

THE EFFICIENCY OF BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS





INTRODUCTION

This insight paper has a simple aim; to explore the impact of presentations on business efficiency and signpost ways that organisations can improve the speed, quality, and results they derive from the creation of everyday presentations.

In truth, this isn't a topic you'd expect to hear about from a company like Eyeful. We typically only get to roll our sleeves up and help clients on the big stuff - sales decks, must-win pitches, and career-defining conference presentations. We recognise that these presentations sit at the very tip of the pyramid of all of the slideware that are being created within organisations.

Day in, day out.

Hour in, hour out.

Presentations are viewed by many, indeed most, organisations as a task. A task that is long-winded, uninspiring, and way too frequent for it to be deemed the privilege that most presentations actually are. This 'task mentality' leads to two widespread issues:

1. CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE OF POOR PRESENTATIONS

The first issue is a gradual acceptance of 'Death by PowerPoint' quality presentations within a large number of organisations. A lack of understanding, process, and skills within corporates means that the creation of presentations can become a laborious and frustrating process that is repeated multiple times every week. The net result, understandably, is that the lowest common denominator in terms of quality is typically where most presentations end up.

This creates a vicious cycle of presentations being viewed as a task, thus ensuring they do not have the time, resource, or thinking invested in them to deliver quality output. This lack of investment automatically condemns the presenter to go into battle with a confused, aimless, and flawed presentation which in turn fails them.

Thus, the vicious cycle of rubbish in - rubbish out, merely goes to support the cultural assumption that presentations are a time-consuming task that delivers little value. And so it goes on.

2. BLAME IT ON THE TOOL

All of this negativity is underpinned by the fact that presentations, certainly PowerPoint presentations, are not going anywhere, anytime soon. Large organisations have taken great pleasure in telling the world that they no longer use presentations or PowerPoint within internal meetings. The likes of Diageo, Amazon, and Virgin decry the use of PowerPoints and their leaders write well-meaning and impassioned blogs to support this message.

However, the reality is that these same organisations fall into exactly the same trap as every other organisation out there. They continue to nobble the efficiency of internal communication through poor presentation preparation (the output may be a Word document rather than a set of slides, yet the same set of challenges remain).

That said, we would argue that there are too many presentations being created every day. Perceived wisdom places the number at approximately 30 million PowerPoint decks being created every day (we fear this is probably under-cooking the number a little). In addition, Microsoft Research suggests that \$50 million is wasted by organisations every day creating more content that is neither fit for purpose or will never see the light of day.

In this document, we've set ourselves a sizable challenge. We want to help organisations break the cycle of inefficient and underperforming presentations within their ranks. To do this, we've had to examine the underlying issues that are having such a major impact on the efficiency of presentation creation and offer new thinking to recalibrate the definition of 'presentation efficiency' within today's workplace.



HOW DO YOU MEASURE EFFICIENCY?

At first glance, efficiency should be a relatively straightforward calculation. After all, the production of slides is a measurable thing – the person creating 20 slides a day must be more efficient than their colleague who produces 10, right?

Wrong.

The concept of ascribing a measurement of presentation efficiency to the number of slides produced as quickly as possible merely serves to reiterate the concept of presentations as a 'task'. Success is judged on the volume of content created rather than its quality or impact in front of an audience.

Speed is a productivity gain. It has nothing to do with efficiency.

Instead, a measure of efficiency needs to reflect the overarching purpose of presentations – that is, to prompt an action from an audience. For too long, the quality of a presentation has been measured on the quality of the orator, clarity of the message, or aesthetic of the slide design. Business leaders need to step away from the obvious and view presentations as a business tool. Much like a CRM system is not judged on the clarity of its interface but on the impact it has on sales. And ultimately, the bottom line, presentations need to be judged on the actions they prompt from your audience rather than the 'showmanship' so many tirelessly obsess over.



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SPEED DOES NOT EQUATE TO EFFICIENCY

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With this in mind, we would offer the following measure of presentation efficiency:

Investment (time, money, resources) required to deliver the desired result.

By extension, it doesn't matter a jot how quickly you created a deck or how fast you delivered the presentation if you fail to achieve your goal. Appropriate investment in the right areas is vital in ensuring presentation efficiency. Thus, time spent analysing audience requirements, researching and editing content, crafting key messages, story and structure, and designing high impact visuals is a wise investment if the culmination of this hard work is a presentation that delivers a result. The opposite also applies.

