

VISUAL AIDS

Make your next board or staff presentation stand out.

By Stephen D. Boyd

When making a presentation for members or sharing financial data with your board, effective visual aids are essential. Visual aids—whether computer software, overhead projector, dry board or flip chart—help people understand, pay attention to and remember information more effectively.

The visual aid should indubitably enhance the presentation. Ask: “What would this presentation be without this visual?” If the answer is “not much different,” don’t use it. Under those circumstances, the visual will seem “forced” to the audience and the value lessened.

SIZE

The visual should be large enough to be seen by everyone in the room. The best way to test it is to put it where you will be speaking, and then find the seat farthest away from it and determine if you can read the visual from that seat.

If you are using a typical two-by-three-foot piece of poster-board or a flip chart, for example, make sure the letters are at least two inches high for easy readability. Font size for slides should be no smaller than 24 point. Headings for slides should be no smaller than 36 point. And remember the “6-by-6” rule: no more than six lines on a page and no more than six words on a line. This approach keeps the visual from looking “too busy” and the space from being displeasing to audience members’ eyes.

TRANSITION

Introduce the visual properly rather than simply throwing it at your audience. Make the introduction tantalizing: “This slide will demonstrate how the plan works” is a statement that builds up the visual. The weather person

often does this. (“If you look at this next map you will see a storm system moving in from the northeast.”)

COLOR

Use good contrast in colors. With a white page of a flip chart, blue or green markers give effective contrasts. Red makes a good color to underscore key words or ideas. With PowerPoint, a dark blue template or background with yellow lettering looks professional. Be consistent with color contrast. Don’t overemphasize variety or colors even though you have the capability to do so. Just because you can does not mean you should.

BULLET POINTS

Bullets are better than numbers. They give equal emphasis to all points while numbers tend to make some more important than others simply because of numerical value. Plus, you can lose track of numbers as you’re talking and, with bullets, numbering is irrelevant. Finally, bullets can add attractiveness and computer software gives many bullet choices.

CAUTIONS

Don’t allow the visual to take your place as the presenter. Visuals are termed “aids” and not “replacements.” Be confident enough of the oral presentation itself that, if necessary, your presentation can go off smoothly even without visuals. Unforeseen circumstances like lost or malfunctioning equipment or even natural disasters can put your visuals out of commission and leave you on your own. I’ve had an electrical storm shut down the lights and overhead projector in front of 400!

Be careful where you stand in reference to the visual. Don't turn your back to the audience, and also keep eye contact. Step back to the screen and point to the visual aid as you speak. Do not block the view of the screen; stand to the side. Notice if audience members are looking around you to see more easily.

Don't allow the visual to keep you from developing it; avoid statements like, "This slide is pretty much self-explanatory," followed by a period of silence for audience assimilation. If the point is as evident as you indicate, people will wonder why you as a presenter are necessary. If it is not so easy to understand, they will become embarrassed by their ignorance.

PRACTICE

You need to be comfortable with your visuals. Practice using them as you prepare the presentation. Visual aids complicate matters and if you have not practiced your presentation using the visuals, it will show by your hesitancy

in working with them in the real presentation. Visuals should not call attention to themselves. You should look comfortable as you incorporate them in the presentation.

SIMPLICITY

Finally, keep it simple. Limit yourself to one key idea per visual. Use one graph per slide. Leave lots of space between lines or in the background of a drawing or picture. Include most explanations in the content of your presentation, not on the visual itself. Make the visual aid attractive but not a work of art. You want people to get the information, not be distracted by how beautiful, clever or complex a visual is.

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