



Jim Endicott

4 techniques to guarantee you're a terrible presenter

Jim Endicott is owner/manager of Distinction, a business communications company that provides creative and consulting support services. Jim assists business professionals in enhancing the content, tools and techniques related to effective presenting. He can be reached at 503.554.1203, jim.endicott@distinction-services.com.

As you all know, the road to the top isn't an easy one. Getting there can be like climbing one of those rope ladders that dangles from a dangerous precipice, and if you're in high-tech, it's even tougher. Simply hanging on to the thing suddenly becomes as important as actually

fired, collect unemployment and move to Minnesota and fish for walleye?

If either is the case, here are guidelines for delivering a terrible, job-destroying presentation. Follow this advice and you're sure to fail the next time you stand in front of an audience.

Finally, there is a direct correlation between fear and preparation. I've proven to myself time and time again that my confidence and composure in presenting to an audience, especially large ones, is in direct correlation to my comfort level with the technology I'm using and my grasp of the information



I'm presenting. Add to this the critical preparation step of running through your presentation a million times so that your interaction with the audience takes on a conversational tone, and you might end up feeling downright comfortable.

You see, audiences want desperately for

trying to get somewhere.

As the business environment becomes ever more frantic, noisy and information-intensive, the ability to create and deliver an effective presentation to peers and customers has become more important than ever. The attitude of "my presentations are good enough" just doesn't cut it today. Not only have audience expectations changed dramatically over the past few years, but corporations increasingly look at a person's presentation skills when it's time to dole out promotions. As a presentation consultant, I know this is true.

But what if you're tired of the rat race and just want to stay where you are in the corporate hierarchy, or better yet, to get

1. Spend as little time preparing as possible.

The problem with doing any preparation at all is that it severely undermines the efforts of people trying to sabotage their careers. In addition to causing you to miss that 2:30 tee time, it has the side effect of providing additional insight into the subject matter, which in turn allows you to better anticipate questions that will be posed. Also, credibility with your audience is dramatically enhanced when you move crisply and seamlessly through your presentation. Additional practice will tend to keep you more on track and less apt to drill down into content not critical to your key points. Unfortunately, this can only impress those who are in attendance.

us to succeed. Nothing makes them feel more uncomfortable than to experience a presenter who is clearly ill-prepared and struggling to keep their attention. So, if you're serious about tanking your career, instead of running through your presentation five times, just *scan* your notes before you take the stage. With any luck, you'll never be invited back.

2. Try to make your presentation look like everyone else's.

This may be one of the easier steps to follow in your journey to personal freedom. As a matter of fact, this is almost intuitive. The software program you're probably using has provided some built-in assistance. Find a template that looks like one you've seen a thou-



If you want a bad presentation, create bad slides.

sand other presenters use, then use it yourself. That way your corporate identity will become generic and boring, too. If you must use a logo, by all means try to find one that is really jaggy. The best way to do this is to import an EPS logo created specifically for PostScript print reproduction and use it in your electronic presentations. This will ensure your logo is totally illegible. Even if they do manage to read it, it will be clear to everyone that your presentation is an afterthought. After all, how many times have you seen a bad logo used in your company brochures or videos? Let me take a stab at this... how about never?

So by using a poor reproduction of your logo in your presentation, you will send a clear signal that it was the best you could throw together in the time you had, therefore reinforcing Step 1, total lack of preparation. Now you're on a roll. Your manager is coming under some pressure to alter your employment status, so you're halfway there. I'm never one to leave much to chance, though. If there's any doubt that your use of an ill-chosen template might have eluded your peers, I suggest forgetting the stock templates altogether and forging full steam ahead into a...custom background design. Talk about freedom. You now have the opportunity to

leverage 16.8 million colors in the design of your presentation. Bright reds, greens, browns or maybe just plain white — anything goes. Because your presentation software has assured you that anyone can create a dynamic and powerful presentation, there's really no point in becoming pre-occupied with what's appropriate and what's not. Let 'er rip!

3. Try to cram as much stuff on each slide as possible.

One of the best ways to totally confuse and disorient your audience is to place as much text and as many meaningless graphics on each of your screens as possible. Because an audience's natural inclination is to read what's on the screen, you have the opportunity to take the focus off of you for extended periods of time. You could take advantage of this to use the restroom, get some coffee or file your nails because they will still be reading when you return to the room. It may take some effort, however, to bring the focus back to you, but it can be done. Visual clutter also has another unintended result — loss of credibility. Think of the best presenters you've ever seen and the visual aids they've used. Earlier this year Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager* and other books, treated the several thousand atten-

dees of TRAINING '98 to a unique keynote address. He broke all the presentation rules. He paced fervently during his 30-minute talk and only used four small stuffed animals that were tucked away in his pocket to illustrate his message. He captured the hearts and minds of every attendee, illustrating that it takes very little visual support to tell a product or service story that conveys our personal passion.

We often fill our screens because of our fear of looking at and interacting with those who have come to listen. Our inability to crisply organize information does a disservice to our audiences. What could have made a decent detailed handout has made it to the big screen. (Start polishing up the ol' boat!)

4. Add as many animations and sound effects as you can.

This diversion tactic is a proven way to take the audience's attention away from key messages and place it squarely on our prowess in getting the most out of the software. By concentrating on just this single area you may be able to reduce even good content in a professional business presentation into a circus sideshow. The gratuitous use of sound to punctuate anything that moves is a powerful tool; it might even irritate your audience to the point of a mass exodus. Don't let their initial chuckles fool you. These effects will soon grate on everyone's nerves.

As you have already discovered, all these steps are interrelated. The more stuff you can make move onscreen, especially if there's absolutely no point to the movement, means you spend less time actually working on your presentation's content (Step 1), and draws attention away from the fact that your presentation lacks any real graphical impact (Step 2).

You see, it's really very easy to coordinate a complete professional meltdown. The real challenge is for those poor slob who actually want to move ahead in their careers. ■