10-20-30 Rule Of Presentation

Idea In Short

Coined by Guy Kawasaki, the 10-20-30 rule is a great tool for consultants to create compelling PowerPoint presentations. Each element of the formula helps consultants find a balance between design and conceptual explanations. As a result, you can capture your stakeholder' attention, emphasize your key recommendations and enhance readability.

Guy Kawasaki, one of the early Apple employees, championed the concept of a brand evangelist to describe his position. He spent most of his time working to generate a follower base for Macintosh, the family of Apple computers. Today he works as a brand evangelist for Canva, an online graphic design tool. Given his significant experience giving Presentations to captivate audiences, the 10-20-30 is a successful formula that consultants could follow to generate client action. Kawasaki first introduced and described this concept in his book, Art of The Start.

PowerPoint's shortcomings

Presentations are one of the most frequently used methods of communication in most corporations. Both, employees, managers and leaders often resort to PowerPoint presentations to prepare their reports and speeches in front of the Boards. Yet, many academic and industry experts advocate for against using PowerPoint presentations, especially at critical instances.

Edward Tufte

Edward Tufte argues that they reduce the analytical timbre of communication. In other words, presentation slides lack the resolution to effectively convey context:

> weaken verbal and spatial reasoning, and almost always corrupt statistical analysis

Tufte argues that we treat slides more as a medium for self-expression than as a medium to connect with our audiences. His most revealing examples of how presentations corrupt our elegance of expression are his critique of NASA's slides from the Columbia shuttle disaster and a parody of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address condensed into a PowerPoint deck.

By forcibly condensing our ideas into bullet point-statements, phrases, and slides, Tufte contends that we break up narrative flow and flatten the information we're trying to convey. In particular, he claims that presentations' bullet points can't signify logical relationships well and thus dilute the audiences' thought process. The resulting message is watered down, lacks proper emphasis, and doesn't communicate the context very effectively.

Case - IBM

In his pamphlet1, Tufte presents a case at IBM2 in defense of his criticism for PowerPoint presentations:

> When Louis Gerstner became president of IBM, he encountered a big company caught up in ritualistic slideware-style presentations:
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> > One of the first meetings I asked for was briefing on the state of the [main-frame computer] business. I remember at least two things about that first meeting with Nick Donofrio, who was then running the System/39O business. One is that I...experienced a repeat of my first day on the job. Once again, I found myself lacking a badge to open the doors at the complex, which housed the staffs of all of IBM'S major product groups, and nobody there knew who I was. I finally persuaded a kind soul to let me in, found Nick, and we got started Sort of. At that time, the standard format of any important IBM meeting was a presentation using overhead projectors and graphics that iBMers called "foils" [projected transparencies]. Nick was on his second foil when I stepped to the table and, as politely as I could in front of his team, switched off the projector. After a long moment of awkward silence, I simply said, "Let's just talk about your business." I mention this episode because it had an unintended, but terribly powerful ripple effect. By that afternoon an e-mail about my hitting the Off button on the overhead projector was crisscrossing the world. Talk about consternation! It was as if the President of the United States had banned the use of English at White House meetings.

Case - Amazon

This shortcoming is so prevalent in the industry that Amazon banned PowerPoint presentations. Instead of presentations, Bezos began iterating an approach to sharing information that involves writing memos of running copy, between two and six pages long. The original email from Bezos explaining the decision is preserved in Ram Charan and Julia Yang's book The Amazon Management System:

> Well-structured, narrative text is what we're after, rather than just text. If someone builds a list of bullet points in Word, that would be just as bad as PowerPoint. The reason writing a good four-page memo is harder than 'writing' a 20-page PowerPoint is because the narrative structure of a good memo forces better thought and better understanding of what's more important than what, and how things are related. PowerPoint-style presentations somehow give permission to gloss over ideas, flatten out any sense of relative importance, and ignore the interconnectedness of ideas

Case - Procter & Gamble

Based on this idea, Procter & Gamble (P&G)'s corporate culture uses a powerful discipline called the One-Page Memo for clear and concise communication.

