

IDEAS » PERILOUS PRESENTATIONS

# Don't drown in a sea of numbers and factoids



**HARVEY SCHACHTER**  
MANAGING BOOKS  
harvey@harveyschachter.com

**THE VISUAL SLIDE REVOLUTION**  
By Dave Paradi,  
Self-published, 151 pages, \$29.95

**D**ata + PowerPoint = Disaster. Most of us know that formula already. Whether through presentations we have endured or presentations we have cobbled together ourselves, we have seen firsthand the dangers of allowing someone immersed in data to get their hands on software that allows every data point to be entered, and every bullet point of a lengthy speech to be flashed on a screen. Mississauga-based consultant and presentation coach Dave Paradi says that the solution is to present information,

not data, and visuals, not bullet points. "Presenters who want to be successful have to join the visual slide revolution to stand head and shoulders above the normal boring, text-filled presentations," he writes in *The Visual Slide Revolution*.

It starts by understanding the difference between data and information. Data are raw numbers that reflect reality in a market or business. Your job is to take that data, analyze them, and create conclusions a non-expert can understand.

Those conclusions represent information. Presenting the information allows the people you are speaking to, usually decision makers, to focus on the important points, rather than drown in a sea of numbers and factoids.

"The audience does not need to be fed all the raw background data that went into an analysis. Instead, the specialist needs to understand that the decision maker needs to answer the critical question: What conclusion do I need to know that will impact my decision-making," he says.



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And that is best presented in a visual way – through graphs and charts, properly constructed to make the analysis clear, rather than muddled.

"Why use visuals instead of text? Because research has demonstrated overwhelmingly that visuals are more effective," he says.

Of course, if you accept that argument, you could still easily embarrass yourself. Visuals are trickier to pull off without the proper graphics and presentation skills. His book offers assistance on that, too, notably through his explanation of what he calls the KWICK method for creating

persuasive visuals:

» **K is for the Key Point:** Each slide should make a single point. And you must know what that point is for each slide.

If you aren't clear on what the key point is, your visual will likely be confusing. If your data lead to two or three points, make two or three slides. For each, state your point in a sentence that will double as the headline for that slide.

» **W is for Words that suggest the visual:** Once you have written that headline, look at the words and phrases you have used to summarize the key point, which, in turn, will guide you about what type of visual will work best. If you talk about the trend of data, it's a graph. If you wrote about a flow or process, try a diagram.

» **I is for In Context:** Now that you know what type of visual is required, it's time to create it. It's vital to make sure it is in context for the audience – they can relate to it and become engaged in your message. That may mean, for

example, comparing the elements in it to something else they are familiar with.

» **C is for Crystal Clear:** Once the visual has been created, check that the point will be easily understood by the audience. This may mean using well-designed callout graphics or text to direct the audience's attention to the most important part of the visual. Other techniques include embedding photos in the graphics or diagrams to further illustrate the point, or using shading in pictures or graphics to emphasize certain areas.

» **K is for Keep Focus:** Now you need to make sure the visuals are presented in a logical manner that keeps the audience's attention on the conclusion you want them to draw.

Mr. Paradi tackles each point in detail, in the same clear manner he wants your presentations to follow. The In Context section is phenomenally helpful, as he lists the various types of graphics you can use and offers tips for each to make them more powerful.

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CAREERS EDITOR: TERRY BRODIE » FEEDBACK TO GLOBECAREERS@GLOBEANDMAIL.COM



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