

The Art of Technical Presentation – Outline Handout

John Peterson: jtp@technologist.com (for Neon Guild Presentation, October 2010)

Intro

- A) Technology is cool – needs to be shared!
- B) There are so many opportunities to present – to parents, your class, your prospective employer, your spouse, your prospective client, your community
- C) There are way too many awful presentations going on – especially from techies!
- D) Everyone has the potential to share & present well, make a positive impression, persuade. – and to improve!

A presentation is: Beneficial, interactive sharing of ideas, experiences, information.

(and note how “information” is last.)

A presentation is NOT a speech (which is a non-interactive broadcast)

Common principles apply to all presentations - large group, or one-on-one: communicate, empathize, interact, educate, persuade --- all with PEOPLE in mind

>>> It's the interaction with people that makes a presentation shine

5 P's of Presentation:

Passion, Preparation, Performance, People, Potholes (to avoid)

Passion:

A prerequisite for great presentations!

Means being excited about your topic, personally invested, knowledgeable

Can be in any area: video games, sports, personal workout regimens, how to bake bread, Travel tips, Windows 7 Libraries, Champagne tasting, fly fishing, keeping a green lawn, linux media servers!! (notice – many/most of these are NOT technical.

But technical presentations and audiences have special considerations – both challenging and helpful.

- 1) Upside: Technical audiences are almost always patient, and willing to overlook polish for content. Sadly, they've seen so many bad presentations that they probably expect yours to be bad – and they came anyway!!

- 2) Downside: Technical audiences are technically knowledgeable, so it's hard to BS. Also, technical audiences want some fairly deep or practical content. Easy on the glam & gloss...

Preparation (1st P):

The key to good presentations - and conquering fear!

Means being ready – or even over-ready. (Note – really no such thing as over ready...)

FIRST: Key questions to ask early. Contact presentation host to establish (via email or written form):*

- 1) Why – what's driving them – why you, why this topic, why this time, this audience
- 2) Who (who will be the audience, and how many)
- 3) What (what the subject is desired, in as detailed a way as possible, and also how long can it/should it run)
- 4) When (the exact date and time, expected show time, and whether your show is dependant on others (or others on yours), and how you will both deal with delays, re-schedules, or cancellations. Cancellation Note – it's not if, but when. Cancellations happen – don't take it personally.)
- 5) Where (the address, but just as important, the presentation space – size, seating, microphone/projector needed?)
- 6) Wherewithal (what specifically will they provide, for video, audio, presentation gear, food, perhaps \$\$, and exactly who is your point of contact (1: beforehand; 2: at the event for setup and issues)

Second: Brainstorming topic, flow, key points*

- Use this time to loosely consider what to present, and how to present it, in what order
- Do NOT use presentation software for this – use a hammock, paper, text doc, etc.
- Do this far enough ahead to allow for relaxed review, and multiple revisions
- Outtake is a presentation outline – key ideas and points.

Third: Tweaking knowledge –

- Do research needed in order to be solid on all the material you'd like to share
- Perhaps update your knowledge, or buttress with some stats
- Consider likely questions, especially given your audience. You want to have answers!

Fourth: Assembling Material to support key points

- Pictures, examples, samples, stories, stats.
- At least one item to support/enhance each point you want to make.
- Wherever possible, find graphical material to share. That way, while you talk, they can absorb your image.
- >> Use Images/photos, not clipart – Great images are worth 1000 words!
- To find images, use your own, or leverage the Internet. Google graphics search, iStockPhoto, etc.
- Sometimes it's fun to take your own pictures to illustrate a particular point. Often these are the most interesting, because they match your story so well.

