Introduction

The word he used was *meshuga*, known by both Jews and non-Jews alike to mean "crazy." And my father was looking right at me when he said it.

"You're going to say *that* in the book?"

"Actually, Dad, I'm going to say it in the title."

"You must be meshuga!"

And there you have either the most compelling reason to, or not to, author a book without the assist of a large publisher. I've written for many of the major publishing houses, and I have the distinct impression that, were I to have followed that path this time, you would now be holding a book in your hands of a different name. Pretty good chance, also, that a vacuum cleaner would not grace its cover.

My reason for choosing a private-label publisher was not because I sought an edgy title, although I do admit to enjoying the shock value that comes along for the ride. I did so because of a decades-long frustration with being asked (make that required) by traditional publishers to include in any book proposal a clump of PowerPoint-centric topics that few in my intended audience find interesting.

Let's take a poll of one: Do you need to be taught how to create a slide? Did you buy this book because you don't understand how to make a string of text bold or how to make the bullet square instead of round?

If I successfully rise to this occasion, the benefits of this book will far exceed rudimentary mechanics of PowerPoint usage. If you bought this book for its intended purpose, it's because you have bigger issues.

- You know you have a good story to tell, but you're not quite sure how.

- Your presentations are not being received the way you were hoping they would and you're not sure why.

- You have good instincts and they need to be honed.

- Your boss creates the most dismally ugly slides and you don't know what to do about it.

- Or maybe…just maybe, it is you who needs a refresher in the principles of good presentation design.

Really, the potential market for this book is plenty vast without catering to the brand new user. How many horrible presentations did you sit through last month? In the face of how many colleagues or potential vendors would you like to shove this book and say "Here, please read this"?

I remember the first time I experienced it. I refer, of course, to the phenomenon we all know as Death by PowerPoint. The year was 1990, and three representatives from a well-known public relations firm wanted my partner and me to pay them $10,000 to help us market a series of seminars.

They were smartly dressed, meticulously coiffed, and perfectly eloquent, as they proceeded to bore us out of our minds with drivel about value-added propositions, proactive initiatives, and positively-reinforced task-based personalization.

Every slide was read word for word, and each of us had a spiral-bound booklet that duplicated the slides.

Technically, this wasn't Death by PowerPoint; the software had not yet been invented. It was Death by Overhead Slide. Just as bad.

Who should read this book?

As lead author, I would like to think that any presenter, presentation designer, or content creator in the world would enjoy the pages of this book. The fact that I won't try to convince you of that is a sure sign that I have no future as a marketing consultant. From my annual conference and my on-going work as a presentation consultant and coach, I have a pretty good sense of the typical PowerPoint user. If I'm right, you fall into at least one of the following categories:

- You are thought of as the Slide King or Queen of your department and are called upon to crank out untold volumes of them. Getting the job done on time becomes your sole focus, damn the message or design.

- You are a presentation designer, where you have a bit more opportunity than the Slide King/Queen to consider the aesthetic side of content creation, but every project given to you is due yesterday.

- You are an outside consultant brought in to work with people who have no idea how to refine a concept, crystallize an idea, or shape words into a message.

- You are hired to help terrified public speakers learn not to throw up all over themselves when in front of an audience.

- You work with the executives of your firm, and no matter how great the concepts are, when they take the stage, they maul everything.

- You have worked your way into a position, created just for you, in which your expertise as a presentation professional is genuinely appreciated. You are given creative freedom and latitude, and are encouraged to cultivate your skills.

That last example is not fantasy; it only sounds too good to be true. There are just enough forward-thinking organizations and skilled presentation professionals to create optimism for the community at large. In fact, since our first edition, we have seen this trend quickening its pace. Companies are indeed finally starting to get it.

In order for that community to grow and thrive, we need a universe of PowerPoint users who have moved past, as we describe in the first chapter, their first 30 minutes of training.

That is the thrust of this work. You don't need help with the basics of PowerPoint. You know your way around the program. You need someone to speak frankly to you about the perils, issues, challenges, and yes, the joys associated with modern-day presentation creation and delivery. With this book, I accept that challenge.

