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Getting Past PowerPoint

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Research Paper Abstract

- In September of 2004, Bridgewater State College approved the proposal for a student notebook computer requirement for all full-time undergraduate students which was implemented with the incoming freshman class.
- Little is known about the potential applications of notebook computers in the classroom and the effects of notebook computers on student learning. The purpose of this study was to determine if freshmen college students who are using notebook computers for note-taking, in-class assignments, and post-class assignments in an English Writing I course would achieve significantly higher scores and an increase in writing quality than students who are not allowed to use notebooks within a similar English Writing I course.
- Subjects within a treatment group that utilized notebook computers and a control group which did not utilize notebook computers had to complete four major writing assignments. Upon completion of all assignments, statistical analysis was performed of all data, including final averages and the ascension of student grades over time. It was hypothesized that students in the treatment group would *not* perform significantly better over time compared to the control group. T-test analysis of gradebook data over time revealed that students did perform significantly better over time while performing note-taking, in-class assignments, and post-class assignments with the use of notebook computers.

The slide from hell. We've all seen slideshows like this, as well as presentations in which the presenter reads off these slides. It's known as "Death by PowerPoint". PowerPoint is an easy, simple tool to use, but is also very easily abused with too much text, images that contribute nothing to the content, and bullet overload.

Kermit the Frog's Favorite Design

Headache!!!

We've also seen hideously designed slides like this with "cute" animations that we've seen a hundred times over. They are huge distractions for the audience who really should be focusing on the presenter and his/her message.

Identity 2.0

I was a master of the over-use of text and bullets myself in slideshows, but an online presentation I saw in 2005 forever changed my perspective on the effective use of PowerPoint. Dick Hardt, at the time the CEO of a company called Sxip Identity, performed the keynote presentation at the OSCON 2005 conference. Here's a snippet from his presentation, which at the time, and which remains to this day, one of the most dynamic, out of the box methods of using PowerPoint that I've ever seen. (Watch Video)

Of course, not everyone has the skills to incorporate such a dynamic style, but the ideas of using simple pictures and texts to convey points stuck with me.

Notebooks in the Classroom at BSC

NERCOMP SIG at U-Mass Amherst
February 7, 2006

Shortly thereafter, I was asked to co-present at a NERCOMP seminar at U-Mass Amherst with folks from Bridgewater, Salem, and Framingham State about their respective laptop programs. For my piece, I was asked to discuss the use of laptops in the classroom. I was assigned the 11:30 a.m. slot, so with lunch coming, I knew I had my work cut out for me. In addition, I had seen my colleagues' slides, and they were filled with 10-15 bullets per slide with extensive amounts of text – I knew I was going to have a very hard time engaging my audience at that point in the day.

- Laptops allow you to take your office with you on the go
- Teaching and learning from anywhere
 - Art Professor Dan Cooney's Blogging Project
- Classroom issues
 - Older desks are not well adapted for laptop use
 - Students with battery/power problems
 - Power Strip example

I put together an outline of what I wanted to discuss. But rather than present this outline, I decided to use poignant imagery to help get across my points. I grabbed a digital camera and ran out of my office, and here's how it went ...



I started off talking about how I hated laptops. I hate the keyboards, the mouse pad, the position of the screen, etc. – and I hate them so much that I actually turned my office laptop into a desktop computer – notice the external keyboard, external mouse, and the laptop platform to raise the screen to eye level. Having said that, I LOVED the flexibility of owning a laptop. At any moment I could be mobile and on the go, taking my laptop with me to meetings, conferences, workshops, home – you name it.



I then talked about how Art Professor Dan Cooney was having his students use their laptops to blog about art exhibits in the University's Art Building.



I then talked about how ill equipped our classrooms were to handle laptops. For instance, you can barely fit textbooks and notebooks on these desks, nevermind laptops. We needed to reconsider the types of classroom furniture we used.



Finally, I discussed classroom power issues, and one professor who daisy-chained a number of power strips together so that all 30 of his students could power up their laptops, which I'm pretty sure was a fire hazzard!

I may not have kept impending hunger out of the minds of my audience, but I definitely got their attention. As they say, an image is worth a thousand words, and these images really helped reinforce my message, which text and bullets can't always do.

Types of E-Commerce

I also saw presentations by noted intellectual property rights guru Larry Lessig in which he used simple text on the slides to convey his message. The next time I taught my MGMT 360 Fundamentals of Information Systems course, I incorporated the styles of Lessig and Hardt. For example, this slide was an introduction to a discussion around types of e-commerce.

consumer-to-consumer (c2c)

Here is another slide in which the focus was on consumer-to-consumer e-commerce businesses, which got us talking about businesses like ebay. Without having a dozen bullets to distract them, which can often happen with PowerPoint (the presenter is on bullet 2 and I'm already reading bullet 5) I was able to retain their focus on the matter at hand.

Takahashi Method

Recently I discovered the Takahashi slide method.

Simple Words

Takahashi's method is to use simple, uncomplicated words and ...



Keep it
Big

To keep the text size BIG.

Cheap Seats

He uses this concept, similar to Lessig and Hardt, to keep the audience on track, and ensure that people sitting in the back of the room, and those with visual impairments, can still see content on the slides.

Final Quick Tips

Write it out

The problem with a slideshow filled with images is that if you distribute the slideshow to the audience afterwards via a web site, there is no context – the slides won't make much sense. PowerPoint designers suggest writing your talk out, which not only helps you in developing your thoughts and slides, but you can later paste the text into the Speaker Notes field of each slide, which will help when distributing your slides later to an online audience. In addition, you can use that written talk in developing a journal article.

Record Narration



PowerPoint provides you with the ability to record audio into each slide. Rather than just post presenter notes in your slideshow, consider recording those notes as audio directly into your slides as well – another bonus when posting your presentation on a web site.

Cite your sources

And of course, always cite your sources when posting quotes and images on slides. I too often see presenters using content they've taken from the web, such as cartoon strips, but they don't attribute any credit to the author.



Here's an example of how I provide credit for images I use. I won't profess to be a copyright/fair use expert, but aside from asking permission, I think it's a fairly safe method to use.

Pecha-Kucha

20 slides

20 seconds per slide

Finally, if you have students develop PowerPoint presentations for your class, consider having them create Pecha-Kucha slideshows either for those presentations OR as practice presentations. The concept for the Pecha-Kucha is simple – 20 slides, and each slide progresses automatically every 20 seconds. This means that presenters are forced to create slideshows with simple text and imagery. In addition, it's a great exercise in preparation, for as you'll see in this example, if you're not prepared ahead of time, you can easily fall off track.