Image Tips:

- Choose one image to illustrate each point. Let them absorb visually while you talk.
- Avoid text bullets/block like the plague!!!! If you use text on your slides, they will read it, and tune you out. Why even have a presenter (you), if they have text to read. UGH.
- Choose images based on relevance, impact. Avoid generic, slick images that don't closely support your point.
- Rule of thirds – Power points = intersections of 1/3 lines (yup!). Feel free to crop photos mercilessly. Most photos need cropping badly.
<http://www.digital-photography-school.com/rule-of-thirds>
- Highlight key item on the image with every trick in the book: Contrast, alignment, relative size, color, cropping. Every photo management utility has this and much more.
- Two of my favorites:
 - Free: XnView: <http://www.xnview.com/en/index.html>
 - Trialware- but awesome: ACDSee PhotoManager:
http://store.acdsee.com/store/acd/en_US/DisplayProductDetailsPage/productID.178981500
- Cut the cute – spins, animations, wacky effects, odd fonts. Focus on your material, not the effects. They act to distract, and quickly tire the audience.

Fifth: Assembling the Presentation

- This is the first time you actually use presentation software like KeyNote or PowerPoint .
- When you first assemble, don't worry about the precise order, spelling, sizing, etc, just get started.
- Focus on not missing any key points from your brainstorming outline.

Design tips:

- Short , Sweet, Simple – KISS (Keep it simple stupid)
- One point per slide, unless it's an agenda, or credits, etc.
- Six words per slide – MAX. Otherwise they'll read it, and tune you out.
- Multiple fonts are a distraction. Keep fonts effective, not as a carnival show. Also, your fancy fonts may not work/be available on the system you present with
- Guy Kawasaki 10/20/30 rule:
 - 10 slides, 20 minutes, 30 point font minimum
 - Yes, this is extreme, but it's an interesting concept.
 - For technical/ content sharing presentations, triple the slide count and time. Only go over an hour with great caution – most adults tune out after 45 min or so...

Presentation/Performance – The SHOW

>>> *Key Idea - It's ALL about PEOPLE. Really! So, think about your audience every step of the way. How will they react? Will they understand the acronyms you are using? What questions might they ask?*

Practicing Presentation/Dry run:

- Plan/visualize in advance: How it looks, sounds, flows, connects. And length! 45 min is an excellent target for fidgeting. And, if it's hot, or the end of a long day, maybe even less. If they have beer, all bets are off ;-)
- Practice live in front of small, friendly audience (spouse, friend, co-worker) for reality check. If you do not have anyone, or are uncomfortable, practice OUT LOUD in front of an empty chair (really – especially important to do it out loud)
- Finally, visualize your presentation in front of large audience. This helps you to not be so intimidated when you go live!

In the Room/At the Show:

- Right before the show – talk/connect to people in the audience – introduce, get their background and expectations. This helps make what can be an intimidating experience more personal.
- Small tips for the last minute: Breath mints, hair /bathroom break/fly check!!
- Address each point or sentence to specific a specific person or table. Then move to another person, for the next point. Revisit individuals for effect, personal touch. Be especially focused on the back and sides of the room, where they will be more disconnected...
- Never turn your back!!! (Makes it hard to hear, impossible to connect)
- Don't turn off the lights – ever. Somebody will go to sleep, many will zone out – guaranteed!
- >>> Avoid handouts until after – Just like text on-screen, the audience will read ahead, and tune you out.
- Check constantly for audience reaction, understanding, tuning out. Then adjust!
- Pacing – to fast, slow – check with your boss – the audience!

General Tips:

The Intro:

- Tell a story.
- State a surprising statistic or unknown fact, as long as you can back it up with a reliable source.
- Ask a challenging question, not a self-serving or obvious one.
- Make a bold and contrarian assertion.
- Refer to a current event, as long as you keep in mind that current, these days, means really, really recent.
- Use a quote, if your audience hasn't already heard it a gazillion times.

