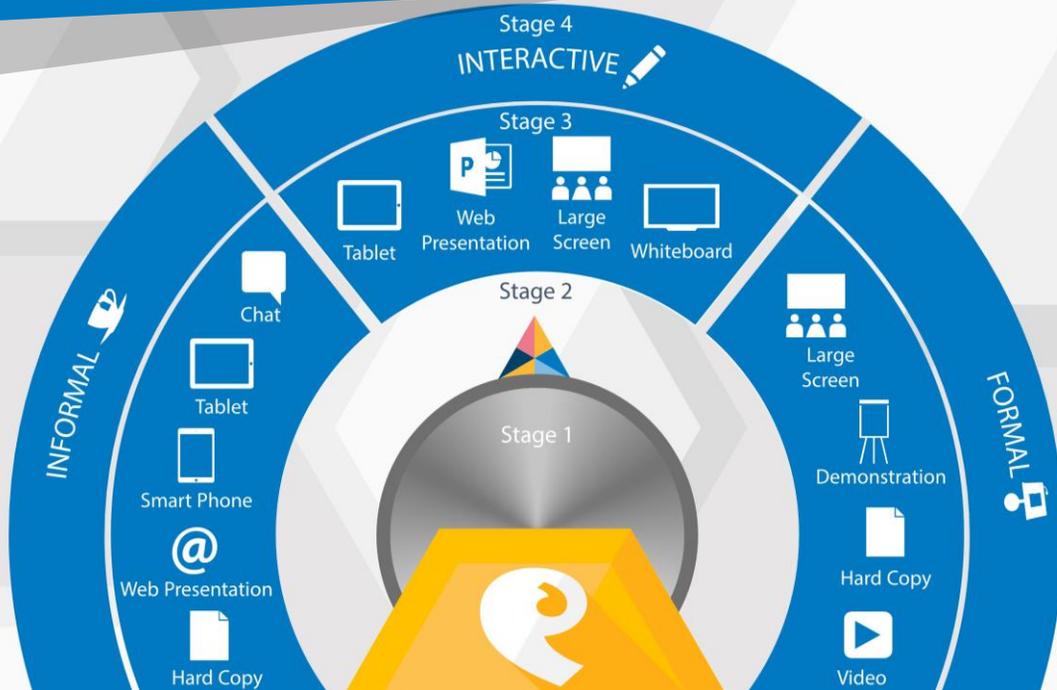




WHO REALLY OWNS YOUR PRESENTATION?

HOW TO KEEP 'PRESENTATION CREEP' AT BAY



It might be the result of working closely with companies for over a decade but I have a theory that presentations can tell you a lot about how a business functions. While typically successful, many of our clients have a very clear view of their message but struggle to communicate this to their audiences (great vision but poor execution). Equally other clients struggle to deal with the sheer volume of ideas and opinions coming from all angles (lack of focus and ownership). Whatever the underlying condition, presentations appear to be the barometer of how a business communicates not only to its audience but also within the confines of their own offices.

I wager that most corporate presentations are subject to the same stresses – either a lack of focus, the age old issue of too many cooks potentially spoiling the broth or simply morphing into something unrecognisable before your eyes.

This all boils down to an understanding of who actually 'owns' the presentation in the first place.

For companies struggling with a lack of focus, we see the issue manifest itself in a condition we call 'Presentationstein', a rag tag collection

of disparate slides taken from a wide range of different presentations. The poor isolated presenter is struggling to identify a theme and clear message to share with the audience so reaches out to well-meaning colleagues who shower them with soundbite slides that, when combined, do little but confuse both presenter and audience alike. In short, no one has stepped up to the plate and taken ownership of the presentation message or opportunity - not good but oh-so-familiar...

It doesn't get much better when you consider the alternative; a presentation created by committee. Suddenly the process of creating a compelling, focused and audience-centric story morphs into a battle for supremacy and positioning on a slidedeck. It's easy to look condescendingly at such a situation but chances are that you've played a part in such fun and games in the past. One of my marketing heroes, Seth Godin, was brave enough to call out a particularly bad example of this and while it is tempting to decry the awful layout, confusing charts and God-awful business speak, I believe the biggest issue with this presentation was the fact that it patently had **no owner**. If you take time to unpick it, you can see a whole host of internal politics in play:



MARKETING

“We don’t care what it says, it just needs to be on this particular template and use our carefully crafted colour scheme”



SALES

“We need to throw in as many benefit statements in there as we can (oh, and add some business speak three letter acronyms in there to demonstrate we know what we’re talking about)”



PRODUCT

“We need to have a complex diagram in there to not only reflect how incredibly hard we worked on this product but also to demonstrate how very clever we are (probably more than the audience)”

The final manifestation of lack of presentation ownership is what we call ‘Presentation Creep’, and it happens to the best of us... The signs may be all too familiar:

You start off with a perfectly good presentation, a perfect mix of audience-centric messaging, strong and relevant content and visuals that resonate with your audience.

