MediaNet

A Presentation Skills Company

Multimedia vs. Multimania

INCORPORATING THE ELEMENTS

Nothing, *nothing* you can do with a notebook computer --- using animation, sound, video, or any special effects --- even comes close to what you see in the movies. We are all accustomed to seeing incredible special effects, and we have Spielberg and Lucas to thank for it. No one walks out of a business presentation and runs home shouting, *"You won't believe this, but at this presentation today --- and I swear I don't know how --- but this computer thing --- it played music and a voice came out --- a real human voice!"*

Face it! It's hard to impress people with technology these days. Your only resort is to set yourself on fire as you speak --- a real attention grabber, but a little difficult to repeat.

Although much has been said about multimedia: *Beware of multiMANIA*. Multimania is the overuse of technology to the point that the audience is enamored by your special effects, but they can't remember the plot!

You should be concerned when you think about adding elements in your presentation that go beyond your own delivery. For example, playing a video clip during your presentation introduces another *character* to the audience, another presence --- basically, another messenger. This isn't wrong, anymore than it's wrong to introduce another presenter. But elements that simulate or mimic real life forms (speech, movement, and real people in action) reach the audience in different ways than traditional visual content. So, you just need to understand the particulars of animation, sound, and video as unique elements that have specific effects on the audience.

ANIMATION

This effect is simply an *object in action*. However, it should never be *text* in action. *Objects* can move, but text should stand still. Take this test. Move this page up and down and try to read it. Text is an anchor. Anchors are not meant to move. You can't read moving text until it stops or slows down enough for you to anchor onto it.

Ever try reading the weather warning as it crosses the bottom of your TV? You can't read each word as it appears from the far right; no, you have to wait for a few words to make it to the far left of the screen so you can anchor and read left to right.

Therefore, text should *never* move. All those transitions you picked with the animated bullet points --- think again. Just because a programmer can make text move doesn't mean it's useful. Animated text lines can't be read until they stop. This means the only effect was the *animation itself*, the movement. Eventually people will watch your text flying in from different points and begin to take bets on where the next line will enter from and when. This is the underlying principle of using multimedia: *If an action only serves itself, it is useless because the audience only takes interest in the action, and not in the information.*

If the text you are animating is part of a logo or is to be treated like a standalone item, then it is really more like an object and probably contains very little anchor-and-read requirement. In those cases, you can animate the text object.

Objects can be animated, but apply a sense of logic. Don't have a clip art symbol of an airplane floating from the top of the visual *downward.* Airplanes don't do that --- at least not more than once. Yet, animated bars or moving lines showing a procedure can help the audience understand growth or flow and make the visual come alive to express an idea. Animation is not a bad thing, as long as it is not overdone to the point that only the effect is noticed.

SOUND

The first sense you experienced was hearing. Before birth you could hear the soft echo of your mom's tender voice as she carried you from place to place. Sound is one of the most important senses throughout our lives and can dramatically affect our perceptions.

Sound can either be used or abused during a presentation. Typically, you might want to add sound at certain points to highlight a key phrase or to add value to some information.

The main thing is to be consistent with sound. The audience not only looks for anchors; they listen for them as well. Your voice becomes an anchor as people adjust to your volume, pitch, and tone. Other sounds placed in the presentation need justification and sometimes repetition to become anchored. Even intermittent or periodic sounds are distracting because we prefer continual sound.

Continuity in sound is better than periodic or intermittent sound. You can process continual sound just like listening to the radio while driving a car. But when you hear a siren or horn beep (non-continuous sound), your attention is immediately diverted. That's why intermittent sound in a presentation is usually a distraction.

So, don't just make a noise because your software program has this great library of sounds that you feel compelled to use.

Sounds that are *linked* to elements on the visual are usually ineffective. Examples of these are the *cash register* sound linked to a symbol of money; the sound of *applause* signifying achievement; the shutter of a *camera* releasing each time a photo of a person appears on the visual. And, the worst of all sound effects --- the *typewriter* sound linked to animated text and possibly to each letter on each text line. In all these cases, the sounds are one-time effects that when repeated can become phony or even obnoxious.

