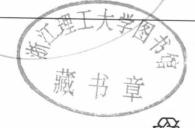
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How to Create HIGHIMPACT

Business Presentations

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Pat R. Graves



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Foreword

he information explosion has placed a premium on effective communication—getting the right information in front of the right people at the right time and in the right format. Nowhere in organizations is effective communication so important as in the meeting room, one of the last frontiers of productivity improvement.

Increasingly, effective business communication will rely on visual presentations—diagrams, graphs, maps, photographs, animation, videos, replicas. Studies have shown that visuals boost audience retention and learning, heighten interest and enjoyment, and significantly influence meeting outcomes. Why? A picture or symbol conveys a whole idea, while spoken or printed words break an idea into pieces. Moreover, since half the brain consists of a powerful vision computer system, the mind processes visual information more efficiently. Consequently, well-designed visual presentations enable viewers to assimilate masses of data quickly and better understand complex relationships.

Visual images work best when the presenter carefully thinks through preparation, delivery, and follow-up. If visuals are added to a written speech as an afterthought or as decoration the effort is wasted. Authors Joyce Kupsh and Pat Graves explain how to conceive visuals in the early stages when planning a presentation strategy and developing a message. They describe the wide choice of media available, noting technological advances such as

LCD projection panels, computer-based slide shows, and multimedia. For the presenter who protests "I'm not an artist," the authors point to easy-to-use presentation software that offers graphic templates and libraries of clip art. The guidelines on using color explain how to evoke a theme or set a mood.

Equally important, the authors give practical advice on how to arrange the meeting room, conduct a meeting, and use presentation equipment. They offer a materials and equipment checklist as well as a sample evaluation form. Presenters who take these suggestions to heart will not only enhance their image in the minds of the audience but also feel more confident and self-assured. Having visuals guide the flow of the presentation frees a speaker from memorizing words or depending on note cards.

Every working day, millions of men and women place their personal and professional lives on the line as they stand up to make a business presentation. This book provides a comprehensive guide for anyone who suffers a tinge of stage fright when called to the front of the room.

> Virginia Johnson Manager 3M Meeting Management Institute

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Creating Effective Presentations

So . . . you have been asked to

- ✓ give a speech
- make a presentation
- ✓ say a few words
- provide some insight
- give a paper
- prepare a talk
- ✓ narrate a panel
- ✔ lead a group
- preside over a meeting

Whatever words are used, you are to be in front of people and are expected to perform. If you dread the experience, you may have one or more of the following symptoms: your hands sweat, your knees shake, your throat dries, and your heart pounds.

There is a fix for these symptoms. Although it may not prove to be a quick cure, it is a lasting one that will provide many rewards for you. You may still feel tension, but it will result from excitement and anticipation rather than dread.

This book contains the remedies for turning what might be a dreaded event into a thrilling opportunity. You will still be the "star" on the main stage, but you will be surrounded by a supporting cast—your visuals.



This chapter is designed to introduce you to the importance of business presentations; explain ways the image makes the difference; describe the advantages of using visuals; take a brief look at technology and high-impact presentations; and see how to get started.

You will be so ready you can hardly wait for opening night. You will be prepared and organized— and your presentation will have impact!

The Importance of Presentations

Presentations are an important communication medium in businesses, associations, and educational settings. They provide an opportunity to share a great deal of information in a very short time. Sources vary on how many presentations are given every day—some estimate 25 to 33 million. Individuals from every walk of life find they are being called upon to share information with others in a group. And, yet, few have been empowered with an inborn ability to be an effective speaker.

Presentations are a crucial part of meetings, and an effective presentation will have an impact on the success of meeting outcomes. While some studies confirm that the average business executive spends more than 50 percent of a typical day in meetings, often meetings are not the most stimulating events you can attend. In an editorial in *Presentation Products Magazine*, Lindstrom (November, 1990) made the following comment:

Is there anyone who has not at some time attended a seminar, business meeting, or training session in which the stimuli were so light they could barely be detected? In a study of 200 U.S. corporate vice presidents by Motivational Systems in West Orange, New Jersey, 4 out of 10 of the executives admitted they have dozed off while listening to a presentation. When asked to

Approximately 25 to 33 million presentations are made every day.

