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For the Internet savvy amongst you (I hope that's everyone), you will have a pretty good idea of what I mean by spam: unsolicited email, junk mail, inbox killers etc.

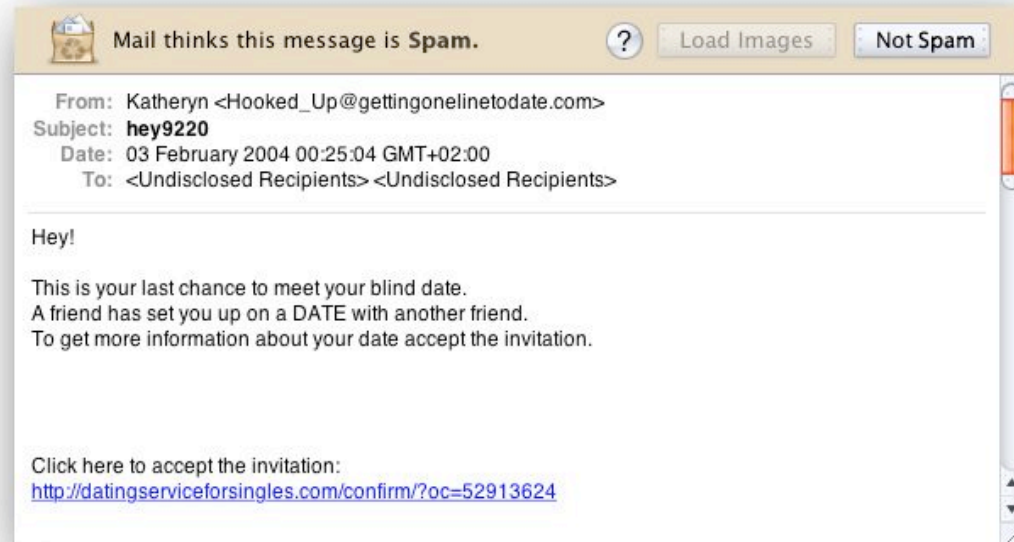
Spam to me is information that I:

- **Didn't ask for**
- **Don't need**
- **Don't want**

If you're like me you delete these instantly, without reading them. (never-ever unsubscribe, if you do that, they know you exist, and you just became worth a lot more cash to them).

A similar thing happens in most presentations that we attend, the speaker quite literally **spam's the audience's attention** with information they:

- **Didn't ask for**
- **Don't need**
- **Don't want**



Now, as we don't come equipped with a delete button, we go for the next available option i.e. switching off. Sadly for both the presenter and the audience, once we've switched off to the speaker, we don't necessarily turn back on for the good stuff; we're too busy thinking about our next meeting...or last night's roll in the hay.

This critical mistake is the single biggest presentation killer. It comes from the belief that the presentation is about the presenter. It isn't (***Sorry for you!***). Or it shouldn't be. It's all about the audience, what's important to the presenter may not be (it usually isn't) important to the audience. In the guide that follows, I've gone through some basic rules that we feel will help you develop content that keeps you out of the **Attention Spam trap**.





Introduction:

So what is a presentation?

Contrary to popular belief, at no point in the definition of the word “presentation” does the word “PowerPoint” appear.

Presentation = To convey a message, to achieve a result.



So what's PowerPoint then?

PowerPoint is a brilliant, yet oft misused software toolbox developed by Microsoft that can aid the presenter in creating visual aids where required.

It is also the **downfall** of most presentations today.

“If I am to speak ten minutes, I need a week for preparation; if fifteen minutes, three days; if half an hour, two days; if an hour, I am ready now.”

- Woodrow Wilson

Presentation Process:

So, you have been asked to create a presentation, you have PowerPoint open and are ready to rock, what now? Here's a process and a few tips that could help you, some may be hard to swallow, trust me though, or if you have a question, mail me - rich@missinglink.co.za

Oh, and close PowerPoint, you're way ahead of yourself.

Objective:

Firstly, create an objective – decide exactly the result you want from your audience. Remember, a presentation needs to elicit a change, be it in opinion or otherwise – if you just want to share information, you're selling yourself short.



Your objective should be concise and you should have a specific result in mind, for example:

“I want to relay my marketing strategy to get the management teams feedback.”

Presentation = **To convey a message, to achieve a result.**

In the example above the marketing strategy is the **message**, feedback from management is the **result**.

Acid Test:

The true Attention Spam acid test here is to cross-check your objective against the brief given to you. **Are you sure that this objective fits what is asked of you?** If so, good! If not, SPAM!

Creating the overall objective is the easy bit, utilizing it throughout the development of your presentation is something else altogether. You see, while most of us are able to talk on our subject of choice for hours, very few people have the inclination to listen for as long.



In order to both shorten the content, as well as keep it interesting for your audience, it is important to remain topical. An easy way of doing this is to turn your objective into a **question** that you constantly ask yourself e.g.