3 months down the line, things have been tweaked along the way – content has been added haphazardly to accommodate specific audiences, some of the visuals have been adjusted and added to in an attempt to introduce a new product and the odd new slide has popped up here and there as new ideas come to mind (granted they’re not consistent in terms of look and feel but ‘they do the job’).

6 months later the previously strong presentation has morphed into the stuff of nightmares – too much content, confusing visuals and a message that even the most engaged of audiences would struggle to identify.

Oh dear...

MAKE NO BONES ABOUT IT, WHATEVER FORM OF PRESENTATION MALADY HITS, THERE IS ONE STAKEHOLDER WHO IS DIRECTLY IMPACTED - YOUR AUDIENCE

Put them at the core of what you do and you’re on the road to recovery. It’s this simple step change in thinking that, in one simple step, addresses the ‘ownership’ issues faced in presentations today. It’s not about you, your department or your ego – it should be about your audience.

With this in mind, what are my recommendations for ensuring presentations are managed by the right people at the right time?

LAUNCH A PRESENTATION AMNESTY

It's an uncomfortable truth that most organisations (even the small ones) will have a whole subculture of off-brand, (potentially) off-message slides circulating among their presenter group. Some of these will be old favourites that the diehards do not want to let go of, while others will be home-grown slides that were created for a specific requirement and just kind of stuck around...

Chances are that many of these rogue slides are actually pretty good and meet the needs of your audience. Yes, they're likely to send a shiver down the spine of the brand team and some of the product claims may bring on palpitations in the product team but their aim is normally laudable.

Whatever the genesis, it's absolutely vital that if someone is going to attempt to control presentations within a corporate that these 'secret slides' are shared openly. We recommend launching a 'Presentation Amnesty', allowing them to be reviewed without fear of retribution so that the good stuff stays as part of the presentation arsenal while also being dragged into the modern world in terms of brand, look and feel and reference points. In short, everyone wins.

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

Ironically, technology might have been one of the reasons you've ended up in such confusion in the first place. The ease by which the renegades in your business have been able to butcher PowerPoint slides probably plays an important part in the headache you're now trying to address. BUT technology can also be your friend – consider an online presentation repository.

At Eyeful, we pondered for some considerable time before recommending a presentation repository to our clients. The reason for our cautious approach is simple – we implore clients is to create a presentation that meets the specific needs of their audience. As such, the idea of a large

database of slides that can be simply dragged and dropped to create a new deck sounds like the antithesis of everything we stand for...but then the clever technology kicks in.

Implementing a slide repository into your organisation doesn't mean a free-for-all. By setting rules around certain slides (for example, a financial presentation cannot be created without certain Ts & Cs slide being shown at the start), you not only increase the efficiency of the presentation creation process but, more importantly, you increase the control you have over it (without the need to stand over every presentation author). Technology also provides useful insights into what your presenters are delivering – valuable data on the most popular (and unpopular) slides allow you to develop new content based on need rather than guessing.

THE CULTURE CHANGE

Ultimately the choice to take control of your presentations needs to come from within the organisation. There needs to be an understanding that presentations are more than a set of slides – they represent a huge opportunity to engage an audience, impart your message and drive them towards action.

This change is not an easy process – many of the people within your business will have been raised on a diet of boring linear PowerPoint presentations that are created with the same enthusiasm as an expenses report. This accepted norm needs shaking up so break the cycle and prompt a new understanding and ownership around presentations. Be aware that this transformation is not as straight-forward as it should be; indeed, much of our own training programmes at Eyeful are focused on getting presenters to [Think, Act and Deliver](#) their messages differently in the first place.



IN SUMMARY

The ownership of a presentation within a business represents more than simply who's server folder a PowerPoint file sits in. A combination of transparency, cultural change and smart use of technology will ensure that the rabid rise of rogue PowerPoint slides can be brought under control.

The net result is a more focused presentation, a more concise and consistent

message and a more confident presenter...all of which delivers greater value and impact to your audience (which, let's be honest, is what the presentation is there to deliver in the first place).

My advice to you – take control now. Your audiences deserve it.