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5 ways presentations can be pointless

Research by A/V technology company Scene Change confirms that the standard bullet-point business presentation is ineffective at communicating with an audience.

Interviewed for the research were people who had attended conference or business presentations in the previous three months, 71 per cent of whom rated the general standard of Australian business presentations as "below average" or "poor".

Only 9 per cent had seen a presentation they rated as "excellent".

The five most annoying habits of presenters were described as:

- Projecting all their words on the screen, then reading them out.
- Trying to deliver too much information.
- Over-use of jargon and industry acronyms.
- Hiding behind the lectern and avoiding eye contact.
- Monotone vocal technique.

The five most effective speaker habits were:

- Having a clear understanding of the audience's interests.
- Using stories to bring facts to life.
- Using pictures and video.
- Keeping within the time available.
- Being open to audience interaction.

Of those surveyed, 52 per cent said they would prefer

to receive PowerPoint material via email, while 84 per cent said they liked going to conferences because of the chance to meet new people, have face-to-face discussions and catch up on industry news.

Conference speakers rated as excellent used entertaining, relevant stories, customised their presentation to the specific needs of an audience, were enthusiastic for their subject and didn't talk down to the audience or speak in managerial language.

Asked to estimate their typical attention span in presentations, the respondents said that on average, presenters have 11 minutes before their audience starts reading ahead, daydreaming or checking email.

"Presenters are following rules from years ago, when there was far less information in our lives," says Scene Change director Ian Whitworth. "Screens full of lists, read out to audiences for hours on end, are simply an ineffective way to get a message across."

He says dull presentations are a drain on the economy. "If a speaker wastes an hour talking to 300 people at a conference, that's tens of thousands of dollars in time down the drain."

Scene Change has launched the Presentation Channel, a monthly series of free on-line video programs to teach presenters how to avoid bullet-point boredom.

But when pictures and video clips are used, presentations can be memorable, says Whitworth. "The boredom problem lies with the program being used it at its most basic, list-template level."

• *The Presentation Channel, www.scenechange.com.au*