

Introduction The word he used was *meshuga*, known by both Jews and non-Jews alike to mean “crazy.” And my father was looking right at me when he said it.

“You’re going to say *that* in the book?”

“Actually, Dad, I’m going to say it in the title.”

“You must be meshuga!”

And there you have either the most compelling reason to, or not to, author a book without the assist of a large publishing house. I’ve written for Sybex Books, Peachpit Press, Que Publishing, and several others, and I have the distinct impression that, were I to have followed that path this time, you would now be holding a book in your hands of a different name. Pretty good chance, also, that a vacuum cleaner would not grace its cover.

My reason for choosing a private-label publisher was not because I sought an edgy title, although I do admit to enjoying the shock value that comes along for the ride. I did so because of a five-year-long frustration with being asked (make that required) by traditional publishers to include in any book proposal a clump of PowerPoint-centric topics that few in my intended audience find interesting.

Let’s take a poll of one: Do you need to be taught how to create a slide? Did you buy this book because you don’t understand how to make a string of text bold or how to make the bullet square instead of round?

If you bought this book for its intended purpose, it’s because you have bigger issues.

- Your weekly load has now exceeded 200 slides and you are beginning to feel like a slide factory.
- Your presentations are not being received the way you were hoping they would and you’re not sure why.
- You have good instincts but they need to be honed.
- Your co-worker keeps messing up your templates and you’re about to scream.
- Your boss creates the most dismally-ugly slides and you don’t know what to do about it.
- Or maybe...just maybe, it is you who needs a refresher in the principles of good presentation design.

Really, the potential market for this book is plenty vast without catering to the brand new user. How many horrible presentations did you sit through last month? In the face of how many colleagues or potential vendors would you like to shove this book and say “Here, please read this”?

I remember the first time I experienced it. I refer, of course, to the phenomenon we all know as Death by PowerPoint. The year was 1990, and three representatives from a well-known public relations firm wanted my partner and me to spend \$10,000 on them to help us market a series of seminars.

They were smartly dressed, meticulously coiffed, and perfectly eloquent, as they proceeded to bore us out of our minds with drivel about value-added propositions, proactive initiatives, and positively-reinforced task-based personalization.

Every slide was read word for word, and each of us had a spiral-bound booklet that duplicated the slides.

Technically, this wasn't Death by PowerPoint; the software had not yet been invented. It was Death by Overhead Slide. Just as bad...

Who Should Read This Book?

As lead author, I would like to think that any presenter, presentation designer, or content creator would enjoy the pages of this book. The fact that I won't try to convince you of that is a sure sign that I have no future as a marketing consultant. From my annual conference and my on-going work as a presentations consultant and coach, I have a pretty good sense of the typical PowerPoint user. If I'm right, you fall into at least one of the following categories:

- You are thought of as the Slide King or Queen of your department and are called upon to crank out untold volumes of slides. Getting the job done on time becomes your sole focus.
- You are a presentation designer, where you have a bit more opportunity than the Slide King/Queen to consider the aesthetic side of content creation, but every project given to you is due yesterday.
- You are on the road a lot, giving sales presentations to audiences of various sizes. You have a well-worn template that fits you like an old shoe, never mind that it was designed from a wizard back in the 1990s. You have gotten pretty good at swapping in new content for old, but have begun to wonder what you are missing by not learning more about the application.
- You are an outside consultant brought in to work with people in the marketing department who have absolutely no idea

how to refine a concept, crystallize an idea, or shape words into a message.

- You are hired to help terrified public speakers learn not to throw up all over themselves when in front of an audience.
- You work with the executives of your firm, and no matter how great the work is that you give to them before they board their plane, by the time they touch down at their destination, they've mauled your slide deck.
- You have worked your way into a position, created just for you, in which your expertise as a presentation professional is truly appreciated. You are given creative freedom and latitude, and are encouraged to cultivate your skills.

That last example is not fantasy; it only sounds too good to be true. There are just enough forward-thinking organizations and skilled presentation professionals to create optimism for the community at large. In fact, since our first edition, we have seen this trend quickening its pace. Even through the economic downturn, many of us who act as presentation consultants have seen an uptick in our business. Companies are indeed finally starting to get it.

In order for that community to grow and thrive, we need a universe of PowerPoint users who have moved past, as we describe in the first chapter, their first 30 minutes of training.

