Giving a great presentation: visual aids with impact

In several opinion polls, public speaking is cited as individuals' single greatest fear. It needn't be. With preparation and practice, anyone can give a powerful presentation. Studies show that there are three key elements that contribute to strong learning; hearing, seeing, and doing. During a presentation, you can attack both the visual and auditory senses.

Present yourself
Your body itself, including your attire, grooming, gestures, and facial expressions make up one aspect of your visual presentation. The other aspect of your visual presentation is visual aids used to engage your audience. The goal of visual aids is to increase sensory contact with your audience. Used well, visual aids:

- Enhance understanding of the topic
- Add variety
- Support your claims
- Reinforce your ideas
- Give your presentation lasting impact

What counts as a visual aid?
Visual aids come in many varieties. Select visual aids that are appropriate for your subject matter and help illustrate your ideas. Visual aids include:

- Sketches and pictures
- Graphs and charts
- Posters
- Objects or models
- Films or video tape

Guidelines for good visual aids
Visual aids should supplement your presentation, but should not become the presentation itself. As you identify visual aids to go with your presentation, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Visuals should be comprehensible at a glance. This means visuals should be simple and clear, rather than dense and crowded.
- The information you present on your visual aids should be relevant to the audience.
- Your visual aids should complement your spoken words, not replicate them.
- Whenever possible, use a picture, chart or graph to support or prove a point. For example, if you're describing the negative impact of water pollution on wildlife, displaying a picture of oil soaked sea gulls will emphasize your point.

Visual aid mediums
You can use a variety of mediums for you visual aids:

- **PowerPoint:** PowerPoint is one of the easiest and most professional delivery systems for visual aids. If you do not have a computer available to you during your presentation, you can print out PowerPoint slides to use as handouts or transparencies.
- **Transparencies:** If you do not have access to PowerPoint software, or will not have access to a computer during your presentation, another option is to create transparencies for use with an overhead projector. This is often a preferred method with a short, small group presentation.
- **Boards and flip charts:** White boards, chalkboards and flip charts are excellent tools to encourage your audience to contribute ideas or demonstrate "how to" do something like solve a problem.
- **Handouts:** It is a good practice to use handouts as a good medium for future reference. Unlike the other delivery systems for visual aids, you can get away with including more information in a handout.

Regardless of the medium you use to create your visual aids, remember that visual aides should:

- **Be visible:** Use the right font size. For flip charts, white boards and chalk boards, titles should be two to three inches high, other text should be an inch and a half high. For transparencies and PowerPoint Slides, titles should be 38-44 points, other text should be 28-32 points.
- **Fill the page:** White space is fine, but do not group all of your text in the center of the slide with a wide, black border
- **Be balanced:** Make sure visuals are balanced top to bottom and left to right.
- **Use color wisely:** Use colors that contrast so the distinction between colors is easily discernible. Remember that yellow is difficult to see on a white background. Red often signifies negative information such as decreased revenue, green often signifies positive information such as an increase in sales.

Remember, the old adage, practice makes perfect. This is especially true when you want to deliver a convincing presentation.