Will this help relay my marketing strategy and thus provoke feedback from the management team?

If the answer to both the above is no, it's probably safe to say that this is not the place to bring it up i.e. **It's spam.**

Too often (always!) people feel that as they have the audience in the room, they should not waste the opportunity on only the required topic “hell, I know it’s a product sales meeting, but lets tell the prospect about our new charity drive while we’re here, it’ll be good PR after all.”

Remember! Having an audience is one thing, having a captive audience is something else altogether. You can spam their attention all you want, but you’re gambling on them missing the content you really need them to hear. **Is it worth it?**

Before reading any further, write out your objective in both forms (objective and question). Try keeping it short and to the point. This is not the place for detail – we’re talking strategy here, not tactics.

Script Structure Development:

Were going to play a game here, you did it as a kid, it’s called spot the difference:



Figure 1



Figure 2

These two are not the same, you are not a professional actor, do not try to work from a script!

We have all seen those films that are so over-acted that they are laughable. I have seen more than my fair share of laughable presentations.

Spoken English and written English are not the same. It is easily transparent when someone is simply reciting a previously written script. It comes across as bad acting i.e. laughable (see where I'm going here?).

When developing a presentation, most people work in one of two ways. Some people develop theirs by creating their PowerPoint slide by slide, then working on what to say later. Others put pen to paper and develop the entire presentation word for word. The former is criminal, the latter, alas, only mildly better.

Using your **objective as a basis**, stick on paper (in a book people – scraps get lost!) the items that are key to your message, remembering of course your introduction and conclusion – these two are practically your objective word for word. Now work on different orders for these items, pay careful attention to your flow. Remember, you want your **presentation to build to a climax**, not ramble on with monotonous abandon. Once you have your order, add the relevant sub-headings or sub-topics. Again paying attention to flow, put these in a workable order. You now have developed your Script Structure; next you must look at your timings.

Note- Try use only 6 or 7 key points, contrary to popular belief the human brain has more in common with a sieve than a sponge (scientifically referred to as “channel capacity”).





Timing:

Banking for me is a simple (if not misguided) process. I challenge myself to have as little left in the bank at the end of the month as is humanly possible. Quite frankly, if I have R10.00 left the day before payday, I feel I have not made sufficient effort. Last month I managed to get down to the outstanding amount of R0.02!

My wife will be the first to tell you that this is a flawed theory!

For most people, presenting poses a similar challenge, “I’ve been given 30 minutes and I’ll be damned if I’m going to waste a single second of it.” So what if your objective only warrants 15 minutes, right? (I hate those writers that try to shove their one BIG IDEA down your throat at every opportunity, but shit man...this is spam!)

With your Script Structure in place, applying timing is a walk in the park. There is one trick though – do not work backwards. Don’t start with a time in mind and tick off the seconds as you go through. Look at each topic and sub-topic in reference to your objective and see how much time each warrants.

Once you’re done, look at the total time, if it’s shorter than has been allotted you, well done. If it’s longer, look over what you can streamline, there is always fat...find it, and trim it!

A thought here, when you finish quicker than you were supposed to, two things happen, firstly you look confident. Secondly, you give people an extremely valuable gift. Time!



Rehearsal:

Here comes a tough sale...

Most people argue that there is no way that they can rehearse without their slides. Most people are quickly proven wrong.

Once you accept that your visual aids are there to improve message retention in the listener, and **NOT**, as is often the case, to act as cue cards for the speaker, you will have no problem with this concept.

I feel strongly about this, so with your permission, or without it really, I'd like to digress for a second to try and explain where I'm coming from.

Anyone who has ever taught a child to ride a bike, or who can recall learning themselves, will remember the first time the stabiliser wheels came off. Dad ran behind the bike holding the saddle while you peddled. The wind was blowing through your hair, the world was your oyster and your Dad had of course, let go - you were riding! It was when you realized that Dad had let go that the shit hit the fan, and you hit the ground! The problem was not your capability, simply the pre(miss)conception that you needed him there. This is the problem we face when presenting. **By rehearsing with our slides we become a slave to them.** This is bad; they're there to help. You are the presentation!

So take your script-structure and timings and start to present. Consider **anecdotes** that may help clarify your message here. Work on sounding **casual and confident**.

We often tell our client's to rehearse while driving. For most people their car is a safe-haven. It's our bubble where we can see out, but no one can see in, thus we tend to be relaxed. This is good.

Another advantage is that as we are driving, we can afford, only a passing glance at our notes when we stop at traffic lights. This trains us to rely more on our memory, and less on our crutch - the cue cards.

TOP TIP: If the people next to you bust you rehearsing in the car, you're going to look fairly stupid. No worries, just keep your eye's forward and pretend you're finishing a conversation on your car kit. For effect I usually lean forward and "hang up". Note, you've got to keep schtum here or you're back to looking like the knob that talks to him/herself. Wicked!



While rehearsing, think about items or stories that will aid you in delivering your message. Many suggest recording yourself, or standing in front of a mirror, at this stage, I don't recommend this. You will find that you are trying too hard and are thus not yourself.

After rehearsing like this for a while, sit back at your desk with your script structure, adding notes to headings or sub-headings where you can recall a specific item you thought would help. Do not feel you need something under every heading, if it isn't immediately apparent, and needs to be "found" it probably is not going to be that helpful to your audience.



Creating your visual-aid:

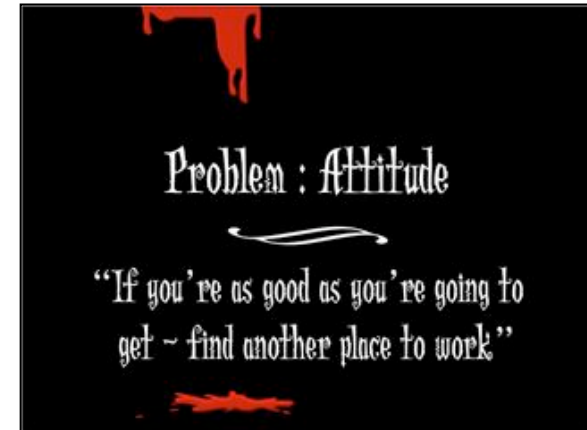
Okay, now you're ready to begin working on your visual-aids, remembering of course that that is all that they are.

There are several tools available, however, for the sake of this document I'm going to refer to Microsoft's PowerPoint. From a simple availability standpoint it wins hands down.

As I mentioned earlier, PowerPoint is actually a great tool, it's the common misuse of the tool that has given it a bad rap amongst the "pro's". Used correctly it can be an extremely valuable addition to the end product.

The trick is of course, not to overdo it. Taking your Script structure and your rehearsal notes, make a list of the key words or images you want to use. Do not look through the template imagery, settling for the first usable anything usable, if PowerPoint doesn't have the picture you require, an image search on www.google.com is an almost guaranteed to find what your looking for.

Now, this is not the place for me to give you a PowerPoint step-by-step tour, I simply want to put you in a logical mindset before you begin.



Work towards an absolute maximum of 6 words on any given slide. **YOU WANT YOUR AUDIENCE TO LISTEN, NOT READ!** I can't stress this enough. This is always our toughest sell, if you need more words, use more slides, (there's no rule about that) just don't clutter them

I personally prefer images to text, yes there are times where a certain amount of text is required, however 90% of the time it isn't. The text comes from you.

PowerPoint's transitions and sound effects should be avoided. They do not add to your presentation, but will rather pull the focus away from you. This is rarely a good thing. Custom sound effects or video clips are of course a viable option, but again, use them carefully.

Most importantly, do not feel that every topic requires a detailed slide, often the topic heading, or even your company logo will suffice.

As a rule, less is definitely more here.

Less is more!

The presentation:

Alright, here we are. Hopefully you've had a few more (not too many) rehearsals with your slides, ensuring that you are confident, but not robotic.

Get to your presentation as early as you can. If possible, set up before your audience arrives. I would strongly suggest that you bring a back-up copy of your presentation on disk. Computers are prone to untimely sickness, usually two minutes after you begin. If, heaven forbid, this happens, don't fuss. No one will blame you for a computer hiccup if you have an alternative on hand. In fact, in my experience errors like this actually humanize the speaker in the eyes of the audience giving them an endearing quality.



More often than not you should stick to the structure you've developed. However, if the situation warrants that you deviate from the plan slightly, go for it, this is another reason to opt for simpler slides, it will allow you to make changes "on the fly".

When the structured section of your presentation is over you have a crucial choice, do you open the floor for questions? There is no standard rule for this although in my experience this will depend on your audience. Press, or people that are comfortable with you will often ask questions, a mixed audience of strangers, usually won't. If your feeling is that no questions will be asked, don't open the floor to them; simply explain that people can approach you afterwards in person if they want to discuss things further.

(Did we miss anyone?)

Questions:

If you decide to ask questions, make sure that you leave your conclusion until the questions are over. By doing this, you are reclaiming ownership of the presentation from your audience. You are also ending on the crux of your presentation, not a random point brought up by an audience member. As you know, the first and last few minutes of your presentation are the clincher.

Tip: When answering questions, avoid complimenting the questioner, "That's a great question." What the balance of the room hears is "Everyone else's questions have been crap."

So there you go, a nice helping of Attention Spam lite. Eat strictly as part of a calorie-controlled diet. For best results combine it with Missing Link's professional services. Presenting seriously is the most fun you can have standing up, if it isn't for you, you're doing it wrong. Have fun!

If you have any questions or feedback, you know where to find me.

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