

Make sure your slides are the itch, not the scratch



By [Douglas Kruger](#)

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PowerPoint was once a really good idea. It's not the program's fault that it all went wrong.

Microsoft's proud creation suffers a similar PR problem to money. Universally acknowledged as the root of all evil, money was falsely accused. The original verse actually states that "the *love* of money is the root of all evil." Similarly, it is the obsessive, compulsive, yearning, mindless, brainwashed, mewling, needling, squirming, frightening *need* for PowerPoint that is the real problem. Not PowerPoint itself.

No, PowerPoint is not inherently evil. Nor, for that matter, is the atomic bomb, poison gas or timeshare salespeople. It is how they are inflicted upon society that does it and, through no fault of its own, PowerPoint has been used to inflict more pain on professional people, in a shorter space of time, than multilevel marketing and global recession combined.

Info-dump a common problem

One of the most common problems is the information-dump. Speakers and presenters feel a level of anxiety before they present, and in order to assuage their doubts, they stuff everything they know onto their slides. This way, they feel, they will be secure. "I have the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica on my slides! What could possibly go wrong?"

What then happens is that they end up trying to read three hours' worth of text in their 20 minute time-slot.

This creates three problems:

1. **Audience disconnect:** You sound like you're reading and, for that reason, you lose all of the magic of human connection, which is the essence and true value of public speaking.
2. **Time problems:** Everyone goes overtime, thus pushing the agenda, which was set to end at 5pm, into the early hours of the next morning. Spouses file for divorce.
3. **Redundancy:** Everything's on the screen for the audience to read. So why are you even there? The speaker becomes a pointless aid to a block of text. The whole conference could have been achieved by email.

Information dumps are a bad idea. Professional communicators know that having all of the information is only half of the job. Turning it into a useful message, which is suited to the audience that is present on the day, is the balance.

There are a number of techniques for solving the info-dump problem. Here's one of the simplest:

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Don't give the answers on the screen. Instead, pose the problem. Create the tension. Make your slides the catalyst for curiosity.

This is very simply done with headlines. Rather than using a headline that *states*, use one that *asks*. The headline "20% of people have ugly, webbed toes" is not nearly as effective as the headline "What percentage of people have ugly, webbed toes?"

Asking questions is a powerful way to create audience interest and interaction. Once you've asked the question, pause for a moment and allow them to digest it. They may even suggest answers, which shows engagement. Or a perverse interest in toes. Either way, you have created a vibe in the room.

Once your slide has created the curiosity, it has done its job and it can go back to sleep. Now *you* are the show, and *you* should answer the question.

The real magic

The real magic is in your delivery, in your connection with them, and not in the slide. Let the slide function as a guideline, setting up your presentation, while you act as oracle, dispensing the answers. Professional speaker Randy Gage said it best when he asserted, "Text on a slide is not a visual aid."

So, the next time you prepare for an important presentation, and the temptation arises to simply dump the entire contents of your vast body of knowledge onto a slide, pause for a moment. Reconsider. Be brave. You can do better than that.

Have the courage to trust yourself. Create slides that are merely launch-pads. Their only job is to set you up, and then you can dive right in. No one will ever remember your slides. But if you connect with them, they will remember *you*.

ABOUT DOUGLAS KRUGER

Douglas Kruger is the bestselling author of nine business books with Penguin, including the global release: *Virus-Proof Your Small Business*. Meet him at www.douglaskruger.com or email info@douglaskrugerspeaker.com

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