

AN *e*-BURST OF INSPIRATION FROM THE BEST BOOKS

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# LESS IS MORE

The Proper Use of Graphics  
for Effective Presentations



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FINANCIAL TIMES

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## *The Proper Use of Graphics for Effective Presentations*

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### The Proper Role of Graphics

Think about a time when you were in the audience at a presentation and the graphics didn't work. What was the problem? These are the most common answers my business clients give:

- “The graphics were cluttered.”
- “There was too much on the slide.”
- “The slide looked like an eye chart.”
- “The slide was a Data Dump.”

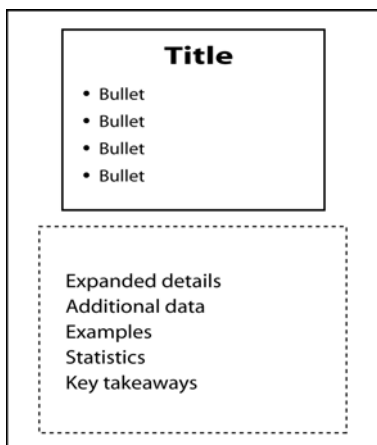
Now flip the lens and take the point of view of an Audience Advocate. What's the effect on you? Odds are that it's another case of the dreaded MEGO (Mine Eyes Glaze Over) syndrome: the same cause and effect as when a story is unloaded on you as a Data Dump. The main reason this happens is that presenters fail to distinguish between a document and a presentation. They treat a presentation as a document. This is the *Presentation-as-Document Syndrome*, in which the presenter uses the graphics as both a display and as a record, as both show and tell. This is the vestigial legacy of the ancient origins of presentations, the flip chart.

manifestation of the Presentation-as-Document Syndrome. There are three others:

- Using the slides as *notes* to help the presenter remember what to say
- Cramming a plethora of *details* on the slides, as if to demonstrate legitimacy
- Filling the slides with enough information so that anyone else in the company using the same slides will maintain the *uniformity* of the message

A presentation must serve only one purpose. If a presentation tries to serve two or more purposes, it dilutes both purposes. The presentation itself is neither fish nor fowl.

A presentation is a presentation and *only* a presentation...never a document. If you *do* need a document of your presentation, Microsoft PowerPoint provides the Notes Page view, as represented in Figure 1. The top of the Notes Page contains only what your audience sees projected on the screen. The bottom provides the additional material for the handouts.



**Figure 1** The Notes Page view in Microsoft PowerPoint.

Be sure to distribute the handouts only *after* the presentation. If you distribute them before or during the presentation, your audience members will flip through them as you speak, and they won't listen to what you have to say.

If you're asked to provide a copy of your presentation for a conference so that the slides can be printed in book form, use PowerPoint's Notes Page view. That way, you'll maintain the integrity of your slides as purely presentation material.

If you're asked to provide a copy of the presentation in advance, as so often happens, especially in the venture capital and financial sector, politely offer to provide a business plan or executive summary...as a document. And create that document with Microsoft Word, *not* PowerPoint.

## Presenter Focus

An extension of the Presentation-as-Document Syndrome is what happens to the audience when the screen lights up with a slide filled with dense text and highly detailed tables, charts, and graphs. The focus of the audience immediately, *and involuntarily*, goes to the graphics, and they start to read. When they start reading, they stop listening. The graphics then become the center of attention, and the presenter becomes subordinate to the slide show, serving, at best, as a voice-over narrator and, at worst, as a ventriloquist.

This problem is compounded as the presenter becomes a reader, too. The reading often fails to rise above the level of a verbatim recitation. Reciting the slides verbatim is patronizing to the audience. They think to themselves: "I'm not a child! I can read it myself!" The results are a failure to connect, a failure to communicate, and, most likely, a failure to persuade.