

### 3 Common Presentation Pitfalls and How to Fix Them (Aug 11)

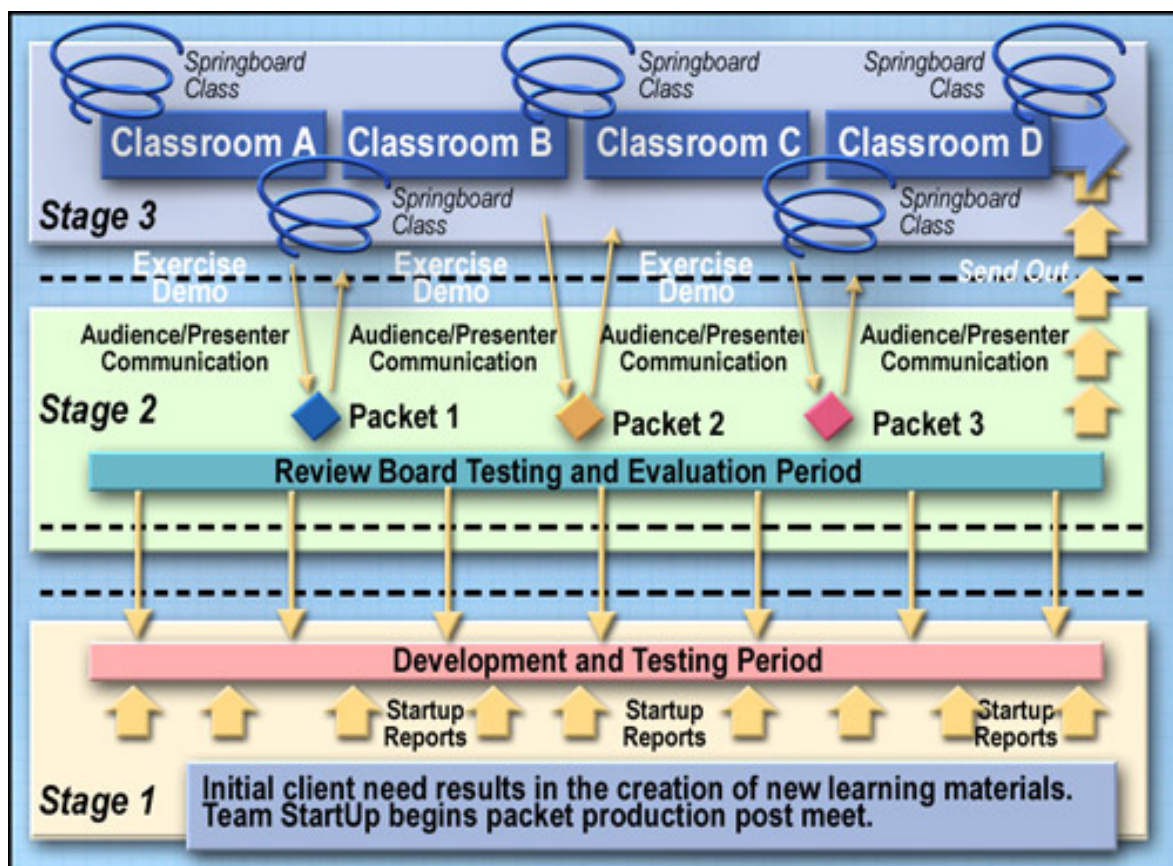
August 18th, 2011

By Mike Parkinson

There are three critical errors to which most presentations fall prey. Here are the culprits and some proven ways to fix them to create more impactful presentations:

**1. Razzle Dazzle.** A presentation that relies too much on “razzle dazzle” techniques fails to positively connect with its audience, because the slides are too complex to understand and remember. The presentation lacks clear explanation.

“Razzle-dazzle” presentations confuse the audience with fancy pictures, mountains of data, and overly technical slides. By using so many elements, the presenter hopes that something influences the audience. Presenters often use this trick to “dazzle” the audience into believing their solution is complex; therefore, it must be better than other simpler solutions. Fortunately, this approach often backfires, as the slide below demonstrates.



**2. The “Me” Disease.** The story, slides, and presentation are not customer-focused. The presenter explains why his information, company, and solution are wonderful but fails to show his audience how it will benefit. Presentations fall flat if it is not clear how the audience will benefit.

