

The Search for Flip-Chart Charlie

Do Your Chart Presentations Measure Up?

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Do you know Flip-chart Charlie? Perhaps he is an employee of your company. He could be your boss, or the guy who works alongside of you, or maybe even one of your men.

If the name doesn't ring a bell perhaps you will begin to recognize Charlie after we tell you a little about him.

Flip-chart Charlie is an important man in his company and a recognized expert in his field. He knows quite a bit about engineering, manufacturing, purchasing, quality control, business law, employee training programs, employee relations, human relations, and public relations.

Charlie does such a bang-up job in each of these areas that he is often asked to share his ideas and knowledge with others.

When it happens, Charlie doesn't hesitate or falter. He knows exactly what to do. First, he rounds up all the facts and figures that he wants to pass along to his audience. Then he calls in an artist and has the information carefully hand-lettered onto easel paper. Since he recognizes the value of humor in putting across an idea, Charlie has the artist whip up some clever cartoons. Finally, the whole package

is bound together into a carefully-planned and beautifully-prepared flip-chart presentation.

Testing

Does Charlie stop here? No indeed! The next step is the tryout or let's-run-it up on the flagpole and see if anybody-salutes phase. Charlie sets up his charts on an easel in his office and calls in five or six people whose opinions he values, and asks them to preview his presentation. Close to the speaker and close to the charts, the small audience sees and hears everything with ease.

"Well, what do you think?" Charlie asks when he is finished.

"Beautiful job!" one listener exclaims.

"Terrific presentation, Charlie!" echo the others.

So far, so good.

The Presentation

The big day arrives and five hundred members of management assemble in a large auditorium. They applaud enthusiastically as Charlie mounts the rostrum. But the applause is replaced by an audible sigh as Charlie begins unrolling his flip-charts, which appear

the size of postage stamps to the fellows in the rear rows.

As Charlie begins to talk in a low voice, he faces the charts instead of looking out at his audience. Concentrating on the reminder notes he has penciled on the charts, he forgets the audience completely, and his voice drops even lower.

The attractive artwork that went over big in Charlie's office cannot be seen by two-thirds of the men in the audience. His words of wisdom are mumbled jumbles to all except those up front. Unable to see, hear, or follow Charlie's dissertation, most of his listeners begin to tune him out.

The Result

Instead of bolstering the group's knowledge and enthusiasm, Charlie is wasting their time, his time, and the company's money. His carefully-planned presentation is a flop because he ignored one of the basic rules in communication—that even the guy in the last row should be able to see and hear everything going on.

But the strangest thing about all this is that even Charlie's best friends won't tell him. People who won't put up with wiggly lines on their TV screens, or crackling static on their car radios, will sit quietly through a presentation lasting an hour or more which they cannot see or hear properly. A few even politely congratulate the speaker for his excellent presentation.

Audio-visual should help an audience grasp facts more readily, but if people cannot see or hear the aids, their purpose is defeated. You can't drive nails with a screwdriver and you can't communicate with the wrong tools.

Don't misunderstand. There's nothing wrong with good flip-charts if the group is small and acoustics good, but they just aren't right for every situa-

tion.

Flip-Chart Rules

If Flip-chart Charlie works in your organization, hand him a copy of these simple rules for getting the most out of visual aids.

1. Use flip-charts only for small groups of five to twenty people, seated not more than 15 feet from the easel.
2. Make sure the lettering on your charts is large enough to be easily read by the fellow in the seat farthest from the easel.
3. Don't attempt to cram your whole message on flip-charts. List only the key points. Then, put the meat on the bones with your oral presentation.
4. Never fasten two or more sheets together to make a giant-sized flip-chart for larger groups. They are clumsy, difficult to operate, and look ridiculous.
5. If your group numbers more than twenty people, forget about flip-charts, and look for a method of enlarging and projecting your material. Filmstrips, color slides, overhead projector transparencies, and opaque projection are possibilities.
6. Make sure every person in the audience can hear by using a public address system or other means of voice amplification. A simple neck microphone will enable you to move about freely while talking.
7. If possible, hold a tryout performance in the area where the actual presentation will be given. Have someone sit in the seat farthest from the center of activity to check on the acoustics, lighting and visibility.

Finally, if *you* prepare presentations for *your* company, it might be a good idea to review *your* own techniques. Maybe *you* are Flip-chart Charlie!!!