

About power presentations

A **power presentation** is one that ‘*captivates*’ its audience, holding their attention throughout.

WOW is when an audience is greatly impressed and responds enthusiastically to the message.

A **power presentation** that creates **WOW** is almost certain to produce the intended result (i.e. something is agreed, approved, sold, or understood).

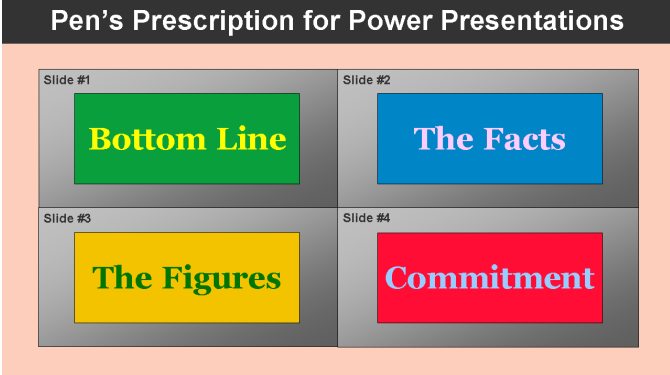
Presentations happen all around us, every day, e.g. sales pitches, job interviews, business proposals, etc. You or I may even find ourselves doing the ‘presenting’ on occasions. When this happens, knowing (and applying) the secrets to a successful **power presentation** is vital for success.

A few weeks ago I was given some advice that will enable us all to design **power presentations** that create **WOW** – not just once, but every time that we are presenting. It happened while I was sitting with my friend Pen on her balcony in the warmth of a Singapore evening. With our men folk, we were enjoying an absolutely scrumptious curry, and ‘*chewing the fat*’ over all manner of things.

Pen’s prescription for power presentations

During the conversation, Pen began to describe her *prescription* for designing a successful **power presentation**. Because she is a senior executive in a multinational consulting company, I sat up and took notice! Here is a summary of what she said:

- You need four slides, five at the most
- First slide – the bottom line, i.e. the result or decision you want
- Second slide – the FACTS, i.e. how, who, what, why, when, and any risks
- Third slide – the FIGURES, i.e. the expected costs, and the payback
- Fourth slide – confirm what you want, seek a commitment



Use your slides for a visual cue, NOT a detailed justification

Pen then stated “*the real art of the successful power presentation is brevity and conciseness*”, and gave two illustrations:

- most people have far too much unnecessary background information
- the other important thing people miss is not knowing when to “stop talking”

What really struck me about Pen’s *prescription* for **power presentations** was how it is a quite radical departure from most of the business presentations that I have experienced. Being a fan of the “*just enough, just in time*” maxim when it comes to learning, I was immediately in love with Pen’s ‘four slide’ prescription. The prescription is also in keeping with my favourite ‘**KISS**’ principle (“*keep it short and simple*”).

Business presentations – a little reality

Presentations are a valuable tool for business. They are regularly used to pass information, and also to seek approval for various business initiatives. Technology has made it so easy to put a presentation together – open PowerPoint (or a similar App), and away we go. But, how often do you experience a real **power presentation** that creates **WOW**?

Most presentations that I see, including business presentations, involve mediocre slide design. Mostly this is about wall-to-wall text, usually in a small font size (to squeeze more words onto the slide). Other common problems include poor selection of text colours, use of distorted graphics, and an absence of ‘white space’. All of these have a negative affect on the ‘*balance*’ of the slide, which affects readability.

In addition, many presenters also tend to ‘over-talk’, leaving minimal time for their audience to think. Whether our presentation is simply about passing information, or whether it is about reaching a decision, it makes little sense to design something that fails to engage our audience. Mistakes like poor readability and exceeding the limits of peoples’ attention spans are all too common.

The 10/20/30 Rule – and our attention span

Back in December 2005, venture capitalist Guy Kawasaki addressed these issues in his post “[The 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint](#)”. This was based on his (bad) experiences with hopeful entrepreneurs making their pitches for investment. The essence of the Kawasaki “Rule” is as follows:

- 10 slides
- 20 minutes duration
- 30 point font (minimum)

As a guideline, this approach still has a lot of merit almost 10 years later, but there is a ‘*catch*’. Research conducted for Lloyds TSB Insurance (released in 2008) showed that one critical capability of any likely audience has been diminishing over recent decades – an average attention span was down to *just over five minutes* (diminished significantly from 12 minutes in the late 1990s).

