Why Consultants Love PowerPoint

Idea In Short

Consultants spend hours polishing slides, and the habit is not narcissism about pretty formatting. Presentations force genuine brevity, respect how little time executives actually have, drive action rather than just documentation and use visual archetypes that communicate faster than paragraphs of text ever could.

A Common Sight

Consultants spending hours adjusting slide layouts, tweaking graph colors and proofreading verb agreement is such a routine sight that it barely registers as unusual anymore. Presentations get called deliverables for good reason: they are the literal product handed to the client at the end of an engagement, and the habit is widely misunderstood from the outside.1

Is It Excessive?

The comment "you're so good at making pretty presentations" gets under the skin precisely because it misses the point entirely. Polish is not the product; it is closer to plating on a well-cooked dish, noticeable but secondary. Clients are not paying premium hourly rates purely for visual design work, and treating the slide format as mere decoration misunderstands what the format is actually doing.

Reason One: It Forces Brevity

Good presentations stay succinct by design.2 A sixty-page appendix might exist behind the scenes, but the executive summary itself has to be terse and carry a genuine point of view. Using the metaphor of a tree, the presentation is the fruit: months of late nights, analysis and interviews sit behind it, and none of that grinding work belongs on the page itself. Applying something close to the 80/20 principle, distilling to the essential 20 percent that actually

matters, is exactly the discipline that a strict page or word limit forces onto a writer, similar to famously tight essay word limits used in academic admissions.

Reason Two: Executives Are Short on Time

A project sponsor may commit only 10 to 12 total hours across a project spanning several months, even while a project lead works far more closely day to day. Executives are, almost by definition, short on time and long on opinion, and a hundred-page document written in prose is simply never going to get read by that audience, regardless of how well-argued it is.

Reason Three: Communication Is the Actual Goal

Consultants are hired to solve problems, and solving a problem is not complete until someone with authority actually acts on the recommendation. Smart analysis on paper is not enough; persuasion and results matter more. Slides frequently get reused directly by the client to sell the recommendation onward, to a boss, to peers, to a board, which means the presentation has to work for an audience the original consulting team may never even meet.

Reason Four: Executives Process Visually

Executives handle enormous volumes of information daily, reports, emails, dashboards, and visual formats consistently convey more meaning per second than dense prose does.3 A handful of recurring visual archetypes carry most of that weight: a stage-gate process for narrowing down options or investment choices, phases for showing a project's start, middle and end, a Venn diagram for the overlap between two distinct things, an S-curve for growth that ramps and then plateaus, and a simple two-by-two matrix for comparing two dimensions at once.

The Skill Transfers Beyond Consulting

The underlying discipline behind a good slide, distilling complexity to its essential point, sequencing an argument logically and matching format to audience attention, transfers directly into any role that requires persuading people who are short on time. Consultants often carry that habit into later careers precisely because it was drilled so thoroughly during years of client-facing work, long after the specific software or template style has changed

entirely.

When the Format Gets Overused

None of this means every message deserves a slide. Simple status updates, quick clarifying questions and internal working notes often communicate faster and more honestly as a short email or a direct conversation, and forcing them into slide format just to match team convention wastes time on formatting that could go toward substance instead. Knowing when the format is genuinely earning its keep, and when it is just habit, is itself part of using the tool well.

Reason Five: Most People Are Genuinely Bad at This

This last point sounds cynical and holds up well under scrutiny: most presentations, viewed at random from any public slide-sharing platform, are genuinely poor, dense with text, lacking any real narrative, essentially a copy-pasted compilation of facts rather than a constructed argument. That widespread weakness is precisely why the skill remains valuable. As long as most people struggle to distill complex problems into clear, logically sequenced recommendations that executives can act on quickly, the consultants who can do exactly that reliably will keep getting paid for it.

- 1Presentation
- 2Pareto Principle
- 3Data Visualization

Summary

Slides earn their reputation as consulting's core deliverable because they force brevity, respect scarce executive time, drive action instead of documentation and use visual archetypes that communicate fast. Most people are genuinely bad at this, which is exactly why the skill stays valuable.