

AN e-BURST OF INSPIRATION FROM THE BEST BOOKS

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PRESENTING TO WIN

How to Use Animation Effectively
to Tell Your Story



Press Delivers *elements*

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How to Use Animation Effectively to Tell Your Story

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In the context of business presentations (ranging from those on websites to ones given on stage at meetings or conferences), animation refers to motion added to computer graphics. This movement can involve either an entire slide or the visual elements within a slide. In animation, these elements move onto or off the screen; shift within the screen; or grow, shrink, change, or vanish. But how do you animate your presentations without overdoing it and alienating your audience with too much flash and sizzle?

How Versus Why and Wherefore

We've all seen varying degrees of electronic animation in business, from the sophisticated sequences that appear on websites to the equally sophisticated presentations at industry conferences and trade shows, many of them worthy of Disney or Pixar. Often, even conventional prepackaged corporate pitches have screen effects that rival the production values of the big-tent special events.

Most of these examples of animation are created by professional graphic artists and technicians using complex software, such as Adobe Director or Flash. Professional artists also use Adobe Photoshop to render objects and images in vivid, opulent detail for animation as well as for conventional presentations.

nature...should be aware that flashy animation projects a negative image. And yet, business presentations that look like MTV videos are as common as car crashes in Hollywood movies...and just as irritating.

The reason that businesspeople perpetrate this graphic assault on their audience's visual senses is because these presenters have learned the how-to of animation, but not the why and wherefore of its application. The computer sections of bookstores abound with worthy Power-Point books. The Web, television, newspapers, and magazines abound with equally worthy courses and courseware that provide excellent instruction about how to operate and navigate the software. None of them, however, tells you why, where, and when to use animation and particularly not what effect animation should or could achieve.

Why use animation at all? As a conservative businessperson, you might think that animation is irrelevant, frivolous, or unnecessary. "I'm not up there to entertain people," you might say. "When I'm making a presentation, people just want the facts, plain and simple. Fancy gimmicks will just take away from my message."

You may be right. Any visual aid can indeed become a visual hindrance when it's misused, resulting in distraction, annoyance, or confusion in your audience. So it is with animation. But any sword can cut both ways.

The word "animation" comes from the Latin root *anima*, which means "spirit" or "life," just as the word "animated" describes a lively or energetic person. Animating the graphics in your presentation can add a sense of spirit and life to what might otherwise be a flat visual display.

Even more important, well-designed and appropriately applied animation can actually enhance your message. Just as you can create text, pictorial, numeric, and relational slides to express your important concepts, you can also strengthen that expression by adding animation

to bring graphic objects on or off the screen meaningfully. The right animation can make your presentation more visually appealing, transforming it from the merely good to the truly captivating...and therefore persuasive.

The answers to the wherefore of animation can be found in intrinsic human perception and in cinema, the same sources that provide the fundamentals for the design of presentation graphics. The core principles of cinematography and editing are even more relevant in animation. What follows is an extrapolation of those well-known, innate, and well-established professional principles into a simple set of guidelines that you can apply to animate your PowerPoint presentations.

Perception Psychology

The operative rule for designing animation effects goes back to Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe's Less Is More principle. Simplicity is the watchword for the graphics in any presentation, and that applies to animation as well. Moreover, whenever motion is involved, we must also keep in mind the cultural, psychological, and neurological factors that influence how people perceive and process visual cues.

Psychologist and art historian Rudolf Arnheim, in his book *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, described the tendency of the human eye to move across a visual field from left to right. This innate effect is further heightened in Western cultures. Text in Western languages (including English) is printed from left to right. These predispositions have a profound impact on how all human beings...including presentation audiences...perceive visual stimuli. Whenever our eyes move from left to right, the information we absorb feels “natural,” “normal,” “smooth,” “easy,” and “positive.” Many of the visual arts follow this same path: