



# ROLE OF PRESENTATIONS IN INTERNAL COMMS

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After over a decade of working on PowerPoint presentation design for companies of all sizes, I've noticed a few interesting trends. Some are obvious (the best presenters aren't always the biggest personalities, less is more and, shock horror, there is life beyond PowerPoint) and some less so. The general treatment of internal presentations is a case in point...

Let's face facts – in terms of profile and focus, sales presentations sit firmly at top of the pile. Sales and marketing directors are very vocal about needing the very best PowerPoint presentation design and will invest time, money and energy into getting everything absolutely spot on – the messaging is finely tuned, the visuals carefully designed and the delivery rehearsed (a lot). It's how a presentation project should be.

Equally interesting is the very low profile internal presentations typically have within organizations. There are exceptions, of course (the big hitter 'townhall' events run by the MD or Chairman always seem to get a lot of love and attention lavished on them) but,

in the main, most internal presentations are a homespun affair with slides being hastily knocked up by the person foolish enough to declare themselves a member of that elite breed we know as presentation designers (if you happen to know any of these, we run a rather fine advanced PowerPoint training course – [see it here](#)).

It all seems rather unbalanced to me for the simple reason that the stakes are often way higher with the internal presentation. Get it right and entire companies can be moved, motivated and mobilized through an engaging presentation that resonates with an internal audience. Get it wrong and teams can be left frustrated, demotivated or downright confused.

While these presentations may not carry the same billing as their higher profile sales colleagues, the impact on the bottom line, share price and general wellbeing of a business runs a lot deeper.

In short, internal presentations should command much, much more respect.

# SO WHY THE MISMATCH?

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There's no getting away with it – internal comms is a tricky thing to get right...

Frequently important messages get lost in the noise of everyday life (often, ironically, as a result of the large amounts of internal communication, both formal and informal). There's just so much of it – countless company-wide emails, intranet postings and internal meetings all add to the noise – putting the internal PowerPoint presentation design on the back foot before the first word has been uttered.

Don't get me wrong – the intention is usually good ('We have some important information that we need to share with our employee team') however, for all these good intentions, many internal presentations fall at the first few hurdles:

## AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

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Unlike many other presentation forms (sales, marketing, investor, technical or training), many internal presentations seem to easily slot into a 'one way broadcast' of information. Roles are clearly established where the presenter is in charge of talking and the audience's job is to sit and listen (quietly).

### How dull is this for both parties?

The presenter is left with the nagging feeling that nobody is listening to what they say (thus adding to the 'we're just going through the motions' paranoia that accompanies many internal presentations), while the audience manfully fights the temptation to either drop off, ponder what to have for tea tonight or surreptitiously turn to their smartphone for their social media fix. Oh, and the addition of a 'Q&A' session at the end of the presentation does little to build bridges between presenter and audience – frankly by then, both parties have given up and are only sticking around out of courtesy.

## DEATH BY A THOUSAND BULLET POINTS

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Make no bones about it – most presentations fail because they get crammed with content. You know the kind of thing – slide after slide

after slide of verbose information that does little more than justify the audience's time you're taking up. Sales audiences have got wise to this and now feel entitled to vote with their feet (or, for those looking for a subtler voice, simply not signing on the dotted line) however for obvious reasons, this is much trickier for internal audiences to pull off.

The net result is they simply drift off to a lullaby of boring slides that share information that means nothing to the audience. In short, too much non-relevant information kills your audience (or at least gives them license to drop off).

As we will cover off in future posts, getting the balance of presentation content right is a tricky business but made so much easier once you have a strong message in place. Get this right and the content kind of picks itself...but that's for another time.

## LACK OF RESPECT

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This may be a little controversial but I often get a perverse sense from clients that internal presentations can be a little shabby around the edges because external audiences won't be viewing the slides. It's as though the 'internal presentation' status gives the presentation designers license to cut a few corners when it comes to creating slide visuals.

For the reasons already stated, this couldn't be further from the truth.

The care and attention lavished on a slide deck speaks volumes before the presenter even opens their mouth. Now don't get me wrong – simply because you have some snazzy slides does not get you off the hook in terms of clear messaging and passionate delivery – but it helps demonstrate that you truly care about both the audience and the information you are about to share.

## SO WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

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As you may have guessed, there is no silver bullet. All presentations take a great amount of time, effort and thought to get right...and internal presentations are no different.

Perhaps the most important step internal presentation designers and presenters can take is to recognize the value and privilege of their presentation. To attend your presentation, your audience have given up the one thing they'll never get back – time. As an employee, it's a lot more difficult to 'dodge' a presentation in favour of other important tasks so inevitably this builds pressure on them to squeeze more into a day. The net result is working late or working weekends. It's potentially a big sacrifice...and

it's vital for the presenter to recognize this and prepare accordingly.

Great presentations start with a good understanding of your audience – from the respect of their time to getting under the skin of their concerns and building your message accordingly. Take time to really think about what both you and the audience want to achieve from the presentation and build it around this core theme. Not only will your presentation be more focused but it will deliver greater value to all involved – a great investment in time for both audience and presenter (and when was the last time you said that about an internal presentation?!)



## A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY

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Above all else, recognize the huge impact a carefully developed internal presentation can have. Never forget that they are often the most important and influential presentations many of us will ever make. Clear and engaging internal presentations can help turn a failing business around, engage a team and celebrate success in the most inclusive way. Equally, failing to invest sufficient time and

energy in such a communication is failing to invest in your company and its people.

Granted, these are strong words but internal presentations really are that important... Now ask yourself a question – how do yours measure up? And would your audience agree?