High-impact presentations can reduce or eliminate boredom at meetings. rate the average business presentation, 51.5 percent of the subjects said "interesting or stimulating," while 44.5 percent said "boring or unbearable." (The remaining four percent nodded off during the survey, I assume.)

3M, a leading supplier of presentation equipment and supplies for many years, recognized the need to improve meeting effectiveness by establishing a Meeting Management Institute (MMI). The MMI advisory board sets policies and guidelines for the institute and provides direction for its sponsorship of studies investigating how meetings can be improved to achieve greater results.

If presenters and meeting leaders can become more effective, personal and company productivity should increase. In today's competitive world, increased productivity is vital. The persuasive power of a high-impact presentation can be what makes the difference in your success.

This book will provide you with a basis for improving your presentations and, consequently, your effectiveness and productivity. You will create high-impact presentations that do make a difference.

The Image Makes the Difference

Presentations have one or more objectives: to inform, teach, motivate, or persuade. In fact, almost anything you wish to communicate in the form of a presentation will have some element of persuasion in it. If you want your audience to accept you and the ideas you share, you need to be prepared—both personally and professionally—so the image you create

Increasing productivity is vital in today's competitive world.

will get the results you want. Your appearance, attitude, and mannerisms are all important to form a good first impression. Today's presentation technology can help you increase your confidence and your level of preparedness by allowing you to develop and use well-designed visuals.

You, as a presenter, have the opportunity to improve the image you wish to project to an audience.

Appearance

An audience will immediately begin to form an impression of you the moment you enter the room. While many aspects of physical makeup cannot be changed, the style of clothes you wear will contribute to your image. For instance, does your attire fit in with an art deco crowd, or the business image of the nineties? Suits are still the norm, but more color is shown in women's business attire today.

Think about the formalness of the presentation situation when you select the clothes you wear. Think about how your audience might dress. If in doubt about your attire, be conservative.

Your grooming and physical hygiene reflect how you feel about yourself. Be sure you reflect a caring, "together," image.

Attitude

Your enthusiasm and positive attitude will be contagious. If you lack enthusiasm, you cannot expect your audience to readily accept your ideas and be enthusiastic. The image you project will suffer.

Mannerisms

Mannerisms should show you are decisive and in control. The audience should see your assurance. If you are uncertain of yourself, nervous mannerisms will give away your lack of self confidence.

Preparedness

Being prepared is a way of winning an audience and influencing their decisions. After all, if you have done your homework, you stand a much better chance of being able to influence them into your way of thinking.

Confidence

Confidence shows an audience that you believe in yourself and whatever it is you are representing to them. You must have confidence and good self-esteem (or give the image that you do) to gain the confidence of the audience.

Visuals

The visuals or audio-visual media you use in your presentations will also contribute to your image. They will help the audience form an opinion of your personal characteristics and credibility. Their appearance can project a favorable and impressive image. Visuals can also help you display enthusiasm by including reallife or drawn images to project the type of attitude you desire. By using visuals, you may find that your nervous mannerisms may disappear because the audience's attention will be diverted periodically as you speak. However, you do have the responsibility to learn

and follow good audio-visual techniques in using them.

When you use well-prepared visuals, your confidence level improves. Instead of nervously holding notes or cards, your visuals can provide an outline for you as well as your audience. The time you spend organizing your thoughts and developing your visuals increases your preparedness.

Actually, if you accidentally lost your visuals on the way to the presentation, chances are you would still give a better presentation because of the organization and planning required to develop the visuals. This extra work undoubtedly gives you more familiarity with and confidence about the subject on which you are presenting.

Therefore, the image makes a difference in a variety of different ways. Bobbie Gee, a Laguna Beach management consultant, believes that a positive image and reputation are the most important assets an individual or company can possess. According to Gee, "an image can be whatever you want to make it."

The Advantages of Visuals

By designing visuals of some type to support your ideas, you will be required to prepare and organize your presentation. You will not depend on a stack of note cards or be compelled to memorize exact words. Your visuals will prompt and support you.