# Company Overview

THE HENDLEBURG CO.  
INTERNATIONAL

- We are the #1 provider in the United States
- Our staff is well trained
- We have multiple convenient locations
- 1600 cleared personnel
- 132 languages spoken
- We have the best reputation

# #1



**3. Fact-itis.** The presenter assumes sharing facts alone is the best approach. The slides are word and data heavy with few, if any, stories and graphics. Humans are not robots. We cannot sift through and disseminate columns of data in seconds.

We make decisions based on cognitive and emotional factors. Data has the greatest impact on a cognitive level. Slides of numbers and text are rarely emotionally stimulating—and every decision humans make is guided by an emotional response (according to countless studies—Google it). If you don't tell a story with your data or display it in a compelling, memorable way, then you will experience low win rates. Empathize with your audience. In turn, they will empathize with your solution.

18 Month Contracts						24 Month Contracts					
Contract	Monthly Cost	Phone Cost	minutes/texts	3G Data	TCO	Contract	Monthly Cost	Phone Cost	minutes/texts	3G Data	TCO
02 16GB	£30	£209	100/unlimited	500MB	£749	02 16GB	£25	£279	100/unlimited	500MB	£879
	£35	£179	300/unlimited	500MB	£809		£30	£179	300/unlimited	500MB	£899
	£40	£119	600/unlimited	500MB	£839		£35	£119	600/unlimited	500MB	£959
	£45	£99	900/unlimited	750MB	£899		£40	£99	900/unlimited	750MB	£1049
	£50	£29	1200/unlimited	750MB	£929		£45	£29	1200/unlimited	750MB	£1109
	£65	£0	both unlimited	1GB	£1170		£60	£0	both unlimited	1GB	£1440
02 32GB	£30	£299	100/unlimited	500MB	£879	02 32GB	£25	£329	100/unlimited	500MB	£929
	£35	£279	300/unlimited	500MB	£909		£30	£279	300/unlimited	500MB	£999
	£40	£209	600/unlimited	500MB	£929		£35	£209	600/unlimited	500MB	£1049
	£45	£179	900/unlimited	750MB	£989		£40	£179	900/unlimited	750MB	£1139
	£50	£129	1200/unlimited	750MB	£1029		£45	£129	1200/unlimited	750MB	£1209
	£65	£29	both unlimited	1GB	£1199		£60	£29	both unlimited	1GB	£1449
Orange 16GB	£35	£229	600/500	750MB	£899	Orange 16GB	£30	£189	150/250	750MB	£889
	£40	£189	900/500	750MB	£889		£35	£119	600/unlimited	750MB	£959
	£45	£129	1200/500	750MB	£939		£40	£89	900/unlimited	750MB	£1049
	£55	£99	3000/500	750MB	£1089		£45	£29	1200/unlimited	750MB	£1109
							£75	£0	both unlimited	750MB	£1900
Orange 32GB	£35	£319	600/500	750MB	£949	Orange 32GB	£30	£269	150/250	750MB	£909
	£40	£269	900/500	750MB	£989		£35	£219	600/unlimited	750MB	£1059
	£45	£219	1200/500	750MB	£1029		£40	£189	900/unlimited	750MB	£1149
	£55	£139	3000/500	750MB	£1139		£45	£139	1200/unlimited	750MB	£1219
							£75	£29	both unlimited	750MB	£1829
Vodafone 16GB	£30	£219	75/250	1GB	£759	Vodafone 16GB	£25	£219	75/250	1GB	£819
	£35	£169	300/unlimited	1GB	£799		£30	£169	300/unlimited	1GB	£889
	£40	£119	600/unlimited	1GB	£839		£35	£119	600/unlimited	1GB	£959
	£45	£99	900/unlimited	1GB	£899		£40	£99	900/unlimited	1GB	£1049
	£50	£29	1200/unlimited	1GB	£929		£45	£29	1200/unlimited	1GB	£1109
	£65	£0	3000/unlimited	1GB	£1170		£60	£0	3000/unlimited	1GB	£1440
Vodafone 32GB	£30	£309	75/250	1GB	£849	Vodafone 32GB	£25	£309	75/250	1GB	£909
	£35	£289	300/unlimited	1GB	£899		£30	£269	300/unlimited	1GB	£989
	£40	£219	600/unlimited	1GB	£939		£35	£219	600/unlimited	1GB	£1059
	£45	£189	900/unlimited	1GB	£999		£40	£189	900/unlimited	1GB	£1149
	£50	£139	1200/unlimited	1GB	£1039		£45	£139	1200/unlimited	1GB	£1219
	£65	£59	3000/unlimited	1GB	£1229		£60	£59	3000/unlimited	1GB	£1499
Tesco 16GB	£20	£349	250/unlimited	1GB	£589	Tesco 16GB	£45	£19	both unlimited	1GB	£1099
Note: Contract is for 12 months											
Tesco 32GB	£35	£229	750/unlimited	1GB	£649	Tesco 32GB	Monthly Cost	Phone Cost	minutes/texts	3G Data	TCO
Note: Contract is for 12 months							£45	£99	both unlimited	1GB	£1179
	£20	£429	250/unlimited	1GB	£669						
	£35	£299	750/unlimited	1GB	£719						
Three						Three 16GB	Monthly Cost	Phone Cost	minutes/texts	3G Data	TCO
Note: Three only offers 24 month contracts							£30	£99	500/5000	1GB	£819
							£35	£99	600/5000	1GB	£939
							£35	£169	2000/5000	1GB	£1099
							£40	£59	2000/5000	1GB	£1019
							£45	£0	2000/5000	1GB	£1080
Three						Three 32GB	Monthly Cost	Phone Cost	minutes/texts	3G Data	TCO
Note: Three only offers 24 month contracts							£30	£199	500/5000	1GB	£909
							£35	£189	600/5000	1GB	£1029
							£35	£219	2000/5000	1GB	£1099
							£40	£149	2000/5000	1GB	£1109
							£45	£89	2000/5000	1GB	£1189

