



## "PowerfulPoints" on Presentations (Part 1)

**D**o you remember when coordinating a professional presentation entailed a podium and maybe a microphone or an oblique overhead projector? Now, more than ever before, corporate seminars, trainings, and conferences are transforming into complex multimedia productions. Often they involve stressful decisions regarding appropriate screen sizes, varying LCD projectors, lumen strength, keystone distortion, and Internet connectivity. It seems that wireless lapel microphones are as common as coffee at breakfast meetings these days. I thought I was really on top of things by learning how to insert digital music files into a presentation for an upcoming business meeting. Just a few days ago, the attorney asked me if he could just plug his iPod Nano directly into the hotel's overhead sound system. The days of donut holes, flip charts, and black-and-white transparencies are long gone!

Frankly, these are the things that keep me tossing and turning at night before an event. If it is not the dreaded screeching of audio feedback as the live goose-

neck at the podium interferes with the wireless mike, the pink-and-purple "psychedelic maze" screen saver will surely kick in right at a critical moment during the introduction.

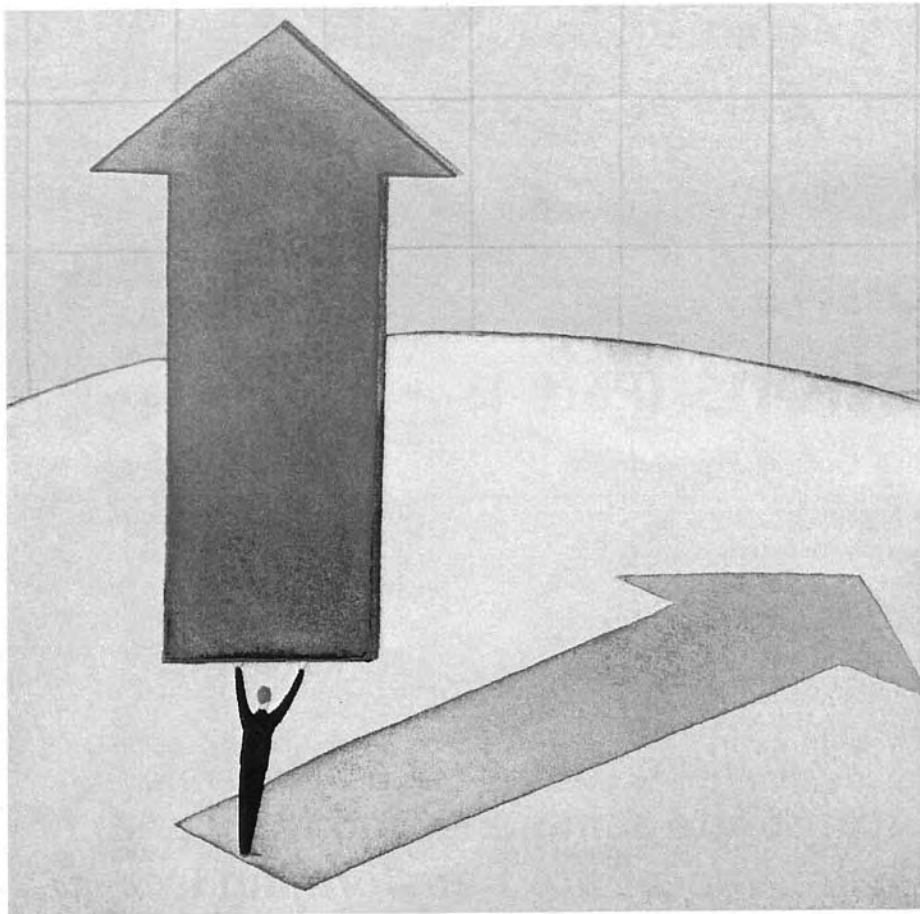
**Now, more than ever before, corporate seminars, trainings, and conferences are transforming into complex multimedia productions.**

I am certain that everyone in the industry has a favorite horror story to share. Mine dates back a year ago to our firm's annual affordable housing conference. With 200 people sitting in the opening general session at the Oregon Convention Center, everything was moving smoothly as our keynote began right on time with his talk on "Low-Income Housing Tax-Credit Basics." The first five or six slides in his PowerPoint presentation transitioned perfectly, but things quickly took a turn for the worse. As I watched helplessly from the sidelines, the text projected on the screen started mysteriously

reversing...one bullet point at a time. Not until later that day did we learn that another speaker had been practicing in the breakout room next door with a wireless remote similar to the one we

were using on the main stage. Inadvertently, they entered into an invisible tug-of-war. As he advanced his slides forward, their signals crossed and her images started advancing as well. Naturally, she began clicking backwards, which had the same miraculous effect on our laptop.

It is advantageous to hire an audio-visual professional to be present for as much of your presentation as possible. If nothing else, have the technician there for the first hour. It will pay for itself during a stressful situation such as the one mentioned above. In this particular example, our technician's ability to calmly,



quietly, and quickly unplug the remote from the USB port and hand our presenter the good old-fashioned wired mouse to click was worth triple his hourly rate, and then some.

Since the release of Microsoft's PowerPoint for Windows in 1990, effective presentation styles have become increasingly challenging. According to a *New York Times* article in December 2003, more than 400 million copies of Microsoft's PowerPoint software are in circulation today. Some 30 million PowerPoint-based presentations are given around the globe each day. When used properly, the program can be extremely helpful in conveying a message. Nevertheless, it can also cause more harm than

good. In the same *New York Times* story, titled "PowerPoint Makes You Dumb," the final sentence reads, "If you have nothing to say, maybe you need just the right tool to help you not say it."

Several speakers I have witnessed of late have a difficult time taking their eyes off the long strings of colorful text that spin dizzily in circles before settling across company logos and unsophisticated clip art. It is no surprise that they cannot spend more time interacting with the audience. Perhaps the bigger issue is that this powerful presentation tool can easily be overused and become ineffective in just eight seconds. That is the recommended amount of time a person should spend reading any given slide.

Becoming an exceptional presenter can be as simple as mastering the following key objectives that do not come packaged inside software applications:

- 1. Make eye contact.**
- 2. Tell a story.**
- 3. Anticipate and encourage a response.**

According to the *Book of Lists*, the fear of public speaking ranks as the number-one fear in most people's minds. This is above and beyond the fear of death and disease. Perhaps it is helpful to note that, as a whole, people do not remember exactly what you do or say on stage. They are much more likely, however, to remember how you made them feel. Lengthy statistics or complicated graphs are easy to forget, but not the stories behind them. Take a moment to think about the last presentation you attended. What did you walk away with: a printed copy of the slides to reference later? I would rather have one or two useful bits of information that I can share with a coworker in the lunchroom.

#### **Next issue: Tips on using PowerPoint**

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