



# TOP 7 MISTAKES

People make when creating  
business presentations

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Most people think that in order to create  
effective business presentations  
it's enough to open PowerPoint and put together some slides.

It's much more than that.

It's about understanding your audience and their needs,  
finding your key messages, designing slides that amplify your story  
and communicating comfortably and confidently.

After ten years working with clients to help them  
sell more through radically better business presentations,  
at Ideas on Stage we found that  
these are the seven most common mistakes  
people make when they create business presentations.  
When we correct them, it creates a permanent change  
in the way they present and therefore in their ability  
to sell, persuade and influence.



## 1. You think it's your presentation

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Whenever you choose to present, you are taking time from your audience. What you give them needs to be a good deal for them, in return for their time.

This is why it is important to prepare well, but also why it is vital to know your audience before you begin.

When you give someone a present, it's their present, not yours.

When you give people a presentation, it's their presentation, not yours. Make sure it suits them well.

Before starting to create a presentation, you should ask yourself some questions about your audience, their burning needs and the context, to ensure you are ready to begin preparing their presentation.

## 2. You set the wrong objective

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Too many presentations aim only to inform, yet this is one thing oral presentations are particularly bad for. We forget most of what we hear within 30 seconds.

If you want people to remember information, give them a document and a coffee, and time to read. Then you can answer their questions, discuss, agree and leave.

Presentations are very bad at informing people — but they are great at transforming them.

Your aim as a presenter is to change your audience in some way. If, after your presentation, they neither believe, feel nor do anything new or different, then you've wasted your time — and worse, you've wasted theirs.

Remember, if you don't have a clear objective, you're certain not to achieve it.

“If the only reason for your presentation is to share information, cancel the presentation and give them a document to read. It's far more effective.”

**Garr Reynolds**

### 3. You go straight to PowerPoint



The first thing most people do when they are asked to make a presentation is to open PowerPoint (or any other presentation software). As a result, it's no surprise that you always see the usual boring slides with a title at the top, a block of text in the middle and a random clipart on the side. And this is normal because that's what the tool wants you to do.

You open PowerPoint and you have a pre-set layout that invites you to insert a title at the top and a block of text in the middle.

Before opening PowerPoint, you should brainstorm effectively in order to find your key messages, with your audience at the centre.

Then you should translate your ideas and put them down in a storyline.

Only once you've created a clear storyline and only if it's appropriate to illustrate your talk with visual aids, can you start designing your slides.

“We don’t know where we get our ideas from. What we do know is that we do not get them from our laptops.”

John Cleese

## 4. You use slides with too much text



The way most people and companies use slides is far from aligned with what science knows about communication.

We can't listen while we're reading.  
We can listen while we're watching.

The reason is simple: the written text is processed in the same part of the brain that processes the spoken text.

Therefore, reading and listening are two conflicting activities for our brain. Yet, the slides of most business presentations are full of text.

The alternative, which is far more effective, is to create simple and visual slides that support and amplify your message.

Remember, you are the presentation, not your slides.

The value of simplicity in design is immense, and extremely rare when it comes to slides.

“Art is the elimination of the unnecessary”

Picasso

## 5. You confuse presentations with documents

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Slides are slides and documents are documents.  
They are not the same thing and should be separated.

Slideuments (slides + documents) are effective neither  
as slides nor as documents.

When you have to provide additional information  
that you can't include in your visual slides, you can prepare  
a separate document to be distributed after the presentation.

This approach allows you to have all the details available  
in a handout without compromising the effectiveness  
of your slides.

When you provide good handouts, your audience (and bosses)  
will feel less concerned about your different, simple slides, and  
will be more likely to accept your different approach  
and give it a chance to work.



## 6. You don't connect with your audience

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You need to make a connection with your audience.

It's hard to connect when you stay at a distance or behind barriers. For example, don't stand behind a lectern. It just accentuates the feeling of "I'm up here, you're down there" whereas what you really want to do is to be communicating **WITH** your audience, not just talking **AT** them.

Get close to your audience. If you can reasonably walk among them while still making yourself heard, then do so from time to time.

Remove the crutch of having notes on your slides. Prepare properly, so that you never have to look at the wall behind you.

Remove anything which is there only for your benefit and not for the benefit of your audience. It's about being authentic, being true — being you.

"Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken"

Oscar Wilde



## 7. You fail to prepare

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If you have a very clear, well-structured and memorable talk, illustrated where appropriate with highly effective visual aids, you may be tempted to say that you're now ready to get up in front of your audience and deliver it. Perhaps you are. But to use a motor racing analogy, it's not because you have the fastest car that you're going to win the race. The performance of the driver is just as important.

Racing drivers need to prepare properly for race day: plenty of practice, honing their skills, and physical and mental preparation. Likewise, with a presentation, the performance of the presenter is crucial.

Whether you are an improviser or a learner, we'd still encourage you to rehearse a number of times. It doesn't matter if what you say is different each time. It will still be more powerful the fifth time than the first.

# The rest is up to you

You are still only at the beginning of your journey  
to becoming the best presenter you can be.

It's the smallest investment you can make in yourself  
to make the biggest difference to your career.

We urge you to keep going.  
You won't regret it.  
And your audiences will thank you.

"This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end.  
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

**Winston Churchill**



If you'd like to learn more about how we can help you become the best presenter you can be, here are a couple of things you can do:

**MASTERCLASS:**

Attend one of FREE Live Masterclasses:

<http://ideasonstageuk.eventbrite.com>

**DISCOVERY SESSION:**

Attend one of our [discovery sessions](#) to learn how you can go from good to great when presenting.

Express your interest by sending an email to Andrea Pacini at [andrea.pacini@ideasonstage.com](mailto:andrea.pacini@ideasonstage.com) and we'll get in touch to see if you qualify.



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