



ON MILLENNIALS, TECHNOLOGY AND PRESENTATION CULTURE

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It may not feel like it but a key part of the way we conduct business is currently teetering on the edge of a precipice. The good news is that for once this has nothing to do with Brexit or the macroeconomic machinations of the new US President – we'll save that for another day. No, the cause for my concern is a little closer to home – presentations.

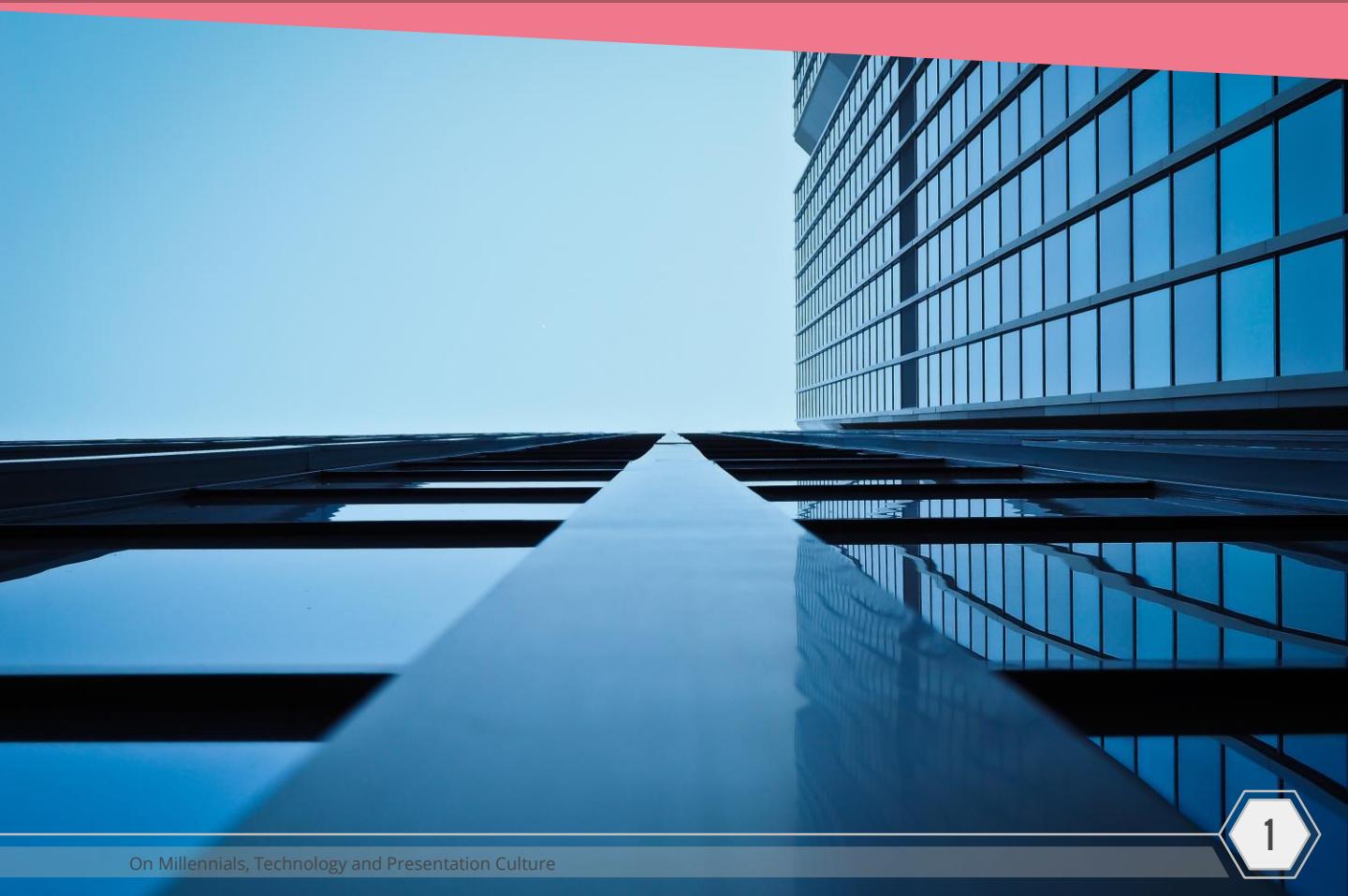
It is interesting to note that the reasons for my anxiety are all well documented but seldom linked. Individually they pose a challenge for any business; combined they form a ticking time bomb that could have huge implications longer term.