On the surface, this seems logical and, by extension, the engrained behaviour of most professionally-run businesses across the globe. Sadly not. Either due to reasons of Presentation Culture (ref. Eyeful Insights study - [The Impact of Presentation Culture](#)) or lack of awareness, speed and volume continue to take precedent over a more pragmatic and considered approach.

Ironically, the failure of this approach is well documented. A 2017 study by CSO Insights, part of the Miller Heiman Group (and an Eyeful partner), highlights that only half (51%) of sales leaders feel that the quality of their sales collateral content met or exceeded expectations. The definition of 'sufficient' is that the content is effective in helping the prospect move forward, the perfect sales definition of 'delivering the desired result'.

So where do people spend the majority of their time? To understand where, how, and why people were dedicating their limited time in the quest for the ultimate presentation, we conducted a survey...

OUR RESEARCH APPROACH

This insight study took a two-fold approach. First of all, we conducted a global survey to understand the challenges and the current state of play of organisations large and small. We were delighted with over 200 responses, which have provided a very useful background to the ideas and considerations going forward.

These were then bolstered by further in-depth interviews with leading lights within the presentation sector, including Shawn Villaron, PowerPoint group lead within Microsoft, on their understanding and observations of the issues relating to presentations.



THE FINDINGS

Slide creation dominates people's viewpoint of presentations and the efficiency of their creation. Tales abound of vast numbers of slides being developed in the knowledge that they will never be used. One senior member of a global tech organisation recalls a particularly telling example:

"I was just talking to an exec the other day, and I was pointing out that they had put together a 150-slide deck for a 45-minute presentation with our CEO."

I said, "Think of the amount of time that has been spent building those slides, reviewing those slides, preparing those slides, and you know you're not going to get to 90% of them."

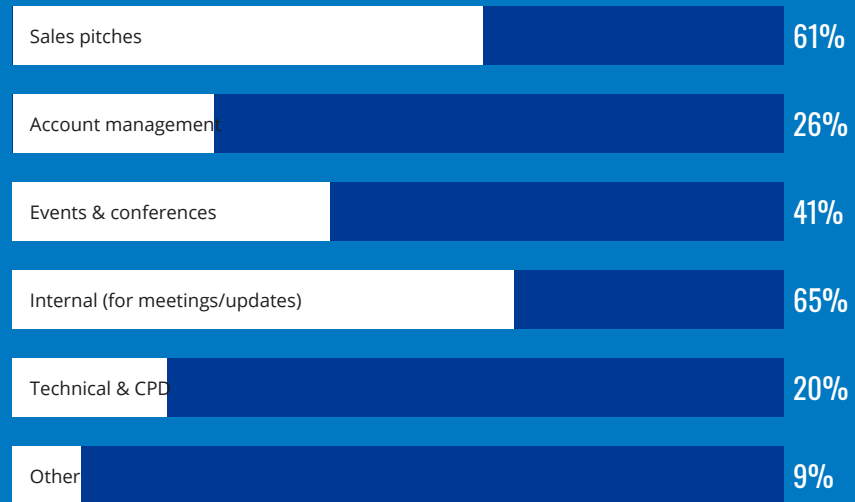
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WHAT TYPE OF PRESENTATIONS DO YOU DELIVER?



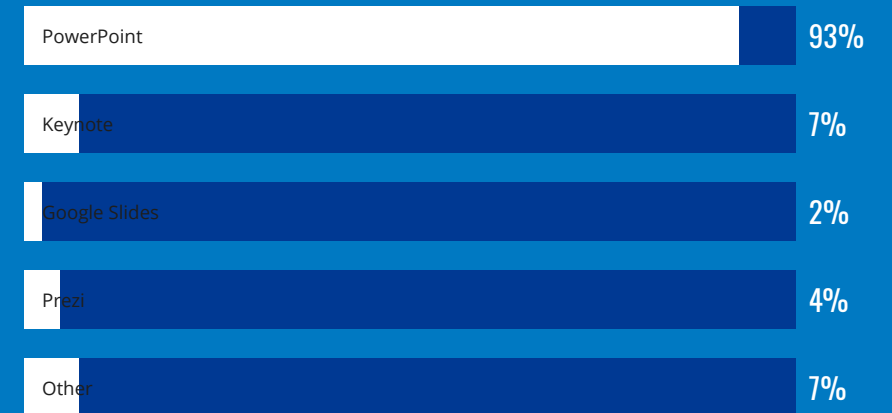
As you may well know, presentations come in all shapes and sizes. The biggest single group of presentations is internal presentations. Surprisingly though, there is anecdotal evidence that strongly suggests that internal presentations are not seen as “important” or “serious” as external presentations like sales presentations and conferences.