How to use this book

There's an insulting headline for you. (*To use this book, start at the top of the page, read from left to right, and turn pages with your right hand…*) Proud authors like to insist that good books aren't used; they're read. But we in fields of technology know better. We know how people use computer books—lots of dog-eared pages, notes in the margin, brutalized tables of contents—and I'm fine with that.

My hope, however, is that you do find it to be a good read. By design, it is written unevenly. Some chapters are just a few pages long, others close to 40. Some topics we hammer and others we ignore. And I do not pretend that these chapters are some sort of sterile, objective listing of "advanced tips," whatever that even means. This book is one person's view of the presentation community, the essential skills required, and relevant functions and nuances of PowerPoint. It is full of bias and subjectivity and you are invited to disagree with it at any point. In fact, if you agree with everything that I say here, this book's value is probably diminished.

In choosing my editors, it was practically a prerequisite that they disagree with me on occasion. As a result, these pages alternate between first-person singular and plural enough to drive a grammarian nuts. And that is my prerogative—there are times when I speak for the team, there are times when I speak on behalf of a community of thousands, and there are times when I feel as if I'm on Survivor's Exile Island.

But no book should be an island—it's challenging enough to ask static pages to cover a medium of motion. And that is why we consider the book's web site, **www.whypptsucks.com**, to be a full partner in this endeavor.

You'll see our constant references in the margins to files that you can download, view, and dissect.

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There are no appendices to know about and there is no particular order in which you need to read this. **Part One** is where we bring the big hurt. We share our research and our conclusions about all that is wrong with the presentation industry and the software that is at its helm. Hopefully before the onset of depression, **Part Two** channels the inner designer in all of us, providing strategies and advice for those who did not come to presentation from an art academy. **Part Three** is all about animation, one of the essential technical skills you should appreciate, no matter which software you use. **Part Four** is devoted to skills and techniques that you can adopt to help you become a better public speaker, whether you are a natural at it or not. And **Part Five** steps up the geek volume and covers several advanced topics and ideas for your indulgence.

What version do you need?

In many cases, it matters little what version of PowerPoint you use or if you use it at all. This reflects our general belief that PowerPoint proficiency is actually a bit of a mediocre commodity. Of the essential skills to the presentation experience—message crafting, presentation design, software proficiency, and delivery acumen—we would rank the software last. A good designer needs only a blank slide; a good presenter could use a 1993 copy of Harvard Graphics. This book reflects those philosophies with shallower dives into the software than into principles of presentation design and oratory.

That said, when we discuss the software, we make the assumption that you are using at least version 2010 on a PC and 2011 on a Mac. All of our screen images are of the Windows version of Office 365, but Mac users will find mostly seamless relevance to their experiences.

If I have written this book correctly, it will prove to be bad for my business as a presentation consultant. A good chunk of my time as a hired gun is spent retraining, or untraining, to be precise. Many of the people I work with have read the reference guide and have taken some sort of introductory course, but never really learned any principles or guidelines for presentation creation. By the time they bring me in, their slides often have dozens of unused placeholders, text boxes with bullets stuffed into them, random applications of animation, and multiple backgrounds. More to the point, their narrative arcs lack direction and their designs don't actually contain much design.

Before I can teach them anything new, I have to strip off all of the old. I intend to provide you with the strategies, the techniques, and the tools for becoming completely proficient with the projects that you need to produce. I intend to leave you with a more complete understanding of how good presentations are designed. And I intend for you to not have to rely upon consultants like me as often. I guess you could say that this book attempts to reduce by half my billable hours.

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Finally, the wonders of print on demand are numerous, chief among them the agility with which we can print new versions of this book, perhaps starring you. If you: a) have created a presentation that illustrates a technique discussed herein; b) disagree with an assertion that we make; c) have an alternative technique to propose; d) want to suggest a topic for us to cover or expand upon; or e) just want to comment on a passage, please write to me at ricka@betterpresenting.com. We will not hesitate to include noteworthy commentary in an upcoming version, which, if sales go well, could be as early as next month.