

Effective presentations

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Claire Gillingwater's business is advising clients how to get their message across. In this first edition, the head of Dunnell Gillingwater Associates offers some advice on making a truly memorable pitch and says it may be time to give the traditional PowerPoint presentation the bullet.

In 1981 Whitfield Diffie, a peacenik and mathematician, wrote some computer software that allowed the user to produce a slide show. A few years later another computer engineer, Bob Gaskins, built on his work to create the graphics programme PowerPoint.

Did they do the business world a favour? PowerPoint has its uses, but my advice – and this may come as a shock to some – would be never to use it if you are planning an important pitch.

The problem is the powerful temptation to use PowerPoint as a substitute for engaging directly with your client. It is not unusual for people to come up with a 60-slide PowerPoint presentation, with five bullet points per slide – that's 300 bullet points!

Ask yourself: could you absorb 300 bullet points while sitting in a darkened room?

And that's not the only problem. Many pitching teams put their all into creating their PowerPoint presentation. By the time they come face to face with the client, there's little left to give.

It's all too easy to hide behind your slides. But a potential client is not buying a PowerPoint presentation – they are buying you. Rattling through a series of slides can never be a substitute for a well thought out pitch, delivered with intelligence and enthusiasm.

So how to avoid death by bullet points?

Be bold

Distil your message down to three strong points. The discipline of this will force you to think through what your most potent selling points really are. Hang all the key information around this.

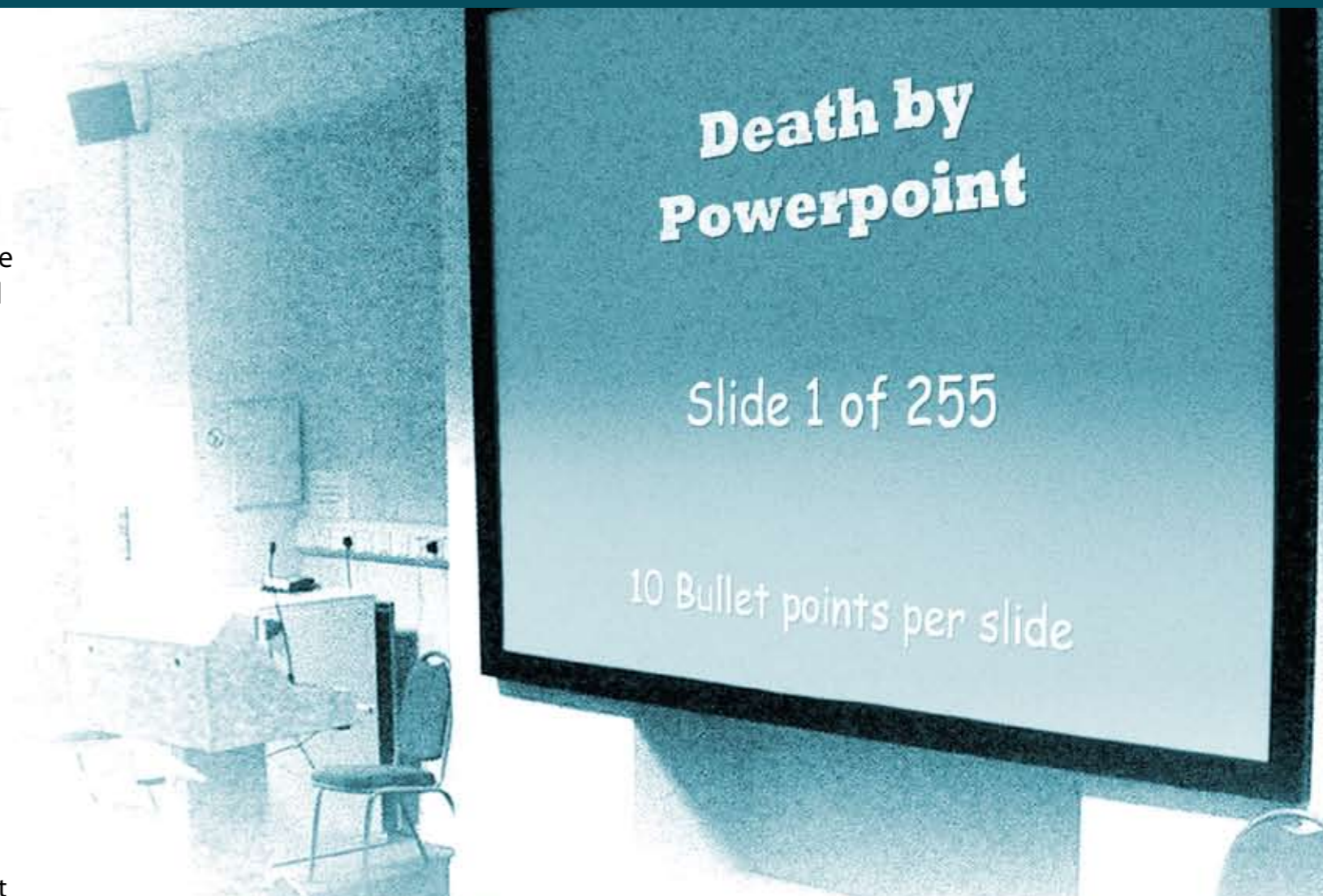
Keep it visual

Present your pitch on boards. Make it as visual as possible; pie charts and graphs – as long as they are meaningful, pertinent and clear – will all help you get your message over powerfully.

Show, don't tell

Back up all your claims. Have plenty of solid examples to substantiate what you say you can do. It's those real-life examples the client will remember when the pitch is over.

This different approach will help you inject a new-found energy and verve into your pitches and presentations. You will be able to engage the client, enthuse them with your ideas and answer any questions. Rather than overwhelm them with hundreds of indistinguishable bullet points, you will deliver a pitch which has clarity, shape and power. This will remain in the clients' minds long after you have left the room.



“Before there were presentations, there were conversations, which were a little like presentations but used fewer bullet points - and no one had to dim the lights.”

Ian Parker, The New Yorker

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