This negative thinking, in turn, has a knock-on effect in terms of the approach and time people spend on the quality of internal presentations. They are not as important, therefore, the quality tends to be lower.

Equally worrying, sales presentations are a large requirement within organisations. That in itself is not surprising, although many will assume this is managed by the corporate marketing function. However, somewhat more worrying is the fact that sales presentations are typically being created by the salespeople themselves. This has an impact on the amount of time they have available to sell, and you will have salespeople, according to Miller Heiman Group research in 2017, 19% of all sales collateral is created by the sales team. The opportunity cost of this could be in the millions depending on the sector you operate in.

In terms of our efficiency measure – investment to deliver intended result – the sales function is a good example of what happens across organisations today.

HOW ARE THESE DELIVERED?



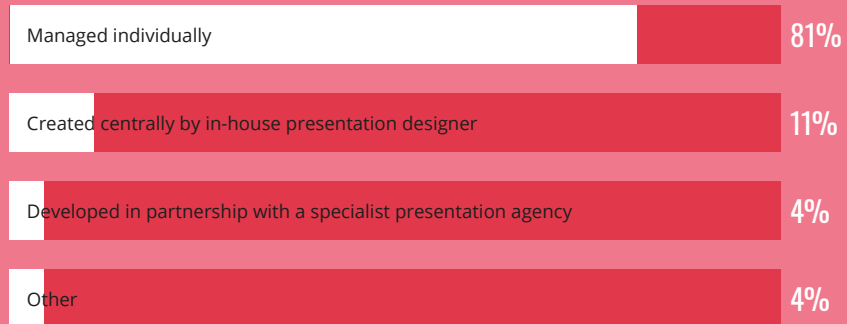
PowerPoint is still very much the weapon of choice when it comes to creating presentations. Although a lot of time and effort has been put into developing PowerPoint software over the past 18 months, such as with the designer and presentation coach aspects, some of its strongest pitfalls remain.

There has actually been very little improvement to the efficiency of presentation creation when judged against our definition of efficiency. That is:

Investment (time, money, resources) required to deliver the desired result.

In truth, no technology has a “magic widget” to improve the efficiency of presentation creation!

HOW ARE THESE PRESENTATIONS CREATED WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS?



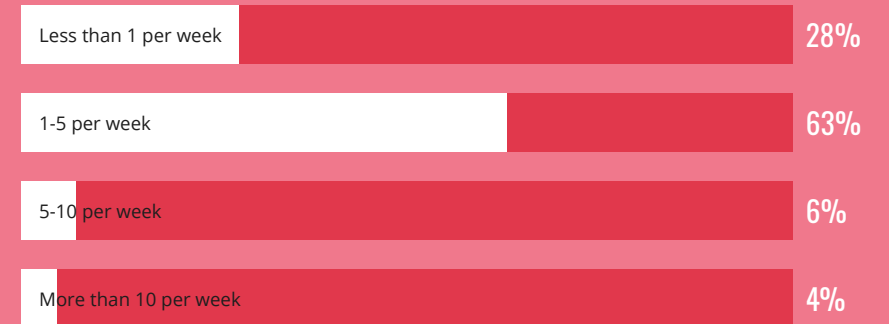
Typically, these are created by individuals and most of those presentations are being created from scratch. This means a vast amount of time is being invested in the creation of slides that are ultimately going to be used once and then dismissed.

Unfortunately, the importance of presentations seems to have slipped through the cracks. Consider building your own website or designing your own brochures. If you don't have the skills to do these tasks, you hire someone who does. You consider it to be a worthy monetary investment.

However, when it comes to the art of crafting presentations (stories, structures, visuals, and Calls to Action), the DIY approach is deemed acceptable! This is probably the reason why they tend to take so long, look so bad, and are viewed as a horrible task or even a chore.

What makes this more worrying is that so few people have actually been trained in the creation of quality presentation materials. The result is, inevitably, a poor quality presentation.

TYPICALLY, HOW MANY PRESENTATIONS DO YOU WORK ON PER WEEK?



