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According to Peter Drucker, management guru of the 20th century, “We are prone both in academia and management to mistake the surface gloss of brilliance for the essence of performance.” 1 While this visionary statement was made prior to the exploding technology revolution, it offers a sober precaution for the use of current technology applications.

The very success of electronic presentations has inspired a backlash of sorts. Some companies have declared electronic presentations as too formal for internal communications; others have offered guidelines to limit the number of slides used in a presentation, or even dictated what colors could or could not be used. Scott McNealy, then president of Sun Microsystems, went so far as to ban the use of PowerPoint by his 25,000 employees. McNealy’s reasoning for prohibiting slide usage was that Sun employees were spending too much time preparing slides, presumably at the expense of other kinds of preparation. While the ban was reportedly not enforced, it provided wide exposure to the problem of overuse and abuse of slide presentations. 2 Speaking of the ban, McNealy said, “we had 12.9 gigabytes of PowerPoint slides on our network. And I thought, what a waste of corporate productivity.” 3 He attributes a rise in company profitability to movement away from time spent on elaborate slide presentations.

A major argument against electronic presentations is that they divert attention of both the audience and speaker from the presenter’s message to what is essentially a series of pictures. The slide show, once peripheral to a presentation (visual aid), becomes the center focus. A good presentation will have the presenter as its major focus; visuals should be used sparingly and only to reinforce the speaker’s credibility. Another important point is that presenters should choose visuals only after they have a firm idea of what they want to say.

McNealy may not be as vocally opposed to slide usage now that Sun offers its own presentation software product, Impress, as a component of its Star Office free software download. But his philosophy that presentation software should be a medium and not the message has remained the same.

APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED:
1. Develop a list of suggestions for the appropriate use of an electronic slide presentation.
2. Read the following article available that summarizes the advice of Edward Tufte when using a PowerPoint presentation to enhance your speaking:


What advice can you add for effective use of PowerPoint?
3. Following directions from your instructor, electronically post your response to this statement: “No visual aid has ever been developed that will change a weak presentation into an excellent one.”

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