PowerPoint **Pizzazz**
Designing visuals for presentation

PowerPoint and other presentation graphics software have brought us a long way in a short time. Today's tools allow us to create sophisticated pages with color, animation, charts, photographs, sound, video, and perfectly set type.

While the tools to create presentations have improved, our skill at using these tools has not necessarily kept pace.

When visuals are used, your presentations can be more persuasive, interesting and involving, you can cover more material in less time, and retention and comprehension are greater.

This handout will help you design visuals and create a visual plan for your presentations that will make the information you have easier for the audience to understand. Remember that the number one priority with visuals is legibility — they must be easy to read.

Deb Tanner, Publication Coordinator/Designer
John Grindahl, Graphic Designer
David Haasser, Graphic Designer

NDSU AGRICULTURE COMMUNICATION

■ Page setup

- Set your Page Setup to the final format you will be using – on-screen show, banner, 8½ x 11 handout, etc. This will produce the best quality output plus save you time because you will only set it up once.

■ Create a master style

- Use templates for a consistent look throughout the presentation — consistent fonts, colors and graphic style.
- Choose a master style that is appropriate for your image, your audience and your objective.
- Customize the template to suit your needs. Add logos and elements to be on all visuals.
- Simple is always better. Elaborate designs will destroy the impact of the message with the intensity of the design.
- Consistency in design will maximize the overall power and pizzazz of the presentation.

■ Basics

- High-contrast improves legibility. Use light type and artwork on a dark background for projected images.
- Shoot for 20 words or less per visual. The more words there are, the more distracting it is for the audience.
- Use well-stated headings, two to five words in length. Omit unnecessary phrases such as "Graph of" or "Percentage of."
- Use a subhead if you need more than a few words to describe a visual.
- Headings should be larger and bolder than subheads and body text.
- Avoid all capital letters for text. Even though they're easy to type, it makes text harder to read and looks like you're shouting.
- Capitalize only the first word in a line.
- Eliminate capitalization altogether on bullets.
- Add emphasis and contrast using size, text weight, color and style of text.
- Avoid underlining text. The underline cuts off the descenders of the letters, making them harder to read.

- Limit punctuation. Formatting such as size, type style and weight, position and color reveals the organization of the material.
- Use line spacing (in the Format menu) instead of extra returns to separate items. Keep related items closer together.
- Use spell check, but you need a human eye to catch small mistakes. Be especially careful when making last-minute changes.
- Proof your visuals. If another set of eyes is not available, try reading your material backwards, word for word.

■ Simplify

It's easy to write too much text for visuals. When you are through with the initial presentation setup, go back and edit to simplify your visuals.

- Take out sentences and replace them with key words and phrases.
- Take out visuals you can live without.
- Take out clip art if you have used more than you really need.
- Take off punctuation.
- Remove all extraneous elements such as lines, arrows, borders and boxes, and make small adjustments to the size and placement of the remaining elements.
- Keep visuals simple and uncluttered. The audience should not have to struggle to figure out what it's trying to show.
- Have open space (also called white space) on the visuals to allow for easier reading and visual breaks.
- Vary the look of the screens for interest. Mix up text slides, charts, bulleted lists and photos.

■ Fonts

- Use san serif fonts for easier readability. San serif fonts don't have the flares at the bottom and tend to be a more consistent thickness throughout the letter form that appear clearer on visuals.
- Use fonts such as Arial, Helvetica and Tahoma.
- Avoid using fonts with extreme thick and thin strokes, or thin, wimpy-looking fonts.
- Keep font size 24 points or larger. Never use fonts smaller than 18 points.
- Apply fonts to master pages for consistent size, placement and colors.

- Use no more than two fonts for your presentation. Keep in mind that fonts come in families, which are variations within one typeface design such as normal, bold, black, narrow or italics — and this counts as one font.
- When presenting in a large room, the text needs to be larger than if you're presenting in a small room.

■ Color

Although there is no extra cost to add color to your presentation, there are many choices that can be made. Most of the time, the colors you choose are not as important as the relationships they create. Some work well together and some don't.

- Use color to attract, highlight, contrast, or create a feeling or mood.
- Colors have a thermal quality. Reds, oranges, and yellows are warm colors that create a feeling that is warm, bright and cheerful. Cool colors such as blues and greens create feelings that are soothing, peaceful and cool. Green also represents growth, prosperity or envy, but doesn't always project well.
- Choose one or two vibrant colors.
- Apply colors to your master templates.
- Use color that is appropriate for your message. Be careful with red which is perceived as a danger color.
- Be careful using unusual colors such as pink, purple or light green. They are not always considered appropriate.
- Avoid using red and green together. Ten percent of the male population and 5 percent of the female population are red/green color blind and can't easily see the difference between the two.
- Use colors with high contrast for easy readability.
- Use highly saturated colors when presentations are projected on a screen.
- Test your colors on the equipment you will be using. You may need to adjust colors for different media.