However, sound can play a major role in the presentation if done correctly. Background music is a good example of this. The movie *Jaws* wouldn't be the same without music. *The Omen* wouldn't be as scary. The nice thing about background instrumental music is that you can talk over it and the audience can hear your words and the music. In addition, if the music track is long enough or loops continuously, the audience gets the benefit of continuity and will anchor to the music as it plays. In this case, sound serves as filler, playing a secondary role.

Even if you don't incorporate music during the presentation, consider playing some tunes as people are coming into the room or perhaps closing off with music as people leave. In these cases, sound dominates the moment and plays a primary role in the presentation.

You don't even need to have the music clips stored on the computer if the files can are quite large. You can simply use your computer's CD-ROM drive (if you have one) or bring a portable CD player and connect it directly to the projector.

You can use sound effectively by using the *Nostalgia Theory*. This states that whatever experiences you had when you were about 15 years old (songs, political events, movies, first love, and so forth), you recall vividly for the rest of your life. For example, let's say you are giving a presentation in 2003 to an audience, the average age of which is 35. That means they were 15 years old in 1983. Michael Jackson's *Beat It* will be a more popular sound clip for this crowd than his 1970 tune *ABC*, when the majority of the group wore diapers.

VIDEO

Multimedia takes on a very different flavor when you incorporate video. The multimedia issues with video come in two flavors, *full-screen* and *full-motion*. The goal is to have them both, but the technology you currently own may not allow either. Full-screen video is easy to envision. The video fills the whole screen, just like on a TV. Many video clips in presentations today are still limited to half, one-third, or even one-quarter the size of the screen, depending on the computer system used to deliver the video.

Full-motion video is what you get when you watch TV --- 30 frames per second. That speed is fast enough for the images to appear lifelike, which is why TV is such a powerful medium. Much of the video shown through notebooks is not full-motion, but

about half-motion or 15 frames per second. Faster processors are already resolving this issue, but it will be a while before everyone has the latest technology. For now, video clips shown in presentations have limitations.

At less than 30 frames per second, and especially during longer digitized video clips, you can get synchronization problems with voice and video after a while. That's when the video and voice get out of sync, and it looks like one of those foreign films with poor dubbing --- you know, the films where the character's mouth moves as if saying eleven words, but you only hear the words "So, Hercules!"

Currently, with most laptops, we sacrifice full-motion and full-screen for the sake of storage and speed. Naturally, the storage required for video is much greater than for still images or even clip art, for that matter. Without getting into the technical details of file sizes, if you've ever loaded a video clip on your PC, you know that it takes up a lot of disk space. For example, a one-minute clip that only plays in a window half the size of your screen might be about 10 megabytes. Of course, one minute is a long time for a video clip when you consider that TV commercials are 15-30 seconds. The point is that storage and speed are an issue for video and you should limit the length of the clips.

So the goal is full-screen, full-motion video. Technology has already arrived and it won't be long before video is a breeze to watch through any notebook computer.

Regardless of speed, another issue with video concerns movement and direction. If your video clip is not full-screen, you may be including it as part of a visual. If the visual has text and the video clip shows something moving in one direction, make sure that direction matches the way the text reads. For example, a visual in English would have a left-to-right reading pattern. So if your clip shows a car moving from right-to-left, you'll have an eye movement clash. Try to match the direction whenever possible.

TRANSITIONS

Electronic presentations allow the use of transition effects between visuals. Rather than use transitions randomly, you should consider the way the *next* image will appear.

For example, let's say you're displaying a text chart with several bullet points, followed by a horizontal bar chart and then a pie chart. You could use a "horizontal blinds" transition into the text chart because the lines of text are separated by horizontal space. Then you might use a "wipe right" transition from the text chart to the bar chart because the eye will be moving from left to right when the bar chart appears. Then, from the bar to the pie chart, a "box out" transition could be used. The circle of the pie centers the eye in the visual, and the transition opens from the center matching the circle.

Transition effects are designed for the visual yet to appear, not for the visual already displayed. So, check the general geometric shapes in the next visual when planning the transition to assure a consistency in eye movement from one image to the next.