P&G's corporate culture requires any idea or proposal to fit onto one side of one piece of paper and must follow a predictable format. According to Charles Decker's book, Winning with the P&G 99, the one-page memo consists of the following narrative elements:

- **Statement of Purpose:** An introductory sentence that concisely and succinctly states the reason for the recommendation. Provides a context for the memo as a whole
- **Background:** Factual analysis that connects the purpose of the memo to the strategic objectives of the company or the brand. Also provides facts in relation to the problem the recommendation is supposed to address
- **Recommendation:** The specific proposal on how to solve the problem or exploit the opportunity detailed in the background section

- **Rationale:** The reasons for the recommendation, and the logic by which the recommendation was reached
- **Discussion:** Details of the recommendation, anticipated questions or areas of concern, risk assessment, identification of other alternatives, details of the recommendation
- **Next Steps:** Who will be following through on the recommendation, what target dates they would be working towards, what actions they would be taking to execute the recommendation
- **Supporting Exhibits:** Other supplementary information as applicable

Charles Decker states:

> If you can learn to write a P&G memo, you can learn how to think. The memo becomes a knowledge codification tool, a way to present ideas, arguments, and recommendations in a language and style everyone at P&G understands

Winning with the P&G 99 also quotes an advertising agency executive:

> P&G seems to have figured out that if you structure information certain ways, people will readily understand it, good ideas will emerge, and bad ideas will be exposed. I really think that is what has made them so successful. They make fewer mistakes because they find mistakes before they happen

Additionally, P&G's renowned salesforce uses a Persuasive Selling Format [PSF] narrative that is structured along similar lines.

Support for PowerPoint presentations

Despite such, PowerPoint has its advocates, such as Jean-Luc Dumont, who offered counter-arguments in favor3 of well-designed and delivered PowerPoint presentations.

PowerPoint is a superb presentation tool, which, when used properly, can be an effective visual aid for professional speakers. However, at the hands of inexperienced presenters who have no eye for design, it can pave the way for jarring and unattractive slides. Sadly,

the business world is teeming with mediocre presentations that just don't do justice to PowerPoint's abilities as a great communication tool. Luckily, there are people like Guy Kawasaki who can show how to design and deliver compelling PowerPoint presentations.

Kawasaki's 10-20-30 Rule

Kawasaki advocated the 10-20-30 Rule of PowerPoint, which banks on the idea that a presentation:

> should have ten slides, last no more than twenty minutes, and contain no font smaller than thirty points

Although Kawasaki originally meant it to be for entrepreneurs and startup business owners, this principle applies to all types of presentations. By following this guide, you can avoid basic design mistakes and ultimately stand out from the vast sea of lackluster presentations.

10 Slides

Kawasaki believes that it's challenging for audiences to comprehend more than ten concepts during a presentation. Given this, consultants should aim to create PowerPoints with no more than ten slides. Using fewer slides and focusing on the critical elements helps your audience grasp the concepts you're sharing with them.

In practice, this means creating slides that are specific and straight to the point. For example, say you're presenting on the success of your recent strategy engagement. Your strategy analysis was likely extensive, and you took a series of different actions to obtain your recommendations. Instead of outlining every aspect of your analysis, use your slides to outline your recommendations.

This could look like individual slides for summarizing the problem you analyzed, your goals, the steps you took to reach your recommendation, and business impact that your client can achieve on implementing your recommendations.

It's important to note that there shouldn't be overwhelming amounts of text on your slides. You want them to be concise. Your audience should get most of the information from the

words you're speaking; your slides should be more supplemental than explanatory.