First up we have that perennial LinkedIn topic, 'Death by PowerPoint'. Much has been written about the scourge of presentation technology (heck, a healthy industry was spawned off the back of it!) but it remains an issue that besets many businesses. More importantly, it's an issue that impacts more

audiences today than ever. This problem shows no sign of disappearing anytime soon...

Add to that a smidgen of millennial paranoia. Again, commentators have dedicated endless blogs, webinars, and books on the topic and, depending on which side of the generational gap you sit, you'll have formed certain opinions. To paraphrase, the thinking can be summed up as follows –you do know that they are about to change the way EVERYTHING works, right? Are you ready? Are you feeling nervous?

Finally sprinkle a little anxiety around constant changes in business culture and working patterns, and you have the perfect presentation storm. It's something we've termed 'Presentation Culture'.



PRESENTATION CULTURE

So what is Presentation Culture and how can you spot if it's having an impact on your business, presenters, and most importantly, audiences?

First, let's look at the obvious symptoms. By far the easiest to spot is a creeping over-reliance on software like PowerPoint (or Keynote or Prezi – they are all abused by business presenters – no software is immune). If your meetings are dominated by countless slides, time-consuming pre-reads and a lack of real interaction or conversation, it's time to step away from the computer screen.

Closely aligned to a descent into this presentation zombie-like state is a business-wide acceptance that presentations are, and will always be, a tedious necessity of business life (akin to taxes and CRM systems). In short, a poorly performing presentation culture manifests itself in treating presentations as a task rather than viewing them as an opportunity.

This sense of 'presentations as a task' is the thin end of the wedge when it comes to managing a positive presentation culture within a business. It is at the core of much that is wrong in presentations today:

- A lack of recognition of the huge privilege presenting your message actually is (after all, your audience could be doing something more productive with the time they've carved out to listen to you).
- An ambivalent approach to preparation (dusting down an old deck of slides and making cursory changes to them does not count as preparation).
- A disregard of the importance of sharing information that is truly valuable to your audience (and, trust me on this one, bombarding them with slides at the start of your presentation dedicated to your company's EBITDA performance, global footprint, and impressive management team CV rarely fits the bill).

In addition to these behavioural woes, the cultural constraints that exist within all businesses will pervade the way that you act and deliver presentations:

- For example, you may work in a business that has a **trust & control** issue where centralised handcuffs on presentation thinking quells any opportunity for creativity or change – it's our way or no way at all. Perhaps understandable in compliance led industries like banking but so often the death knell for presenters looking to flex and engage audiences on their terms.
- Or you may work in a business where **silos** reign supreme, prompting duplication, protectionism and glaring inconsistencies across a variety of presentations.
- And then of course there is the **tech** obsessed persona where new technology is seen as the answer to their presentation woes. PowerPoint failing to engage audiences? Swap over to Prezi...or Keynote. Their excitement of new animation tools and high impact visuals takes over while their audience remains disengaged and bemused.

Of course, it's not all doom and gloom –some companies have spotted the signs and are trying to address the issue. The likes of Amazon and Diageo have publicly denounced PowerPoint in an attempt to get things back on track. This, however, feels more like a brave attempt to treat just one of the symptoms rather than dealing with the root cause of a much more complicated issue.

I'd respectfully suggest business leaders' energy is better spent looking at realigning the presentation cultural issues within their organisation, factoring in the needs of their presenters and audiences. The reality is that there is no silver bullet to fix things in one quick and easy step.

SO WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE YOU AND YOUR ORGANISATION'S PRESENTATION CULTURE?

Ultimately, a good presentation culture is built upon an understanding and strong engagement with an audience.

It really is that simple.

By obsessing about the basics, good habits are embedded across the business with

presenters approaching presentations as an opportunity and a privilege, not a task.

One final thought to ponder on as you review your presentation culture:



IF IN DOUBT, DON'T PRESENT.

If you think that audience engagement is better served without slides, follow your instincts and try it. Both you and your

audience may be very pleasantly surprised at the outcome.