

EXPLORING THE NEEDS OF POWER POINT USERS

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Exploring the Needs of PowerPoint Users among Students and Professors of Graduate Programs

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Abstract

Presentations today are an important business communication tool. Entrepreneurs start organizations and companies launch products or services based on the quality of presentations. Out of the millions of presentations delivered each day, people deliver with effectiveness only a small percentage (Duarte, 2008). Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), senior managers, and educators create presentations with incredibly high stakes. Quality of presentations influences stock value, sales revenue, career promotions, and behavioral changes. Training in visual communication is critical to achieve organizational goals, sell a product, and avoid disasters because it can reduce ineffectiveness of multimedia presentations. Microsoft PowerPoint (PP) software is the most popular application adopted by professionals that requires people to think visually. When a presentation is developed and delivered well, it becomes one of the most powerful communication tools in the world. Contemporary communicators must learn imperatively how to create visual stories that connect with their audiences considering global competitive pressure (Duarte, 2008). “Making bad slides is easy, and it will negatively impact your career. Invest in your slides, but invest in your own visual skills as well” (Duarte, 2008, p. 1). Researchers in the fields of cognitive science and educational psychology studied for decades the best ways to help people learn new information using narration and images. Their work is directly relevant and applicable when communicators use PowerPoint to create presentations (Atkinson, 2008). This project research aimed to demonstrate the importance of best use of graphical techniques, specifically the use of PowerPoint to communicate effectively and as a strategic management tool. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the feasibility of launching a presentation design and consulting business in Tampa and adjacent areas. The results of this study will help to plan expansion in other cities of Florida as well as the exploitation of

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outsourcing opportunities. This research followed a qualitative grounded research, establishing research constructs based on the existence of cognitive theory of three important researchers: Stephen Kosslyn, Edward Tufte, and Richard E. Mayer. These researchers served consequently as inspiration to three contemporary professionals in the communication field: Cliff Atkinson, Garr Reynolds, and Nancy Duarte. This research consisted of two study phases. The first phase had the objective of learning perceptions and utilization patterns of PowerPoint among students and professional instructors of graduate courses in their school and workplace. A second data collection phase aimed to know what is the perception and use of PowerPoint by professionals in the communication field. The results of the study provided valuable information about applications for PowerPoint, problems associated with PowerPoint presentations.

Keywords: PowerPoint, presentations, communication, cognitive science, use and perceptions of PowerPoint presentations

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Chapter VII: Conclusions

The literature review showed that designing presentations and creating the supporting visual aids help the way audience processes the presentation. People today are accustomed to use PP in their presentations, becoming PP an effective multimedia tool for people from many fields. The research results confirmed the approaches from the three authors: Cliff Atkinson, Garr Reynolds, and Nancy Duarte; and from the authors of the cognitive science field: Kosslyn, Tufte, and Mayer. The research findings from the analysis of data and variables (questionnaire and interviews) made possible to understand better the importance of the best use of PP for an effective communication. The findings show the ignorance about the cognitive field and its relation with PP as multimedia tool, people mentioned that they do not have time to develop a PP presentation or they believe that is not important spend time on it.

It is easy to get impatient with the creative process, but investing enough time is critical to developing a great presentation (Duarte, 2008). When presenters analyze the functionalities of PP, they usually discuss which size font to use, how to insert a video clip, and the background of a PowerPoint template. One thing that never hears is a conversation about any research related to PP presentations (Atkinson, 2008). Researches in the cognitive field show how people learn better from words and pictures than from words alone. Audiences might not know about dual-channels theory, but they do know they feel when presenters do not integrate the concept into their PowerPoint approach (Atkinson, 2008).