So how can you avoid these three pitfalls? The following are three steps that eliminate Razzle Dazzle, the “Me” Disease, and Fact-itis.

### Step One: Simplify Your Information

Get to the point. Know what you want to say before you say it. Summarize your story/slide/section in one sentence then walk your audience toward that conclusion.

I recently asked Rick Altman, author of *Why Most PowerPoint Presentations Suck and How You Can Make Them Better*, about a common mistake presenters make when designing their presentations. He replied simply, “Too much crap.”

Altman is right. Many times presenters believe in the adage that more is better. Too much may be good when enjoying a piece of homemade apple pie, but in designing slides, the opposite is true. If your audience is too distracted with your vibrant color scheme, opposing graphic styles, long bulleted lists, and complex graphics, then they will miss your message.

Connie Malamed, author of *Visual Language For Designers: Principles For Creating Graphics That People Understand*, found research that proved we can only process around four bits of visual information at one time. Clean, clear, and easy-to-understand graphics create a visual hierarchy and allows viewers to focus on the most important information.



### Step Two: Affect Emotions

PowerPoint and other presentation tools help distill information into the most salient points, thereby connecting content to our audience’s goals—that which they care most about. Great communicators know this leads to a critical second step—affecting emotions. Independent research shows that people care if the information shared can benefit them. Legendary philosopher Harry Overstreet wrote in *Influencing Human Behavior*, “Action springs out of what we fundamentally desire.” When we show how we can help our audience, people become cognitively and emotionally invested in the presentation. Ultimately, it is the emotional element that carries the greatest weight. Emotions are a driver in every decision.

But how exactly can you affect the emotions of your audience and motivate them to choose your solution? There are several ways to affect emotions within a presentation.

**a. Reflect your audience.** Your words and images should reflect your audience's goals and challenges. Connect your information or solution to your audience's needs.

**b. Facts tell and stories sell.** Tell a story that clearly shows how your solution will (or has) achieved the customer's goals.

**c. People buy people.** When we can put a face to a corporation or a product or a solution, then it becomes personal to us. Presentations allow the presenter to speak to and connect with their audience on a personal level—sometimes face-to-face and sometimes via conversations in a webinar. Either way, the audience can interact with the presenter and have its questions answered almost immediately. They are more likely to buy into a solution or an idea if they know the person behind it.

