Successful PowerPoint Presentation Integration in Conferences, Hotels, and Venues

Here are 8 tips to help when presenting to an audience using Keynote or PowerPoint. Whether you are a professional speaker, or simply doing a presentation at your local community centre, these helpful points will reduce potential snags in your presentation integration.

We deal with a lot of presentations from guest speakers. The typical scenario is one of the following:
A. Presenter brings their laptop, we connect it to our projectors.
B. Presenter brings us a thumb drive (flash drive) about an hour before their presentation with the file on it.
C. Presenter emails us the file around midnight the night before because they are still up working on it.
D. Presenter brings an iPad in hopes that we have the proper connection to make it work.

All of these above scenarios are just recipes for failure. Last week we received a call on our after hours line from a customer who was having issues connecting a guest presenter's laptop to their in-house video system. This event sparked the thought process for this blog. In this article, we give a few key suggestions and pointers on giving a successful PowerPoint presentation. One quick disclaimer though, if you are a presenter who brings your own laptop, with your own projector, with your own screen, then YOU ARE GOOD TO GO! You can skip this article.

To start, think back to your old school days. If you wait until the night before a test to "cram", the outcome will most likely be bad. Same goes for PowerPoint presentations. If you wait until the night before to coordinate with the AV company, or even worse, a few hours before your presentation, the results will most likely (not always, but you have a higher chance) be bad.

Point 1 - Send your Files Early
We can not stress this enough! Just like the example of waiting until the night before to "cram", if you wait until the night before to send the files to the AV company, there are so many things that can go wrong. Remember, if your presentation is at 8 am, the AV crew is probably arriving to do their final preparations at 5:30 or 6:30 a.m. The odds that they have internet access and the time to download and check your presentation during this time are very slim. If you are a good presenter, you will have your slides done well in advance. So ... coordinate with the company, find out who you need to send your slides to, and do it early. This gives that person plenty of time to download and check your presentation.

Point 2 - Things don't always look the same on different computers
How many times have you sent a file and opened it up on another computer only to find that the fonts, background images, slide elements' placement, etc. are completely different to that on your home computer? This is because fonts, layout, background images, etc. are native to the computer that created the content. Different versions have different settings. So how do you avoid this?
Most versions of PowerPoint and Keynote have a "bundle package" option for saving your

presentation. This puts all elements (fonts, layout, images, video files, background images) within a folder. Then, send THIS folder to the AV company. Here's another vital hint. With the same folder, also send either a hard copy printout, or PDF printout, of what your slides are supposed to look like.

This will help the AV company spot any differences in the appearance of your presentation when they run it on their computer.

Point 3 - What to do if you are wanting to use your own computer

Our biggest advice here is KNOW YOUR TECHNOLOGY. Know how to change the video settings on your computer. Know how to differentiate and select between mirroring and extending the desktop. Software changes rapidly. System techs are becoming younger and younger, OR, older and older. They may not know the version of your operating system. Many people want to use their own computers because they claim that they know it will work. Well, here's a little news for you, it's actually more difficult to make your computer work than providing the file in advance.

Important: The clicker

A standard corporate AV company will also provide you with a clicker to advance YOUR slides on THEIR computer. Here's the hidden secret that you don't know. There's a piece (which is pretty much a standard piece of equipment to own if you are in the AV industry) that is a long range slide advance tool. It connects to the computer and works great. It can also connect to two computers so if that company is running a backup, it can advance both computers and maintain a consistent backup source. Furthermore, that piece of equipment has two big arrows on the front showing immediate response when you press the advance or back buttons. If your computer drops the connection for some reason, a system tech can manually advance based on your input. This also allows the company to "have your back" they are watching your clicks and making sure your slides are advancing properly. These guys know what they are doing. Do your best to help work out any bugs that you can. Take the time to know this on your hardware so you're not relying on them to experiment and take potentially hours trying to figure it out. Practise using the clicker on the day to avoid embarrassment.

Point 4 - Have the right adapters

Here's a safe rule of thumb. Always have the correct adapters to end up with a VGA output. VGA has been a standard in the video world for a long time. I think it would be safe to say that 95% of AV companies are going to have the capacity to accept a VGA input. So if you are using your own laptop, make sure you have the correct adapters to convert to VGA. If you are using a tablet, do the same, make sure you have a VGA output at the end of your chain. Also, TEST YOUR ADAPTERS! We see many presenters show up with their laptop and a brand new adapter still in the packaging because "This is what the store told me I needed". Well, Apple adapters aren't always compatible with non-Apple products. Sometimes what you thought was a video output was really a video input for the computer (this was the case in my emergency phone call last week). So, just be prepared, bring your own adapters and check them at home. Almost any computer monitor will have a VGA input, and many TVs as well. You can test your device using these at home.

Point 5 - Test it the Day Before

Whether you are bringing your own presentation source or sending files to the AV company in advance, TEST IT THE DAY BEFORE. This is **your** presentation . Ask yourself this question: "Will my presentation still be effective if my PowerPoint does not work". Is your answer "no"? Then go the day before. Don't risk it. You are putting your whole presentation's integrity at risk if you don't. I'll say it again, many times on the morning of your presentation the AV company has a whole world of things that they need to do: check

microphones, re-set lighting looks, convert videos, etc. Go ahead and get your vital part out of the way the day before when there's plenty of time to troubleshoot if needed.

Point 6 - Install "Caffeine"
There are many different locations within the settings on your computer to adjust energy saving shut down, screen saver times, automatic logout, etc. There's a great little program called "Caffeine" that can override these settings and causing your screen saver to start, or cause your computer to go into automatic sleep mode.

Disclaimer: We are not associated with these programs, We just use them and think they are handy.

http://www.zhornsoftware.co.uk/caffeine/

Download and install this software. It's very handy. It installs a little picture of a coffee cup in your toolbar. All you have to do is click on that coffee cup so it appears to be full, and your computer will stay awake. No screen saver, no automatic log off, no auto sleep mode, no updating software etc. Very handy tool for presenters.

Point 7 - Understand why "It worked fine at home" and now it doesn't
Relate to point 2 for a further explanation of this. We hear this comment almost every single time a presentation doesn't work, or looks different on our screens at a major corporate convention. Know and understand why it doesn't look the same and do your best to avoid a scenario where you would potentially say this. One other key thing to keep in mind here is that there are two formats for screens: widescreen (16:9) and standard (4:3) video aspect ratios. Think of it this way: widescreen is like your new age flat panel TV. It is wider than it is tall. Standard aspect ratio is more square like an old tube TV. Many AV companies still use standard format for their screens due to cost. So check with your AV company ahead of time. Find out what aspect ratio the screen are. Then, either create your presentation around that aspect ratio, or have both a widescreen and standard version of your presentation. If you don't the company will have to "scale" your presentation and stretch things, to get your slides to fill the whole screen. Chances are if you present often, you will run across both formats.

Point 8 - Final Point - Leave it to the professionals
This is a quick summary of all my points above. When it comes to making your presentation appear and function correctly on screens, work with the professionals at your location. Most hotels that provide projectors have an in-house service AV company. Most corporate conference venues have a AV company that they have hired for their event. Touch base with that company early. Know the questions to ask. Be prepared. Don't "cram' the night before and expect flawless results. A good AV company will even have two computers running with a quick switch option in case the computer locks up or crashes. Don't risk compromising the entire integrity of your presentation when you can easily do a little prep work and have a flawless presentation.

However at the end of the day, although the professionals are there to support you, it is **YOUR** responsibility to get it all right.