Presentation Skills

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1 Introduction

Making good presentations is a skill that will likely never cease to be of good use. Applicable to both business and academia, it serves to communicate information to others but can also establish trust [4]. In this paper, we will focus on three types of presentations: oral presentations, written presentations in the form of posters, and online presentations (i.e. websites).

2 Oral presentations

Oral presentations occur when information is distributed a primarily-verbal fashion. Though hand gestures can accompany them, all content is generated from the speaker's mouth.

Good oral presentations usually come one who is practiced in making oral presentations hence, the saying "practice makes perfect".

Practicing may be seen as impractical. For most, there is not much of an opportunity to speak in front of a large audience. Fortunately, work by Mitchell and Bakewell suggests that one can maximize improvements in one's speaking ability while having reduced practice [5]. Mitchell and Bakewell found that students, when given feedback by their peers, improved in their presentation skills more than when given feedback by a tutor alone [5]. So, if one receives feedback from the infrequent presentations one has had, they can more quickly advance in enhancing their ability.

Good oral presentations are also those that are delivered by a confident speaker. To quote Estrin, "stepping in front of an audience to speak is like a Christian's stepping into the arena of the Roman Colosseum. The people who are your listeners and the lions in the arena have one thing in common-they'll eat you alive if you give them the chance" [2]. So, it is important to have the right mindset when presenting orally. One ought to have realistic expectations of the speach should provide as well as how the audience will receive it. Zanders et al. recommends imagining sitting down and listening to one's own speech from the audience [9].

3   Posters

Written presentations can take a multitude of forms. In this paper, we will focus on posters since they commonly accompany oral presentations.

Posters can have a number of advantages over oral presentation. According to Gosling [3], posters provide a sense of data organization that is not as readily present an oral communication. He also notices that posters can present scientific information in a high-fidelity manner [3].

The purpose of a poster is to "visually communicate research findings to a group of individuals with similar interests and to promote networking" [7]. This contrasts from an oral presentation in that a poster does not divulge in the fine details. Persky emphasizes that a poster is not a mini-manuscript [7]. He says "precision is key" [7]. The goal is to avoid over communicating.

According to Persky, there is only a 10 second time-frame to attract the attention of a passer-by [7]. During this time, he will only have the chance to glance at the title and briefly overview the content. Should he read further, the poster should provide a high-level understanding of the problem, motivation, and the results. Use figures and table whenever possible and add labels and explanatory text on how to interpret them [7]. If he is interested, these will provide a que for him to ask about orally.

4   Websites

Websites, although common, can be a difficult medium to master. If they offer a negative user experience, the user is likely to become frustrated, leave for another website, and not return. However, it can be unclear as to how to produce positive user experiences while catering to a multitude of different people. In this paper, we will discuss some principles to keep in mind.

According to Tan and Wei, users typically have negative experiences when either: the website provides out-of-date information or they are unable to find the information they are looking for [8].

There are a number of considerations in when designing a website such that information is easily accessible. Bailey and Konstan suggest considerations include: user control, user navigation, and user participation [1]. User control considers how responsive the content is to user manipulation (e.g. when a user hovers the mouse over an element). User navigation considers how articles are linked together (e.g. hyperlinks between pages). User participation considers how much input the user can provide to the application to determine what content will appear next (e.g. a search bar).

Giving the user more control offers them more freedom to navigate in non-sequential fashions. This may help them find desired information faster since they can skip over irrelevant pages. It does come at the cost that a user may get lost in the application [8].

Considering user navigation, a study by Más-Bleda et al. showed that the webpages of most well-cited researchers link to scholarly databases such as DOI

and are type PDF [6]. Social network sites, such as YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter, were rarely referenced [6]. This seems to coincide with our intuition, as online academic content is almost exclusively discussed in digital academic venues.

Overall, websites should focus on users' needs [8]. Websites should clearly denote their purpose as well as what kind of people they expect to be visiting them [8]. Lastly, they need to be consistent in the style in which they present content [8].

5   Conclusion

Presentations are important in all their forms. Thus, care should be taken in order to do them well. Oral presentations can be done well by maintaining confidence and skills acquired from practice. Posters can be done well by recognizing that, although they are in a written form, they should not replicate the content within a manuscript. Websites, lastly, can be built well when considering user control, navigation, and participation such that they accommodate users' needs of getting information.

References

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