(Source: LifeAfterPowerPoint.com Sept 2009)

<http://www.lifeafterpowerpoint.com/?m=200909>

- Mix it up – vary your delivery, intensity, technicality, and interaction. This will keep your audience engaged, interested
- Lighten it up – humor, especially self-deprecation always lightens the mood!
- Being comfortable is key:
 - o Familiar with presentation environment & tools
 - o Confident with your dress, food, drink, bathroom state. etc

Being seen:

- Physical positioning, vertical presence, interaction (material & audience)
- They must see you in order for them to connect with you.
- Avoid being in a dark spot of the room. This will kill almost any presentation!

Being heard:

- Microphone tips: wireless is best, either lapel or boom. This allows you to move naturally
- Maintain natural, even voice. Too soft will put people to sleep, too loud will turn them off.
- Get a sound check beforehand – even if with the audience. Ask someone at the back...
- Feedback usually caused by speaking too softly, or moving in front of speakers. Cover mic & correct
- No microphone, or mic failure: ask audience to gather closer. Leave podium/front of room. Project!

After the show: relax – you did it!

- 1) Enjoy the victory!
- 2) Have business cards ready
- 3) Re-connect with the audience on a personal level, get feedback, better the next time!:

“How was it?”

“ Anything you’d suggest for the next time?”

Potholes - Gotchas

Don’t try to transfer all human knowledge in one show ;-)

Be willing to adapt, re-focus, condense your presentation on the fly.

Nervous habits of repetition: UM, Uh, Like, rocking. These are almost

Reading from prepared text: This is death, almost always sounds horrible. Avoid at all costs....

Too much text – live example:

http://prezi.com/4_muqjahha-g/powerpoint-doesnt-suck-you-do/

Jargon – never assume your audience will understand – assume someone in the group has never heard of that term you know so well!

Live Software /Hardware demos– be ready for failure – have a backup plan in case you can’t use it (it’s not if but when)

Supporting materials – hold interest, support & validate key points, challenge audience

Interaction – gotta have it! Find a way.

Expect the unexpected – remember the why, and your preparation will get you through

Cool Presentation Tools:

- Screen sharing: zooming, annotation (Zoomit): Practice it ahead!
- Snagit - screencapper supreme (windows, mac beta)
- Green Laser, Like the Kensington K72353US
- Projector @ native resolution (which is??), connections/cables (VGA vs DVI, etc)

- Remote control – freedom to roam. My two favorites:
 - o Kensington Green Laser Control:
- <http://www.amazon.com/Kensington-K72353US-Wireless-Presenter-Pointer/dp/B00314FC80>
- o SMK Link Remote Navigator 2.4:
- <http://www.smklink.com/index.php?id=Mzk1>
- Note – for laser pointers, green laser rocks – has much better visual contrast than Red!

Useful Resources:

Excellent Book: “Even A Geek Can Speak”, Joey Asher

Excellent Book: “resonate: Present Visual Stories that Transform Audiences”, Nancy Duarte

Excellent Book: “Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery”, Garr Reynolds

Guy Kawasaki: 10/20/30 rule:

http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2005/12/the_102030_rule.html#axzz11Lw5wOiS

Excellent Presentations on Presenting:

“Death by PowerPoint”, Alexei Kapterev (Slideshare.net)

<http://www.slideshare.net/thecroaker/death-by-powerpoint>

“The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs”, Carmine Gallo (Slideshare.net)

<http://www.slideshare.net/cvgallo/the-presentation-secrets-of-steve-jobs-2609477>

“Guide to Better Pecha Kucha Presentations”

<http://www.aqworks.com/2007/07/03/guide-to-better-pecha-kucha-presentations/?language=en>

PowerPoint – the Big Ugly: Try searching on: “horrible PowerPoint”

http://www.wisdeo.com/articles/view_post/8732

Sendup on Gettysburg address by powerpoint:

<http://www.norvig.com/Gettysburg/>

Or search YouTube for “PowerPoint comedy”

Great Rule of Thirds Lesson:

<http://www.mac-on-campus.com/LearningCenter/Library/31363.aspx>

Good luck! – John Peterson