



# TAME THE TECHNOLOGY

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# THREE WAYS TO REENGAGE WITH YOUR PRESENTATION

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I'm old enough to remember a time before PowerPoint presentation design... I'm of the generation that remembers overhead projectors (with temperamental bulbs) and slide carousels (never quite in the right order). While it's tempting to look back at these as halcyon days, many of the 'first world presentation problems' we worry about today loomed large back then - nerves, never enough time to prepare visuals and where to beg, borrow and steal content from colleagues.

## THE DIFFERENCE WAS THAT WE DID IT IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY FORM OF SLIDWARE

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Today's presenters and presentation designers are consumed by an apparent addiction to PowerPoint, Keynote, Prezi and their slideware brethren. Conservative estimates state that 30 million PowerPoint presentations are created and delivered every day – that's a huge step change from the days of carefully crafted carousels and painstakingly drawn acetates.

On the whole, progress is a good thing. Chances are that much of the time saved by moving to slideware has been spent wisely – from focusing key messages and polishing content through to dedicating more time to rehearsal. OK, I admit this might be a little naïve but I'm a 'glass half full' kind of person.

In all probability, the reality is that any efficiency gains enjoyed through the use of slideware have been negated by an overreliance on what was only ever designed to be a presentation support tool.

## RISE OF THE MACHINES

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Well-worn phrases like 'Death by PowerPoint' and 'Killed by Keynote' point to the fact that for many presentations, the machines have taken over. While it's tempting to turn this into a rant about the sins of modern technology, the reality is that falling into this trap is oh-so-very easy to do.

Schools and colleges teach the use of slideware, internal business communication is governed by slide after slide of dense content and conferences are defined by huge screens and lots and lots of slides. Let's face facts, our daily references all point to the (over)use of slideware. As such stepping away from it is always going to be tricky.

Whatever the reasons, the result is all too familiar - audiences and presenters are left disengaged, confused and frustrated.

In light of the issue, some have gone to extremes to step away from the allure of slideware. Jeff Bezos famously declared Amazon a PowerPoint free zone (still very much a work in progress based on a recent reports) while other high profile business leaders (Branson, Sandberg... the list goes on) have added to the 'anti-slideware' propaganda. The reality is that the appropriate response is somewhere in the middle – tame the technology and use it when and where it adds value to your message and audience's engagement.

# BACK TO BASICS

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This is all common sense, I hear you cry. Agreed yet so few presenters and companies have managed to find the middle ground which begs a simple question – WHY?

The simple answer is because great presentations don't happen by accident. They come from hard work, planning and careful consideration of the basic elements:

**AUDIENCE: Who are you presenting to?**

**MESSAGE: What are you presenting?**

**CALL TO ACTION: Why are you presenting?**

It all starts from this basic starting point - without a clear understanding of each of these, your presentation is doomed no matter what the technology or the amount you use it. I'd implore any would-be presenter to start in ANALOGUE, scribbling content notes, messaging ideas and insights about audience on paper before getting hot under the collar about the DIGITAL options available.

If proof were needed, my presentation design company Eyeful Presentations is the antithesis of paperless office. Consultants' desks, the design studio and the training team are awash with doodles and mindmaps on paper, whiteboards and notepads. The reason is simple – great ideas need to breathe on paper before being developed for screen...

# MANAGING THE MACHINERY

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But I'd hate for you to think that I was some kind of philistine. Make no bones about it - we are in a golden age of [presentation technology](#), from the traditional-but-constantly-developing PowerPoint and Keynote through to new kids on the block like Prezi, Canva and eMaze. Each bring with them a range of different opportunities for the presenter to truly engage with their audience, from the famed Prezi 'zoom' through to the design dexterity of Canva and eMaze.

But man cannot live on fancy transition and design alone! The lessons of yesteryear need to be heeded. Simply because Prezi CAN zoom doesn't mean that you should. Same goes for the clever animations and transitions in PowerPoint, Keynote and eMaze – if these technological advances are not aiding the connection between audience and presenter or, in the worst cases, actually getting in the way of it, it's time to step aside from the technology and think again.

So as we cast our minds back to a simpler time of overhead projectors and carousels, we should consider what we can share with new generations of presenters to ensure they [do not repeat the sins of the past](#).

The breakneck speed of technological evolution is both exciting and potentially fatal. It's exciting because it opens up new opportunities for us as presenters to engage audiences on THEIR terms.

Equally this evolution could also be fatal as we get blinded by the allure of technology and forget the most basic facet of presentations – the need to engage an audience, share your idea and prompt a reaction. Make no mistake, if we're so blinded by the wonders of technology that we forget to do the basics properly, all of this exciting development will be a complete waste of time.

And if that happens, no one wins.