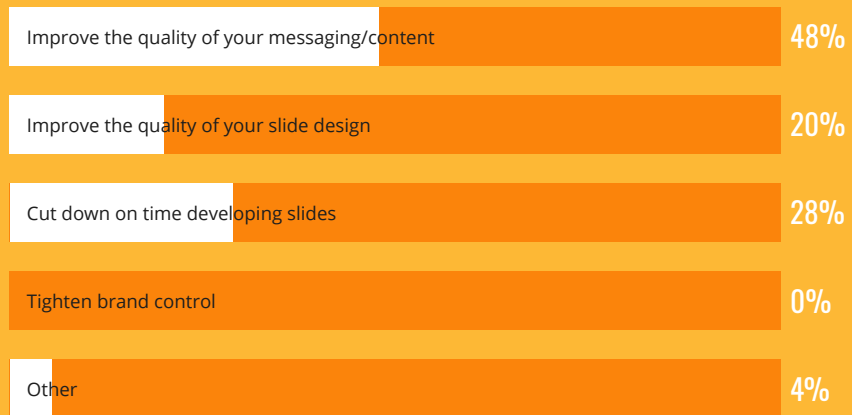
When you think about how many presentations you work on per week, your answer will support the view that presentations are commonplace in businesses of all sizes. Combine this volume with the personal time dedicated to creating these within your business and you can understand how presentations cost businesses a lot every day.

This raises two very important questions for businesses to ask themselves:

1. How effective were these presentations at meeting their intended purpose?
2. How many of these presentations did your company REALLY need?

When you begin looking at the volume of presentations you create, along with their effectiveness, you can move towards a more efficient way of creating your presentations.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT PRESENTATIONS IN YOUR BUSINESS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?



The challenge that people highlighted in the survey is that, combined, the time and the quality of slide design is the area that they would be most keen to address and to fix. However, going back to our vicious circle of the challenge that they're looking to fix, means that they don't have time to do that. And as a result, presentations continue to work to the lowest common denominator.

This cause and effect means that most actually wished to improve the quality of their message and content, but spent most of the time worrying about their slides.



OUR INSIGHTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding these issues and creating solutions to the challenges is never an easy thing. We have identified three areas where leaders should be encouraging their organisations to embrace new ways of thinking to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their presentations.

MANAGE YOUR PRESENTATION CULTURE

A previous Eyeful Insights article focused on the different types of presentation cultures that sit within businesses today. Increasingly, this didactic approach to presentation creation to support every piece of communication is slowly but surely strangling the efficiency of organisations. This has to stop and this is a key part of the cultural phase that organisations need to take themselves through.

The apparent obsession with creating verbose presentations can be related to two cultural drivers. The first is competition – the more slides you produce for a meeting, the more dedicated you are perceived by your peers and, most importantly, your seniors. It's viewed as a quantifiable KPI – I worked late to produce a 100 slide deck vs. my peer who arrived with 15 slides. The question rarely asked is how many of the 100 slides were actually used?

A man in a white shirt and blue tie is holding a tablet. The tablet displays various business charts and graphs, including a bar chart, a line graph, and a pie chart. The text on the tablet includes "New customers", "Profit", and "Financial profit 2:13". The man is pointing at the tablet with a pen.

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SHAWN VILLARON, POWERPOINT LEAD, MICROSOFT

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LESSON 1: Leaders need to create an environment where insecurity isn't countered through slide count but, by being given the tools (and time) to create quality presentations that deliver the desired outcome.

The second driver is creating a time-poor environment – ironically, the squeeze on time is a major impact on the efficiency of presentations. Fundamentally, there are too many presentations being created every day in organisations large and small. The ability to understand the purpose of a presentation is a quick and easy way of qualifying in and out the need for a set of slides.

“People aren't spending enough time thinking about the presentation before they even launch PowerPoint.”

Shawn Villaron, PowerPoint Lead, Microsoft

Equally, there has to be a view that culturally, presentations are an opportunity. They are a privilege and they are something to be embraced. What cannot be allowed to continue is this sense that presentations are tasks that are required for every meeting that is set in place.

LESSON 2: Leaders need to demonstrate best practices themselves. Ask the questions that really matter:

- Who is our audience?
- What do they want to get from this engagement?
- What do we want to achieve from this presentation?
- What proof points can we share to demonstrate audience-specific value?
- How do we make it concise and engaging?
- What format should this be in? Formal, Conversational, Informal?
- Do I need visuals? If so, what? In addition to PowerPoint, consider whiteboarding, hard copy documents or video
- How can we measure success?

This should all be underpinned with a formal and robust feedback loop. This will allow the organisation to self-govern in terms of the volume and quality of presentations being delivered within its organisation. If it is not adding value, do not do it. It's a simple but important tenet to follow.