SCREEN SAVERS, REMINDERS AND NAVIGATION

One of the things you should do with your PC is turn off any *screen savers*. If you stay on one visual too long and your screen saver appears, not only is it a distraction, but it may also interrupt the signal going to the projector. Then, suddenly, the audience is left staring at a blank screen. Check that you disable the screen saver in Windows and any screen time-out functions set in the computer itself. Check your PC's diagnostics or setup screen to see if any system savers are enabled.

Some contact management programs offer *reminders*, like alarms, that pop up when the task is due. When you present, don't load software that has the task reminders, unless you want the audience to see just who it is you're having dinner with that night!

Make sure your software program can handle screen show *navigation* in two directions (backward and forward) without any extra work on your part. For example, in *PowerPoint*, (in the *Options* section) make sure all three check boxes in the Slide Show area are unchecked. There are good reasons for this:

- You don't want the *pop-up menu* to display on a right-mouse click. By leaving this box unchecked, then your right mouse button will do what it is supposed to do --- navigate the show backward one visual. If you need to navigate to different images or you need to get other help during the presentation, you can simply go to the keyboard and press function key 1 (F1), and the menu of choices will pop up.

- You don't want the pop-up menu *button* to show in the left-corner of each visual as you present. Unless you have a remote mouse, you won't be able to click this transparent icon anyway.

- You don't want to end your presentation with a *black slide*, especially if you've been using a consistent background throughout. Instead, under the Slide Show menu, choose *Set Up Show*, and check the box "Loop Continuously until 'Esc,'" so that your show loops back to its beginning. This allows your presentation to "end" with the same image you started with, if you so choose. Your screen show should not end with a display of the interface (the software program's work area). If you've been using dark backgrounds (as you should), the sudden appearance of a bright, paper-white display of the software program will be quite shocking to your audience. That's why the manual effort of using the *escape key* to exit your presentation makes sense.

G<small>LITCH</small> H<small>APPENS</small>!

It goes without saying that you should practice your presentation. In fact, the more multimedia effects you have planned, the more need for a technical run-through before the event. But, let's face it. Sometimes computers cause problems and usually at the worst moments. Whether the video clip moves in a jerky motion or the sound effect doesn't play or the system just "locks up" for no apparent reason --- the thing to remember is not to panic. We have all been there before, and it's not unusual for things to go wrong every so often.

If you know how to fix a problem, then fix it. At the same time, explain to audience what you are doing. Don't just turn your back and say, *"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!"* The real issue is time. If you can fix it within three minutes, fine. But, if it will take longer to fix, then give the audience an opportunity to take a short break.

For practice, run your presentation and somewhere in the middle of it, turn off or reset the computer. See how long it takes to re-boot your PC and return to the *exact spot* where you turned it off. If it takes *more* than three minutes, you'll know to give the audience a short break the instant you know you may have to reboot the computer during your presentation.

Overall, if you keep calm and collected during technical difficulties, you have a better chance of keeping the attention span of the audience. Of course, the more command you have of the message and the more effective your delivery skills, the easier it will be for you to overcome any technical problem.

Remember that the technology only carries the speaker support material. You are the speaker, and your delivery embodies the message. The audience will constantly look to you for guidance and direction.

Never forget that YOU are in control!

NOTE: The information in this handout supports the MediaNet lecture "Multimedia vs. Multimania."
Additional support for this and other topics can be found in several publications including:
--- *Special Edition Using Microsoft PowerPoint 2007* by Patrice-Ann Rutledge and Tom Mucciolo
    (Copyright 2006, QUE, Pearson Publishing, MediaNet, Inc.).
--- *Purpose, Movement, Color* by Tom and Rich Mucciolo (Copyright 1994, 1999, 2003, MediaNet, Inc.)
--- *Media-Design Skills* CD-ROM (Copyright 2004, MediaNet, Inc.) an interactive tutorial.
--- *A Guide to Better Teaching* by Leila Jahangiri and Tom Mucciolo
    (Copyright 2012, Rowman & Littlefield).
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