That is the thrust of this work. You don't need help with the basics of PowerPoint. You know your way around the program. You need someone to speak frankly to you about the issues, the challenges, the joys, and yes the perils associated with modern-day presentation creation and delivery. With this book, I accept that challenge.

How to Use This Book

There's an insulting headline for you. (*To use this book, start at the top of the page, read from left to right, and turn pages with your right hand...*) Proud authors like to insist that good books aren't used; they're read. But we in fields of technology know better. We know how people use computer books—lots of dog-eared pages, notes in the margin, table of contents brutalized—and I'm fine with that.

My hope, however, is that you do find it to be a good read. By design, it is written very unevenly. Some chapters are just a few pages long, some close to 40. Some topics we hammer and others we ignore. And I do not pretend that these 30 chapters are some sort of sterile, objective

listing of “advanced tips,” whatever that even means. This book is one person’s view of the functions and nuances of PowerPoint that seem particularly relevant. It is full of bias and subjectivity and you are invited to disagree with it. In fact, if you agree with everything that I say here, its value is probably diminished.

In choosing my four editors, it was practically a prerequisite that they disagree with me on occasion. As a result, these pages alternate between first-person singular and plural enough to drive a grammarian nuts. And that is my prerogative—there are times when I speak for the team...there are times when I speak on behalf of a community of thousands. And there are times when I feel as if I’m on Survivor’s Exile Island. It’s all good.

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But no book should be an island—it’s challenging enough to ask static pages to cover a medium of motion. And that is why we consider the book’s web site, www.whypptsucks.com, to be a full partner in this endeavor. You’ll see our constant references in the margins to files that you can download, view, and dissect, and most of the time, the file-name mirrors the name of the particular figure or illustration.



There are no appendices to know about and there is no particular order in which you need to read this. **Part One** is where we bring the big hurt. We share our research and our conclusions about all that is wrong with the presentations industry and the software that is at its helm. Hopefully before the onset of depression, **Part Two** offers solutions to all of the pain we uncover in the chapters that precede it. **Part Three** channels the inner designer in all of us, providing strategies and advice for those who did not come from an academy of art. **Part Four** is devoted to skills and techniques that anyone can adopt to help become a better public speaker, whether you are a natural at it or not. And **Part Five** steps up the volume considerably and covers several truly advanced topics and ideas in which you can indulge.

What Version Do You Need?

In many cases, it matters little what version of PowerPoint you use, and we encounter hundreds of presentation designers every year still using Version 2000. A good designer needs only a blank slide; a good presenter could use a 1993 copy of Harvard Graphics.

Having said that, we’ll make Version 2000 users drool over some of the advanced techniques possible with a more current version, which we define to be version XP or later.

Unlike the first edition of this book, Version 2007 is given equal billing and full coverage, even though most of our readers are probably staying with Version 2003 for the time being. Our conclusion is that there are two types of PowerPoint users today: those who are using Version 2007 and those who are curious about it. And even if the second group is larger than the first, said curiosity is extraordinarily wide-spread. As a result, we are careful to delineate the discussions and the step-by-step instructions that are version-specific.

If I have written this book correctly, it will prove to be bad for my business as a presentations consultant. A good chunk of my time as a hired gun is spent retraining, or untraining, to be precise. Many of the people with whom I work have read the reference guide and have taken some sort of introductory course, but never really learned any rules or guidelines for using the software.

By the time they bring me in, their slides often have dozens of unused placeholders, text boxes with bullets stuffed into them, random applications of animation, and multiple backgrounds.

Before I can teach them anything new, I have to strip off all of the old. I intend to provide you with the strategies, the techniques and the tools for becoming completely proficient with the projects that you need to produce. I intend to leave you with a more complete understanding of how the program operates. And I intend for you to not have to rely upon consultants like me as often.

I guess you could say that this book attempts to reduce by half my billable hours.



Finally, the wonders of print on demand are numerous, chief among them the agility with which we can print new versions...perhaps starring you. If you: a) have created a presentation that illustrates a technique discussed herein; b) disagree with an assertion that we make; c) have an alternative technique to propose; d) want to suggest a topic for us to cover or expand upon; or e) just want to comment on a passage, please write to me at betterppt@altman.com or at the betterppt.com web site. We will not hesitate to include noteworthy commentary in an upcoming version, which, if sales go well, could be as early as next month...