

Innovation and Entrepreneurship

PowerPoint Presentations to the Video Game Generation

Sitting in a semi-darkened room listening to the speaker read to me from Kong-sized slides that follow one after another as rapidly as cards from a Las Vegas blackjack dealer, I am sympathetic to arguments about the downside of innovations. But this sympathy would be misplaced. The problem is not with the innovation; but with its use—or, more accurately, its misuse. Microsoft's PowerPoint, the most often used presentation software, is a marvelous innovation. For those who came of age using 2 x 2 slides for presentations, the introduction of PowerPoint for generating slides and slide shows is marvelous.

But whether the innovation is atomic energy or antibiotics, there is always a downside, and so is the case with PowerPoint. Computer-generated slides that consist of written text arranged as a series of bullet points, with each bullet point containing multiple sentences that are difficult to read, let alone comprehend, should be a felony. Additional "hard time" should be given to the speaker who agonizingly and literally reads, word for word, the text for each bullet point. A speaker who reads to the audience from computer-generated slides is neither imaginative nor serious about communication.

PowerPoint Presentations to Dental Students

The preparation of PowerPoint presentations to dental students is especially challeng-



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ing, and has become even more so with the class of 2008. In a previous *Compendium* column¹ I coined the phrase "the Video Game Generation" to differentiate the tech-savvy students born after 1985 from their predecessors. These "vidkids" trickled into dental schools about 3 or 4 years ago. Soon after their arrival, all dental students were required to have laptops and Internet access. For the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine, these changes were introduced with the class of 2008. Giving a laptop with Internet access to vidkids, who had grown up surfing the net and using the latest computer technology, changed the balance of power within the lecture room.

Today, when standing in front of class, instead of faces the speaker sees a checkerboard pattern of black laptop screens. What today's tech-savvy students might be viewing is anybody's guess, and with that sort of distraction it is no wonder PowerPoint presentations are often ignored.

Text Messaging and PowerPoint Presentations

When students have this type of instant communication literally at their fingertips, it is often too much of a temptation to ignore, and as a result important classroom presentations are missed. In addition to the obvious distraction of the laptops in the classroom, vidkids now have an even more invidious distraction—the cell phone. While one would think that the cell phone's potential for distraction can be negated by merely announcing at the beginning of each class, "Please turn off all cell phones and pagers," such an announcement only stops students from talking on the phone, not from text messaging.

Some insight into how pervasive text messaging is can be found in the article by Charles McGrath, published in *The New York Times Magazine*.² Mr. McGrath writes about how universal text messaging has become in society worldwide. While his article examines the reasons why text messaging is universal, he also notes that many text messages are sent when messenger and recipient are within speaking distance of each other—as in classrooms, for example. Certainly, sitting in on any of my lectures would verify this statement. Despite requests to turn off cell phones, it is not uncommon to see the electronic glow of cell phones lighting up randomly throughout the lecture hall like fireflies glowing on a summer evening.

Creating a PowerPoint Presentation for Vidkids

When preparing a PowerPoint presentation for vidkids, we can learn a great deal from Mr. McGrath's observations on text messaging. He notes that text messages are short and to the point. In fact, text messages are sent in a sort of shorthand, or code. One of the best examples, is the :), the colon and parenthesis, to form the "smiley face" that even I use from time to time. He also notes that the code for text messaging is a language unto itself, with its own unique style. He states, "Among inventive users, the younger ones especially, text messaging has taken on many of the characteristics of hiphop."²

Clearly, the text-messaging, Internet-browsing vidkids in lecture halls today have neither patience nor interest in reading lengthy bullet points from PowerPoint slides. So, my recommendation to those planning a PowerPoint slide show is to remember to gain and keep the students' attention, keep your slides short and to the point, and begin your lecture with the following "text message" on your first slide: "XM 2moro." This way you can leave the lecture hall "lol" (laughing out loud).

References

1. Rossomando, Edward F. Innovations and Entrepreneurship: The Video Game Generation Is Now In Dental School. *Compend Contin Educ Dent*. 2005;26:800-801.
2. McGrath, Charles. The Pleasures of the Text. *The New York Times Magazine*. June 2006;15-19.

For additional insights in understanding the Video Game Generation and for assistance in preparation of PowerPoint presentations to vidkids, please contact Dr. Rossomando at erossoma@nso2.uchc.edu.