EMBRACING THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

Technology is evolving fast to support the efficiency-minded organisation. Notably, Microsoft 365 (previously known as Office 365), provides a wide range of efficiency gains within the general use of the presentation.

Of course, a reliance on technology to drive greater efficiency will always come with a health warning. There are numerous mishandled tools like templates within PowerPoint that, when managed correctly, can deliver speed gains. However, they are rarely set up correctly or understood by the average user.

The sharing of slides should be easier... yet remains a challenge within most organisations. This is partly due to the perennial issue of version control across teams but often due to there being no single 'tagged' location from which to source your content.

The good news is that new technologies are arriving every day to address this challenge. For example, [Eyeful³](#) is a plug-in that sits within PowerPoint and improves the efficiency of slide creation by giving access to a searchable database of common slide layouts, assets, and branded templates that can be shared across the organisation.

LESSON 3: Technology is not a short cut BUT it can speed up the process of gathering content, leaving more time to focus on the effectiveness and outcome of your presentation.



CLOUD COLLABORATION

What we find is that if we can get you to put your files on the cloud, productivity can improve exponentially. The ability to collaborate with other people, confidently manage version control and share best practice across the organisation comes alive in the Cloud.

However, the ability to do something and actually following it through are two very separate things. The onus remains on the leader to drive a culture of collaboration across the organisation. The same challenge relates to the introduction of AI tools within PowerPoint, such as Presenter Coach and Designer. They are enablers but only of value if used correctly.

LESSON 4: Allow your people to experiment with the latest technology but only with the 'efficiency formula' firmly in mind. If technology speeds the process up but fails to improve the outcome of the presentation, it is merely a productivity win.

Great presentations are not an exercise in productivity gains – they can only be measured in the outcomes they generate.

Technology is never the panacea of efficiency. It always has to sit alongside a cultural and an improved understanding and knowledge for it to truly take hold. This is why the Eyeful³ solution not only introduces technology but also provides an outsource resource for large or complex slide decks, in addition to an ongoing support and improvement programme to ensure that all users are up-to-date with the latest and most efficient ways of producing slide decks.

Which takes us on to the value of core, not chore. Few organisations outsource their slides. Indeed, only 4 percent in our survey regularly outsourced their slides to an external party. However, there is value in embracing expertise in these different areas, not just when it comes to slide creation but, equally important, a focus on story and driving a strong and valuable call to action.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Slide presentations show no sign of going away anytime soon. They continue to dominate boardrooms, sales meetings, internal comms and, most recently, online tools like Zoom and Teams. Each engagement prompts the creation of more slides.

As a result, the world of B2B communications is slowly grinding to a halt under the weight of slideware.

Something needs to change. We cannot continue as we are. The quality and clarity of communication is suffering as a direct result of the perpetual creation of slides.

Just as we need to differentiate between efficiency and volume, we need to distinguish presentations from slides. Great presentations vary wildly in how they are delivered and the visual tools they pull upon to reinforce key messages.

The one thing they have in common is an audience.

By placing the needs of audience front and centre of presentation thinking, we immediately start the journey back to more efficient communications. By reducing the noise, slide count and content clutter and placing more value and focus on developing clear messages, supportive content, and valuable visuals, we all win.

It's time to start presenting efficiently. We hope you and your organisation will join us in making the change.



ABOUT EYEFUL PRESENTATIONS

Since 2004, Eyeful Presentations has built an enviable reputation as a world leader in the business of presentations.

Through expert research, testing and innovation, they help blue chip clients across the globe get the very best from their business presentations. This is achieved by implementing their proven Presentation Optimisation™ and Blended Presenting™ methodologies to ensure that every presentation has a clear, engaging story, a strong call to action and stunning design.

Their UK HQ is the home of Eyeful Labs, Europe's only dedicated centre of presentation excellence and the base for Eyeful's consultancy and training practice alongside a European team of dedicated presentation designers and digital practitioners.





PRESENTATIONS ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO NOT BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Eyeful was founded in 2004 to address a problem that befalls organisations of all sizes – poor communication at key moments.

It might be a must-win pitch, a high stakes shareholder engagement or strategically important internal conference...whatever the event, presentations play an intrinsic part in their success or failure.

Optimising these engagements is where Eyeful step in.

Understanding the fragile mix of elements that ensure presentation success is why, after all these years, we're still at the forefront of making communication work for clients across the globe.

The growing collection of Eyeful Insights papers is another example of this thought leadership in action. To learn more about our work, visit:

www.eyefulpresentations.com