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Smart Business Brief
Advice for Success!

Help end PowerPoint abuse

Are you a perpetrator of PowerPoint abuse? If you're you guilty of creating wordy slides, using distracting graphics, or adding distracting special effects just to satisfy your inner George Lucas, you have a problem. You're failing to make the most of a powerful communications tool, and it's interfering with your message. Follow this advice to use PowerPoint to communicate successfully.

Choose fonts wisely

Using too many fonts or illegible typefaces is a common trait of PowerPoint abusers. Ease eye strain with these helpful tips:

- Use a sans serif font to enable high visibility: Helvetica Bold Condensed and Franklin Gothic are good choices.

- Do not use script typefaces – they are hard to read and distracting.

- Limit the number of fonts used to no more than two per slide.

- Avoid italics with underlines, bold type with shadows, and outline fonts.

- WORDS IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS ARE HARD TO READ.

Conserve words

Wordy slides are bad for "information digestion," so use words like a cook with chili peppers: sparingly. Text-heavy slides encourage viewers to read rather than listen to your ideas and prompt you to recite information, which dulls your speaking style. Only the core of the message should appear on the slide, so the audience has to rely on you for important information.

- Headlines should be no more than three or four words.

- Use bullet points, not sentences - only about six words per line.

- Try to limit any slide to no more than three or four bullets.

Go easy on the eyes

Many presenters cannot resist the temptation of using busy backgrounds, and too many colors. The simpler your layout, the better.

- Be sure the color of the text contrasts with the slides' background color. The best mix is a dark background with bright type.

- Avoid color combinations that may be difficult to look at or hard to distinguish: red/green, brown/green, blue/black, and blue/purple.

Follow this advice, and transform yourself into a PowerPoint pro. Oh, and don't forget to spell check.