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INVESTOR RELATIONS  
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# Give 'Em That Old Razzle- Dazzle?

By Art Samansky

September 2003

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*IR Update* is published monthly by the National Investor Relations Institute as a service to its members. Annual subscriptions are available to non-members: \$175. ISSN 1098-5220 © 2003 by the National Investor Relations Institute. All rights reserved.

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**IR UPDATE E-SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR NON-MEMBERS:** Annual subscription: \$75.

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# Give 'Em That Old Razzle-Dazzle?

By Art Samansky

The basic backdrop for presentations, whether they tell the corporate story to potential investors or simply update the staff, is the ubiquitous, laptop-driven slide presentation.

The most successful and effective presentations are like a riveting magic act: the speaker, and his or her message, is the magician, and the slides are always the assistant. It's the magician, not the assistant, that makes the act. Too often, though, the slides are mistakenly made the star, to the detriment of the message.

## Value-Added Commentary Is Essential

A frequent mistake made by presenters is to merely be the "voice" of the slides, reading them word for word, with little narration. In this instance, it would be more useful to skip the presentation and send the slide package to the potential attendees, saving the cost of the trip and the time in the conference room.

Value-added commentary and insightful examples, using the slides only as a starting point, are essential to an impactful presentation.

## Too Many Slides

Another error presenters often make is with the volume of slides. With rare exception, the number of non-financial slides (i.e., business line, business model, business philosophy) shouldn't exceed 10 to 12, and the number of additional financial slides should be the same. More slides may be included in the take-away book or investor kit, if necessary.

With value-added commentary on 20 or so carefully chosen slides, a presenter can keep total remarks to the ideal length of 15-20 minutes, leaving time for questions and answers.

## Keep It Simple

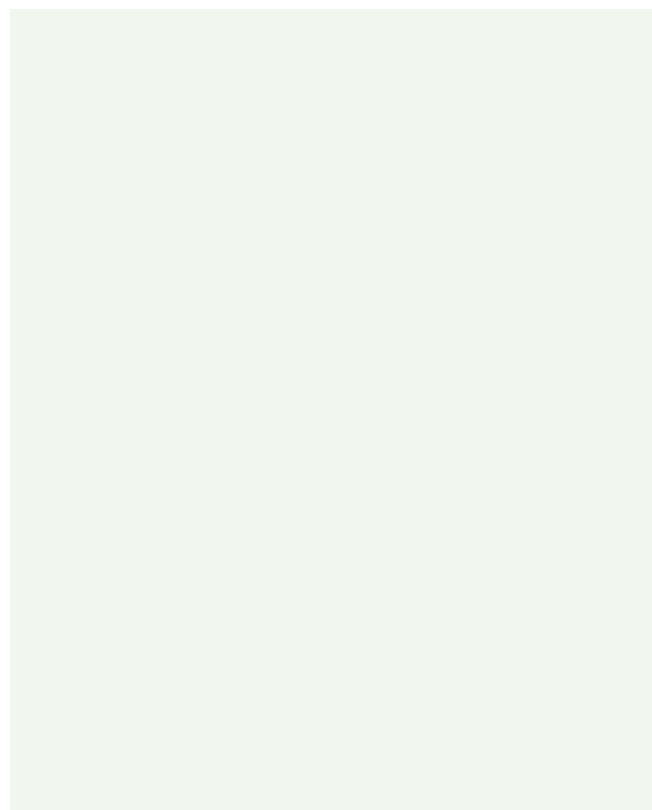
Slides should be as simple as possible. Lots of whiz-bang, floating words and whirling diagrams can distract

from the message. Use special effects very sparingly. The audience needs to listen to the presenter, since he or she is adding the personal substance to the skeletal bullet points, charts or diagrams. In fact, psychologically, the audience needs to "see" as well as "hear" the presenter. If attention is on the slide, it can't be on the presenter. If it's not on the presenter, the message could be lost. An analogy would be listening intently to a news anchor on TV while reading the news scroll along the bottom of the screen.

## Develop a Theme First

Before the first words or charts are developed, a presenter must construct the theme of the presentation, which should be limited to no more than three core messages. However the bullet points, charts and diagrams are eventually arranged, they all must relate to these three basic themes, which should be reduced to a total of 15 words.

There's magic in that number: Getting the three messages to a total of slightly more than a dozen words, no matter how they are allotted, puts the speaker absolutely on target with no chance to accidentally stray. And three simple messages are easily remembered by listeners.



### Building Slides

The next step, building the slides, can be filled with pitfalls. Clutter must be avoided. No slide should contain more than five points; three is ideal. Each point preferably should be no more than one line—and never more than two. As a rule, message points should be headline-like. The typeface should be simple and the size easily readable from the back of the room. And always use the same font throughout the presentation.

Other points to keep in mind:

- ◆ No slide should contain more than two *related* tables or charts.
- ◆ The number of bars or lines in each table/chart should be limited. It's fine to show 10 years of earnings, if essential. But don't mix two years of earnings, two years of revenue, two years of return on equity, etc., in one chart. By the time the viewers have figured it all out, they have heard nothing of the value-added commentary of the speaker, who actually may already be on the next thought.
- ◆ Make sure each bar or line is easily identifiable—especially from a distance.
- ◆ Consistency helps readability and understanding. Make charts either all vertical or all horizontal.

**As a general rule, avoid humor. What's funny to one person or group in one setting may be highly insulting in a different setting.**

- ◆ Use the same color scheme throughout.
- ◆ Be alert to colors. Certain colors fade on large screens; others have positive or negative psychological implications and meanings. There also are cultural implications to color, and thus, presenters should be especially sensitive to where the slide show will be shown.

◆ If photos or caricatures are used, be attuned to issues of race, gender and age in the way people are portrayed.

◆ As a general rule, avoid humor. What's funny to one person or group in one setting may be highly insulting in a different setting.



### Special Attention

Perhaps the two most important slides are the first and the last. With rare exception, a presenter has only one chance to get the attention of the audience. Thus, the first slide must be something that will grab and keep the listeners' attention. Think of the opening routine in a magic act—it sets the stage for excitement.

The last slide is critical for another reason. What is the primary message the presenter wants to leave with the audience? Too often, speakers end their presentation with a slide displaying the name and logo of the organization. With that as the backdrop, the presenter continues to talk for a short time or to answer questions.

But are the name and logo the message? They might be, of course. Or the message might be that XYZ

Company has the world's most sought-after gizmo. If the latter, the last slide should show the gizmo message, staying up while the presenter concludes or takes questions and thus re-enforcing the message.

Short, simple, clear—that's the message for a good slide show. Giving an audience that old razzle-dazzle may be good for musicals, but not for effective presentations. **IRU**

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