20 Minutes

After you've spent time coming up with your ten key points, you'll need to present them in 20 minutes. Knowing that you'll only have 20 minutes also makes it easier to plan and structure your talk, as you'll know how much time to dedicate to each slide, so you address all relevant points. Furthermore, executives are busy people. As a consultant, you will do your stakeholders a huge favour, if you could distill the key information and deliver it within 20 minutes.

Kawasaki acknowledges that presentation time slots can often be longer. However, finishing at the 20-minute mark leaves time for valuable discussion and Q&A. Saving time in your presentation also leaves space for technical difficulties.

30 Point Font

If you've been in the audience during a presentation, you probably know that slides with small font can be challenging to read and take your attention away from the speaker.

Kawasaki's final rule is that no font within your presentation should be smaller than 30 point size. If you've already followed the previous rules, then you should be able to display your key points on your slides in a large enough font that users can read. Since your key points are short and focused. So, there won't be a lot of text for your audience to read. Furthermore, they will spend more time listening to you speak rather than struggle reading the slides you are presenting.

Given that the average recommended font size for accessibility is 16, using a 30-point font ensures that all members of your audience can read and interact with your slides.

Relevance

Kawasaki's 10-20-30 Rule is now more than a decade old. Although PowerPoint is still the most used presentation software today, it's no longer the only one. Several competitors have emerged and they offer compelling features worth considering. Furthermore, how people use PowerPoint has evolved over time. Still, the 10-20-30 Rule is just as relevant today as when Kawasaki originally published it.

Brevity

Very little has changed with slide design. So, presenters still cram multiple ideas into one presentation. Many presenters don't triage the content to filter out the unnecessary stuff and keep only the essentials.

So, instead of filling each slide with unnecessary text, try to identify your salient points and then, make an outline based on them. Use as little text as possible to avoid overwhelming your audience with a barrage of ideas. If a slide isn't necessary, remove it. Remember, you are the star of your presentation, not the pitch deck or anything else. Make sure that all focus remains on you.

Attention span

We're in the age of social media where the best content is short and fast. People appreciate things that don't take much of their time. Attention spans have become so short that consumers expect you to immediately get to the point. When delivering a presentation, consider your audience's time and interest level. Even if you have an hour, prepare for a speech that doesn't last longer than twenty minutes. Use the extra time to set up your equipment or hold a Q&A / brainstorming session.

Eliminate fluff

The universally renowned TED talks requires speakers to deliver their speeches in eighteen minutes or less. That doesn't stop them from communicating brilliant ideas that are worth sharing. If you have an imposed time constraint, you'll be forced to edit your speech meticulously until it's down to the bare necessities. Trim down all the unnecessary stuff so that you can put the essentials in the spotlight. Remember that your goal is not to bombard your client with ideas, but rather inspire them with a few that can change their organizations for the better.

Ensure readability

The number one rule of presentations is simple: the audience is the boss. Wherever you are in the presentation process, you should always put your audience at the forefront of your mind. For instance, what the people at the front row sees should be seen clearly by those in the back row as well. Optimize the font size of your text to accommodate all of your viewers.

When you see people squinting, understand that something's not right with your presentation's font size.

Implementing 10-20-30 rule

Kawasaki did not mean for the 10-20-30 Rule to be pedantically applied across business contexts and presenters. Instead, he set it as a guideline for presenters that want to improve their pitch decks, and consequently, their presentations. He understood that each situation is unique, so this rule is not one-size-fits-all.

Instead of going with the twenty-minute rule, apply the one-third rule that suggests that the length of your speech should be one-third of the time you're given.When building presentations, instead of asking how many slides you should have, ask how many you need. Finally, you can bend the thirty-point-font rule without breaking it. It's only the minimum font size recommended, so you can go higher as the number of words you use per slide decreases.

Ultimately, you should consider the needs of your audience instead of mindlessly jumping on the bandwagon. What works for one may not always work for you.

Summary

The 10-20-30 Rule offers a practical baseline for presenters, though critics like Tufte and organizations like Amazon suggest written narratives may communicate complex ideas more effectively than slides.