Using media to support your presentation and help your audience visualize has several distinct advantages which have been proven by research. When visuals are used, (1) retention and learning are

The power of visuals has been well-recognized since cavemen drew pictures on walls. Edgar Wycoff (April, 1977) said one of the first documented cases in the formal use of a visual aid occurred in Greece in the fourth century B.C. The great orator Hyperedies served as a lawyer for Phyrne, a young lady of "easy virtue and questionable reputation." As a rather hostile panel of judges was about to pronounce a severe judgment against his somewhat homely client, Hyperedies disrobed her in front of the court and commenced to plead for the preservation of one so beautiful.

increased; (2) meeting or class effectiveness is increased; and (3) the image of the speaker is enhanced.

Retention and Learning

An accepted learning principle is that people learn by doing. A trainer or teacher may wonder if visualization is an effective means of instruction. This theory was proven many years back by numerous research results showing that people can improve their learning of even a muscular response by merely sitting and looking and listening. Here is one of those studies:

You can improve a skill by thinking—as well as by practicing.

Subjects were first tested for skills like dart throwing, basketball foul shooting, and high jumping. These subjects were then asked to refrain from any physical practice and to sit quietly for five-minute periods daily for two weeks and to imagine themselves performing these exercises with some thought to improvement. On all three types of tasks, significant improvement was attained with no actual performance and no reinforcement by anyone (Bugelski, 1971).

Many research studies in a variety of subject areas have demonstrated how visuals make a difference in how people absorb information. A few of the studies that validate the effectiveness of using visuals include:

✓ Green (1984) quoted the following findings supporting the use of audio-visual presentations. Physiologically, 83 percent of all learning begins through the eyes. The Armed Forces have proven that people retain facts up to 55 percent longer when they learn by a combination of sight and sound.

By seeing and hearing, people retain facts longer.

- ✓ Colthran (1989) cited two additional studies that prove the value of visuals. At the University of Wisconsin, researchers determined that learning improved up to 200 percent when visual aids were used in teaching vocabulary. Studies at Harvard and Columbia found audio-visuals improved retention from 14 to 38 percent over presentations where no visuals were used.
- ✓ Kupsh (1975) proved the effectiveness of using synchronized sound-slide packages in teaching beginning typing. The experimental study showed that the use of five packages, each ten minutes or less in length, increased the knowledge of basic typing fundamentals during a semester course of beginning typing. In addition, students using the sound-slide packages reacted more favorably toward the class in an opinionnaire inventory.

Meeting Effectiveness

Many characteristics impact on meeting effectiveness. While this topic is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10, consider how the use of visuals can influence the results of a meeting.

A study by the Wharton Applied Research Center of the Wharton School of Business showed that a simple overhead projector could significantly influence the outcome of a business meeting. Projector use reduced the length of the meeting by nearly one-third and also sparked a larger percentage of participants (nearly two-thirds) to make immediate decisions after the meeting (Oppenheim, 1981).

Using visual aids improves both learning and retention.

Media not only helps the students learn better, but also prompts them to enjoy class more.

Overhead projector use can reduce meeting length and promote immediate decisions. Both inexperienced and experienced speakers can benefit by using visuals.

Speaker Image

The same Wharton Study also found that presenters who used overhead projectors were rated more favorably overall (Oppenheim, 1981). Additional research at the University of Minnesota also found several interesting facts concerning how the use of visuals enhance a speaker's image.

- ✓ Use of overhead transparencies results in the presenter being perceived as more interesting but less professional than a presenter using 35 mm slides.
- ✓ Effectiveness varies as a function of speaker quality. A "typical" speaker using presentation support has nothing to lose and can be as effective as the better speaker who has used no visuals. The better the speaker is, the greater the need to use high-quality visual aids (Vogel, Dickson, Lehman, Shuart, 1986).

Technology and High-Impact Presentations

Times have changed! Centuries ago, speakers had the help of a megaphone to project their voices to a gathering of people, or they could draw pictures in the sand or on a stone. Until a few years ago, speakers operated in a relatively similar manner. If their voices needed amplification, they used microphones to project their voices instead of a megaphone. If they wanted to share a written message, they used a blackboard; or they provided typewritten handouts for the audience to take home.

Modern technology has provided new ways to communicate. The microphone is still useful and may