■ Backgrounds

- Use dark colored backgrounds for slides and on-screen shows. Light colored backgrounds work well for overheads.
- Use simple backgrounds that show off your information, not compete with it.
- Simplify the background even more if you will be using it for charts and numbers.
- For variety, change the background color when you introduce something you haven't yet talked about.

■ Bulleted lists

If you write sentences on the visuals of what you're going to say, you have nothing to add. The audience's attention will be on reading the visual, not listening to the presenter.

- Use a few key points for visuals. These should be essential words and phrases, not sentences. Expand on these points in your verbal presentation.
- If concepts are complex, use subentries for more detailed information. Keep the layers of information to two or three.
- If you need many points for clarification, devote an entire visual to each point, rather than squeeze too much on one visual.
- Avoid using punctuation. Ideas are grouped and arranged visually, so punctuation is not needed.

■ Graphics

The use of graphics makes information more appealing and easier to grasp. Graphics include clip art, photographs, tables, charts, and graphs.

Graphics should not be added just because you can. Ask yourself: Does it enhance the understanding of my information? Might it offend or exclude part of the audience?

- Clip art should be appropriate, especially cartoony clip art. Photographs, maps, arrows, and diagrams are appropriate for all audiences. This is not true of clip art.
- Maintain a consistent style in artwork.
- Consider drawing your own artwork and scanning it.
- Use wmf files for line art. It resizes well, with clean edges.
- Avoid using gif files. This format is designed for web graphics and looks blurry the more you enlarge it.
- Use jpg files for photographs. The file size is smaller than tif or pcx files.
- Be aware of copyright. There is a wealth of information on the internet that presenters can use and much of it is free. However, if you take information off the internet, be aware that copyright laws apply to articles, pictures, audio files, and graphics. Just because it's on the Web doesn't mean it's free for the taking — you need to get permission from the copyright holder in order to reuse it.
- Keep visuals uncluttered. The more clip art, photos and text you have, the smaller everything needs to be.

■ Tables

Tables can be used to provide information and visual interest. They are support information only. If the audience needs to have every detail, provide it in printed form.

- Simple is better.
- Separate vertical columns with enough space to keep entities from running together.
- If you use horizontal lines, which facilitate natural left to right reading, allow plenty of room between entries for lines.
- Avoid using grids, which box every entry and separate content.
- Highlight columns by setting entries in a bright, foreground color or with a vertical band of color behind the entries.
- Highlight key numbers with color.

■ Charts and graphs

Charts and graphs are visual representations of data used to make a point quickly. They should support what you say, not say everything for you.

- Simple is better. Information, color and design should be clean and uncluttered.
- Reduce complexity. Remove grid lines, chart frame and figure numbers.
- Keep styles and colors consistent throughout your presentation.
- Make lines thick if showing trends. Thin lines are almost invisible on the screen.
- Make the lines in bright colors. Only use yellow if it will be over a dark background.
- Have no more than five lines or sets of bars per chart, otherwise the information gets confusing and too small.
- Guide the eye to the main point of the chart with an arrow, a different color, or a box.
- Shorten numbers as much as possible. For example, use '96 instead of 1996.
- Use rounded numbers that are as short as possible. For example, instead of $10,400,34, show 10 or 10.4 and change the axis to thousands.
- Show only key numbers, if at all.

■ Transitions

- Choose wisely. Don't overdo. You want the audience focused on the information, not on what will fly in next.
- The easiest transitions and builds are text dropping down from above or text that appears coming in from the left.
- Transitions are easier for the audience to read when the text comes in the same way each time.
- Every visual does not need these special effects. If overdone, they can slow down the pace of the presentation.

■ Scanning

- Scan photos at 100 dpi for presentations on a computer monitor.
- Scan at 150 dpi for projected images. Low-resolution images look grainy and blurry when enlarged several times their original size.
- Scan photos at 100%. The more you will be enlarging the image, the higher your scanning resolution should be.

For more information on PowerPoint and designing visuals, contact John Grindahl at 231-7898 (john.grindahl@ndsu.edu), Dave Haasser at 231-8620 (david.haasser@ndsu.edu) or Deb Tanner at 231-7891 (deb.tanner@ndsu.edu).

Sources

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