I agree with Altman when he told me, "People come to a room to hear what you have to say." Many presenters forget that they are a major component of the presentation. Their ideas and words are more important than the slides. Slides, when used correctly, aid and empower the presenter. When used incorrectly, the presenter reduces the benefits the slides offer.

**d. Communicate with all visual elements.** What we see quickly affects our emotions. Color is the first thing that makes an impression and the rest of what we see soon follows. Carefully consider your template, colors, fonts, styles, and so on. Use graphics to connect benefits to your audience's needs (help them care) and provide them with clean visuals, which causes them to feel positive about you and your solution. That leads directly to the last step ...

### Step Three: Use Graphics

Presentations are intended to be a visual medium. Using effective visuals helps you better communicate with your audience by simplifying the most complex content and sharing it in a memorable way. For example, what was the first word in step two's explanation? You have to look back, right? But do you remember the first graphic in this article? Good graphics are stored in long-term memory, whereas text and words are decoded linearly and must pass through short-term memory to be stored forever.

Besides making your solution more memorable to your audience, another byproduct of a clear visual—which Malamed uncovered in her research—is that the easier it is for your audience to process your information, the more positive they feel about it (refer to "d" in step two).

Still wondering how distilling your information into visuals can help you? Consider the following research when creating your next PowerPoint presentation. Using graphics in presentation, educational, and marketing materials:

- Improves learning 200%—University of Wisconsin
- Takes 40% less time to explain complex ideas—Wharton School
- Improves retention 38%—Harvard University
- Increases your likelihood of success by 43%—3M and University of Minnesota School of Management

Sadly, most people shy away from graphics or choose the wrong graphic due to time constraints, lack of resources, or inexperience. Visit my [Graphics Cheat Sheet](#) (example below, PDF available in the link) to choose the best graphic for your next presentation and get graphic ideas from websites like BizGraphics On Demand, Google Images, the Graphic Periodic Table, and the Business Graphics Library.

**BIZGRAPHICS ON DEMAND** **GRAPHICS CHEAT SHEET**  
 Turn words into graphics

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	Simple <i>The information is presented in a way that is easy to understand.</i>	Complex <i>The information is presented in a way that is difficult to understand.</i>	Quantitative <i>The information is presented in a way that is easy to understand.</i>
Hierarchy	[Icons: tree, funnel, pyramid, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Architecture or Structure	[Icons: building, floor plan, etc.]	[Icons: complex structure, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Process or Flow	[Icons: flowchart, process, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Cause and Effect	[Icons: flowchart, process, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Comparison <i>Visuals appear to show two or more items, but the graphics have been used to highlight the similarities or differences between both.</i>	[Icons: comparison, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Synergy	[Icons: synergy, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Relationship <i>Visual graphics have not shown interaction between elements. The graphics have appeared here and there, not often used.</i>	[Icons: relationship, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Transition	[Icons: transition, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Amount or Value <i>Visual graphics have not demonstrated amount and value. The graphics have appeared here and there, not often used.</i>	[Icons: amount, value, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Time <i>Visual graphics have not shown time. The graphics have appeared here and there, not often used.</i>	[Icons: time, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Physical Description	[Icons: physical description, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Location or Distance	[Icons: location, distance, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]
Protection or Isolation	[Icons: protection, isolation, etc.]	[Icons: complex flow, network, etc.]	[Icons: bar chart, line chart, etc.]

Combine these graphic types and insert icons and symbols to communicate an infinite number of visuals.

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area chart, funnel graphic, people graphic, background, gantt chart, pyramid graphic, bar chart, group graphic, radar chart, before & after graphics, gear graphic, risk matrix, bridge graphic, hexagon graphic, road graphic, bubble chart, items & symbols, scale graphic, building block graphic, illustration, spiral graphic, calendar, line chart, stacked graphic, combi chart, looping graphic, star graphic, chain graphic, map graphic, step-by-step graphic, circle chart, network diagram, table, collage, org. chart, bar chart, manager list graphic, pie graphic, template, cross section diagram, photograph, simple graphic, activity diagram, pie chart, timeline, dashboard graphic, pipe graphic, tree diagram, flow graphic, point chart, tree diagram, data graphic, PowerPoint template, venn diagram, fishbone diagram, process diagram, waterfall diagram

**About the Author:**

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