

What's the ideal level and type of visual aids to be used in a keynote presentation?

 By [Jonathan Curran](#)

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I am often asked this by the motivational speakers that my agency represents. 80 percent of our speakers are well known and paid to give keynotes at conferences and to companies mainly in Europe. But the remaining 20 percent of our speakers are newcomers to the circuit.

The content of a speaker's presentation and its running order which includes the use of visual aids is of paramount importance to delivering a successful presentation. This applies not just to professional public speakers, but also equally to business professionals who are required to make presentations within the work place.

Introducing yourself

First point to consider is that not all, or in fact many of your audience, will know who you are. You may be famous (to yourself!) and to those locally but, when speaking for example to audiences you need to consider them not as one, but as a large collection of individuals. Every person in the room will have a different opinion and learn something slightly differently from a speaker. I have sat at the back of the room and watched countless sports stars who are world famous, ask early on for a hand show of who knows their sport, let alone their famous speaker and seen only 30% of hands go up. I always tell speakers to assume that not everyone has an interest in current affairs or sport, watching the news or reads a daily newspaper.

The best way to introduce yourself to your audience is to assume they know nothing about you. If it's feasible because of what your background is I recommend putting together a short, very dynamic and energising video that plays by your request upon meeting your audience. I have done this countless times and it works. I believe this is where the phrase 'setting the stage' comes from. It makes total sense.

I have a very great example of an introductory video, which was played to a very international audience in advance of the world's greatest rugby union player taking to the stage. How many people from Switzerland, Germany or the USA knew about rugby where the sport is not played professionally? Not many but they did appreciate their famous guest who was Jonah Lomu fully three minutes later following this video introduction:

Jonah Lomu Speaker Introduction copyright Promotivate Speakers Agency

If video isn't possible then consider a simple slide on the big screen behind you. This is effective and helps prevent some of the audience from turning off early on due to lack of interest.

It should contain nothing more than your name and title of what you do. Also consider adding why you are there. If you have a background that people buy into then also push up a large image of you in your 'work gear'.

Powerpoint - Yes or No?

Common opinion in the past few years is that Powerpoint's use to present facts is uninspiring and should be avoided at all costs. I'm inclined to support this.

Powerpoint's best use is to graph up facts and figures and therefore useful for those wearing suits who sit behind desks. But few speakers are presenting numbers or certainly shouldn't be. I [still have many speakers](#) who rely on Powerpoint today but they are getting less and less.

One of the very best speakers I work with will only use Powerpoint, but in his defence he's only using it as a tool for showing his pictures. The other advantage Powerpoint gives is being able to help the speaker with their running order, timing and advance practice. I say avoid it, as it can kill a presentation and takes attention away for the speaker.

The most effective use of visual aids

I advise not focusing on what message you're trying to convey to your audience, and certainly don't attempt to work in getting your audience to like you.

What's most important is that they're engaged throughout and leave feeling their speaker was worth an hour or so of their valuable time. To do this you need to bring energy, enthusiasm, motivation, inspiration and knowledge to your audience. Don't underestimate 'knowledge and inspiration,' as these in particular are two elements that individuals are very interested in.

We all like to learn new ways and things. We learn by listening to others. Chances are you're privileged to be on the stage because you've done something that others would find very difficult or impossible to do - there's the interest! It's up to you to make sure your presentation reflects this. To master this you need to get in early with grabbing their attention.



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A great video introduction of between 30 seconds and 3 minutes can accomplish this and make them sit up and stop texting their colleagues. I suggest if the video has no natural sounds in the background that you choose an energising backing track. Many of you will be familiar with [Bear Grylls](#) on Discovery whose show has Bear jumping from helicopters in the opening sequence. I worked with Bear when he first started as a speaker and when he was unknown and this was exactly how he opened his motivational talks. It hasn't done Bear Grylls any harm!

Keeping their attention

I recommend the use of visual aids throughout any presentation if you want to retain control and stop people reaching for their phones. How often you ask?

Ideally the speaker should be clicking on a new visual every three to five minutes. There are so many forms of visual aids today to consider. Obviously an easy play is to use YouTube video on the screen (assuming you have a good connection and tested it in advance) though you need to factor in adverts displaying.

I'd try to have your own video and not use third parties if possible, although I do think the unpredictability of the internet and using YouTube can add to and also spark up audiences.

Again put yourself in your audiences position, not your own and ask 'is it really interesting' if not don't use it. One clever use of a visual I experienced recently was whilst attending an innovation conference in London. There was a live video feed from a paraplegic man in his wheelchair who was sitting in his home 200 miles away remotely controlling a small drone that was flying above the audience. That was different but it worked and was certainly memorable. You should always be seeking out the 'unusual' as audiences pay to see and hear something they are not used to.

If you're playing something, whether it's a series of videos, stills, live feed to someone relevant make sure you close each down immediately and move the speech on to the next area. You need to bring the attention back to you as the speaker, and regain control. Visuals can be so effective that they can kill the impact of their speaker, meaning the speaker should see the play button as an ejector seat switch if content is not properly delivered.

A typical keynote speech is 40 minutes long. Running an introductory video followed by further pop ups on the big screen every 3-5 minutes is likely to remove about 10 minutes of talk time. This is good, as less is always best. A concise and well structured talk interspersed with great visuals will really help any speaker cut out waffle and repetition. The less a speaker says the better and visuals can tell so much more of the story than words can.

The wrap up

Always wrap up a keynote speech with a thank you slide which includes your contact details. Verbally and very sincerely

thank them for listening and giving up their time. Wish them well and make yourself available to meet anyone who wishes immediately afterwards.

If you are good on social media or have press connection, a great way to thank your client is to post an image taken of you with their people. You're helping promote their brand or company and 9 out of 10 companies will find this a nice afterthought. It'll also help get you your next booking.

ABOUT JONATHAN CURRAN

Jonathan Curran is an author and founder of Promotivate Speakers Agency. He is regarded as an agent of choice by professionals in the speaker industry and an expert on motivational speakers. He works with a superb group of after dinner speakers and he is honoured to represent such a range of talent! Follow Promotivate on Twitter.
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