

Here's looking at you

Getting your visuals right, just like they do in the movies.

You're going to see a movie. It's a cowboy film. The storyline looks interesting, it has great actors and a script that you know will be excellent. But when you watch it the people are in the jungle! Some dressed in suits of armour and others in basketball kit. Huh? Another scene has them on the moon. Very confusing! In the end you can't recall the story at all. It just doesn't make sense.

In this example the movie company didn't pay attention to the visuals. But of course, they would never do this. They always take care to match the visual elements to the story and use them to support and strengthen the message. Sometimes to carry the message entirely.

So why is it that when we create presentations, the slides are often a data dump and their impact is barely a consideration?

When you create a presentation it is critical that you don't just focus on what you are going to say (script) and how you are going to say it (performance). Getting the visuals right can mean the difference between a good presentation and a truly memorable one.

One thing at a time

Have you ever attended a presentation where the speaker has lots of information on their slides and then proceeds to talk while you are trying to read and digest it? Something gets lost. Either you tune out of what they are saying or you can't properly read what is on the slide. In the worst cases you miss both!

Imagine a movie with the actors speaking and then subtitles with slightly different

information going on at the same time. The producers just wouldn't do it. The audience would walk out.

What if the presenter let you read what was on the slide? That would get the message across more clearly but then they might as well have sent you a document. It's a presentation, remember. So, what if they put the one important message of that slide up for you to see and then explained it? Much better! It supports the way we learn and remember things.

But my audience needs the detailed information

Are you really sure they do? And if so, do they need it in tiny writing on a slide they have no hope of reading? You have been asked to deliver a presentation and that means they want your opinion on the subject.

Put the data in a document and circulate it beforehand. Then use the presentation to get across your opinion on the data, highlighting the important points only. And use visuals to help make your point - images and performance in synchronicity, telling the same story, in the same way that a scene set in a castle speaks far more loudly than a long description of a castle.

Setting the scene

In the movies, they keep coming up with original visuals and appropriate locations. In presentations we are guilty of using the same old clipart and cookie-cutter corporate slide templates. To make our slides engaging we have to get away from that.

Just because you have a slide template doesn't mean each slide should look the same. A good template will give you a

variety of layout choices, and variety will keep the audience engaged. When you need something different to get your message across, just do it. The following slide will be back to the template and the branding will hold together.

Personally I dislike clipart the same way that I don't really like romantic comedies. I've seen it all before! That familiarity reminds me of other bad presentation/movie experiences. Of course, not all clipart is bad, but you do need to choose extremely carefully.

One message per slide

Have you ever seen a presentation where someone uses a background image slide after slide after slide? It may be a good image, but by putting it in the background and repeating it you are diluting the impact significantly and may even be adding layers of confusion.

Imagine a movie where the main scene is going on in the foreground and some other action is going on in the background. You may not be sure which you should focus on. And if you do want to focus on the main action, the background action will keep dragging your focus away.

Use the image once, in the right place, to get the maximum attention and impact.

Rolling the credits

Get your visuals right and you will get a lot of credit. If you made the slides for someone you will get credit because you made them look good. Most importantly you will get credit from your audience. You made your point clearly and in a memorable way. After the presentation they will be talking about it, just like we do after a great movie.

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