

Pressing all the right buttons

Richard John points out the way to power

At a recent international exhibition I spoke at a conference and received great feedback. The reason was that I managed to make myself a star in terms of presentation.

At this point I'd normally thank my parents and friends, teachers and colleagues, and try not to cry with pride. However, I can't take all the credit (although, being a consultant I'm going to have a damn good try). My motivation was a book called *Killer Presentations*, by Nicholas Oulton, who runs the M62 group and who probably knows more about PowerPoint than anyone else in the universe.

I had the pleasure of meeting him recently and we chewed the fat about the success, or otherwise, of events where PowerPoint is used without control.

Now, I have read many books on how to present, and often their messages are the same. Nicholas' approach is different, as he is a man with a mission to make our presentations interesting, rather than boring already jaded audiences.

I'm not going to steal too much of his thunder. If you get the chance, go along to one of his presentations and see him use PowerPoint the way a stunt driver handles a performance car.

Us ordinary mortals could never achieve any similar level of performance, and yet he makes it seem so easy. And his book is well worth reading, also giving access to a website with a wealth of hints and tips and templates. Check out www.killerpresentations.com if you don't believe me.

But here are a couple of useful tips for use in day to day presentation. Firstly, imagine you've been asked to speak for 30 minutes, and you've prepared your PowerPoint presentation accordingly. But just before you walk on to the stage, your host whispers that lunch is almost ready, so can you cut it to 15 minutes.

Options? Well, you could carry on as planned and see lunch go cold. You could talk faster, and whiz through your slides, leaving your delegates feeling short changed. Or you could jump through some of the slides without going through them all. Most people when asked how to do this would take the approach of pressing the 'escape' key to leave the presentation, click on the 'slide sorter' option, highlight the slide you'd like to move onto, and click the 'presentation' option to start again. Not exactly slick.

Alternatively, if you know you want to go from slide 12 to slide 22, you could tap 22 on the keyboard and press 'return'. And that's it. Your audience will never know what you've missed. Clever, eh?

Or, you have a graph on screen and you need to focus your audience on a particular area. Well, laser pointers often upset health and safety politicos, and you can end up feeling like an extra from *Star Wars*.

Instead, remember that CTRL P and CTRL A will give you on-screen pointer options that work perfectly.

Most of us assume we can use PowerPoint, and Bill Gates helpfully provides templates on most PCs – which is why most presentations are so similar, and uniformly boring. If you want something different, check out Nick's book.

Oh, and a final point. Presentations

are 'visual support'; look closely at those two words. PowerPoint isn't the star of your session as a speaker, you are. So remember the secret of the B or W keys. Press them, and the screen goes black (or white). Press them again, and back comes your presentation. And in those seconds, where there are no pretty pictures on the screen, that's where the audience gets to see you. After all, isn't that why they came?

Thank you for your attention, ladies and gentlemen. That's the end of this month's column.

You may clap as I leave.



richard@rjagb.com