The prime suspect behind this is actually work. Participants in the research cited ‘stress’ (18%) and ‘decision overload’ (17%) as reasons for poor short-term memory and failing attention spans. To me,

that puts Pen's *prescription* for **power presentations** right on the money – especially when the purpose of our presentation might be to get a decision from someone [See: [How to improve your attention span](#)].

And some 'extra nuggets' from Pen

After pondering on Pen's *prescription* for a few days, I decided to ask if I could use it in a Blog Post (*I wanted to make sure that I was not taking a liberty with someone else's intellectual property*). She gave me the OK, and also added some further '**nuggets of wisdom**':

- it is all about figuring out the key messages – put yourself in the listener's shoes, and work out what they will want to know
- begin by telling your listeners what you want from them – if you are too scared to do that, then you shouldn't even be there
- senior people often don't have time for a lot of background detail – they will assume you have done your job properly, and if they need it, they will ask for it
- don't waste time with detail about who you are and what you have done, etc. – all that will do is bore people; again, if they want to know, they will ask
- find out about your listeners – if they are numbers people, give them numbers, if they are picture people, give them pictures – whatever they need to make a decision
- if necessary, spread the Second slide contents over two slides – but stick to important FACTS, not background information
- know when to stop talking – don't fill the quiet moments with your words; allow listeners time to think – if they have a question, they will ask it
- if you feel compelled to generate a bunch of supporting stuff, send or distribute it separately – if people are interested, they can scan through it themselves

Power Presentations – Pen's Nuggets

1. Know your key message – what your listeners need to hear
2. Begin by telling them what you want from them
3. Limit the amount of background detail you include
4. Don't waste time with details about yourself
5. Research your audience – know their preferences
6. Know when to stop talking – give people time to think
7. Provide any supporting info separately, if it is necessary

Some further 'nuggets of wisdom' from our Expert

Pen's prescription is 'good medicine'

The focus of Pen's *prescription* for **power presentations** is towards content and design – hence her emphasis on *brevity and conciseness*; *imho* the impact of the *five-minute attention span* is something to take very seriously. She also obviously sees merit in knowing something about the audience, so we can best address their preference/s for receiving information. This is particularly important, as it helps us to make a connection with our audience [See: [How to use learning styles to make a connection](#)].

Although Pen doesn't specifically refer to slide readability, her comment about spreading the Second slide content over two slides is relevant. Also relevant is the Kawasaki "Rule" of 30 points minimum font size, especially for modern high-resolution displays. If we don't get our slide readability right, then much of our effort will be wasted (*there is an abundance of readability information available on the internet – Google "slide readability" or "powerpoint slide readability"*).

One further item that I would add to Pen's *prescription* for **power presentations** is "*answers to possible questions*". This is about being prepared for likely questions from our audience. I have seen this work incredibly well:

- at a Board-level meeting, the presenter was asked a question
- having anticipated this question, they had prepared a slide with the answer
- when this was displayed, the effect was remarkable – the audience went "**WOW**", and there were no further questions!

In summary then

So, let me revisit Pen's *prescription* for **power presentations**, including my add-on:

- First slide – the bottom line, i.e. the result or decision you want
- Second slide – the FACTS, i.e. how, who, what, why, when, and any risks
- Third slide – the FIGURES, i.e. the expected costs, and the payback
- Fourth slide – confirm what you want, seek a commitment
- Fifth slide – answers to any questions you anticipate

Note: In this Post I have deliberately not addressed the "delivery" aspect of the power presentation. Again, there is an abundance of information about presentation delivery skills and techniques available on the internet. The essence of a good presentation technique is about: Posture, Presence, Passion, Pace, Pitch, Projection, and Practice (P7). My Post [Body language and appearance – the secret messages](#) addresses the first two items of this list.

In my experience, **power presentations** that (*really*) create **WOW** are actually relatively rare events – but they do not need to be beyond our reach! By applying Pen's prescription, and her other nuggets of wisdom, we can confidently design a **power presentation** that **WILL** create **WOW**! Thank you Pen!

Coming next:

Ready or not, disruption is here – NOW!

<http://freezapnuggets.com/wordpress/?p=1059>