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Finding the Balance of Tools and Technology

By Jim Endicott, Owner/Manager of Distinction

You find yourself breaking into a cold sweat, pacing nervously, frequent looking over your shoulder at the screen. and your presentation hasn't even started yet! It really doesn't take an audience very long to figure out how comfortable we are with presenting. Contrast that with how we want to be perceived - audience interaction that's comfortable and conversational and a message that flows like honey from our lips. Professional speakers make it look so darn easy but as wide as this chasm of confidence might feel to you right now, there are some tips that can help you get to the other side.



Transparent technology

In a perfect world, the best presentation technology is no technology at all - just you, your audience and a passionate story to tell. In the real world however, we need bright compelling images orchestrated by a laptop computer to assist in sharing our story with others. As we've all observed, as soon as something "goes wrong" in a presentation, any continuity and flow we've managed to create comes to a screeching halt. Our technology has sabotaged our very best efforts. The most effective technology will quickly blend into the boardroom scenery waiting to be called into action and not upstage us in the process. There are a couple ways we can do this.

- 1- Use the smallest, lowest profile electronic projector available and eliminate as much clutter as possible between the laptop computer and projector. Set up well in advance of your meeting.
- 2- A small remote mouse, used without distracting fanfare, can seamlessly move you through your presentation graphics eliminating frequent trips to the keyboard. Anticipate your slide advances and have many of them occur while you're speaking. (*Imagine how distracting it would be if an actor in a movie paused everywhere the page turns occurred in the scripts - we would suddenly become aware that it's canned content and would be headed for the exits.*)
- 3- Choose one simple slide transition and stick with it the whole way. Nothing will draw attention to the software tools you're using quicker than creating a circus of transition effects.

Controlling the audience's focal point

As a presenter, your eyes quickly convey to an audience what's really important. Frequent glances over your shoulder at the screen tells your audience that that's where the actions really is - unlike the Wizard of OZ, they feel like they're being directed to pay no attention to

the man in front of the screen. This little habit can also leave your audience wondering if even you are surprised by what's going on back there. When a significant animated element or digital video is being played, turn to the screen and watch quietly and with interest (*Even if you've seen it a hundred times before!*). Remember, it's the first time for them. The ultimate focus of your attention, however, will be your audience. It's the best compliment a presenter can pay because it's a constant reminder that all this is for them, not something you're compelled to endure.

Practice, practice, practice

Practice with your presentation technology until it "disappears". Practice your opening/closing comments and topic transitions until their comfortable and smooth. We do all this of course so we don't end up practicing on our audiences. It's been said that time is the currency of the new millennium. Make the most of yours and respect your audiences'. They deserve nothing less than your very best and in the end, they will define your success, not you.

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