

"THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS AT YOUR DISPOSAL TO PRODUCE A GOOD VISUAL DISPLAY IS COMMON SENSE."

THE RIGHT WORDS, THE WRONG VISUALS

BY DENNIS
McBRIDE

In my position as presentations editor and training instructor, I have helped many speakers prepare their visual aids and am always amazed at the percentage of poor visuals used by some speakers in an attempt to communicate.

A good presentation must be well-planned, both visually and verbally, to be effective. The use of good visuals can be an extremely effective means of communication — taking the time to choose the right visuals will enhance your presentation.

Although speakers are usually pressed for time and tend to quickly put together their visuals, the preparation of good visuals is not that difficult or time-consuming. The most effective means at your disposal to produce a good visual display is common sense.

Did you ever wonder, while listening to a long presentation, just why the speaker used those visuals at all? Up on the screen goes a picture and you say to yourself, "What's that visual got to do with

what he is saying?"

Some speakers start out with an effective introduction and, at this point, they have the audience in the palm of their hand. After the introduction, they go into some background on their subject, but by visual number three something has gone wrong. The point that they are trying to make gets lost when the visuals do not support their presentation!

This is an example of the speaker who knows his or her subject well, but has not mastered the art of choosing the right visual displays to reinforce the presentation. In continuing the presentation, the speaker uses word charts with too many words, line upon line, or in some cases whole pages taken from books.

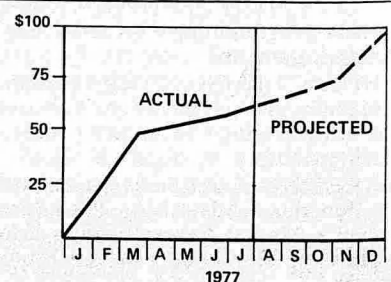
This is a mistake; the speaker should use only key points and lecture from them. Putting the whole story on the screen causes the speaker to read to his or her audience. The audience will soon become bored and the important points that the speaker is trying to make, will then be lost.

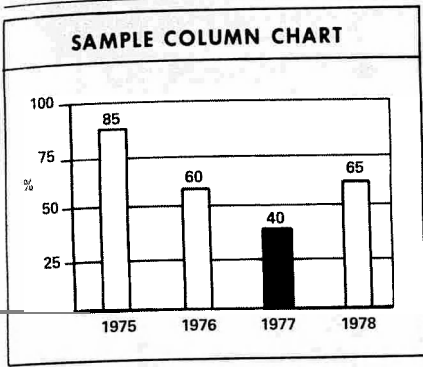
SAMPLE WORD CHART

- KEEP IT SIMPLE
- 5 TO 6 LINES OF TYPE
- USE ONLY KEY POINTS
- USE CONSISTENT NOTATIONS
- MAKE YOUR LETTERING LARGE

Next, he or she uses a complicated graph, with many bisecting lines on a grid background. Here a simplified graph or column chart would have worked much better. By investigating other methods of display the speaker would have found a better way.

SAMPLE GRAPH CHART

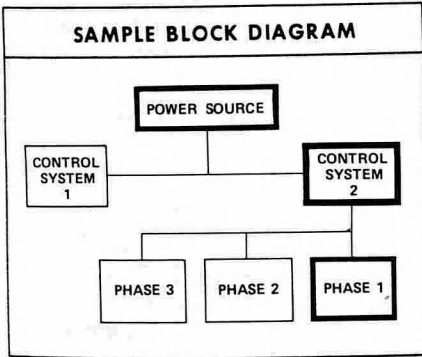




A schematic then appears, filling the screen and our speaker finds him or herself apologizing for the lack of legibility and clarity. Enlargements of the most important portions and a color highlight would have helped the audience follow the flow. If the speaker must use the entire diagram he or she should have passed out legible copies.

Now the speaker uses a color photograph, but it is out of context with the presentation. Color pictures will enhance the presentation, if they appear in the right place at the right time.

The speaker's next visual is a complex illustration showing the inner workings of the entire system. One or two simplified block diagrams would have better served this purpose.

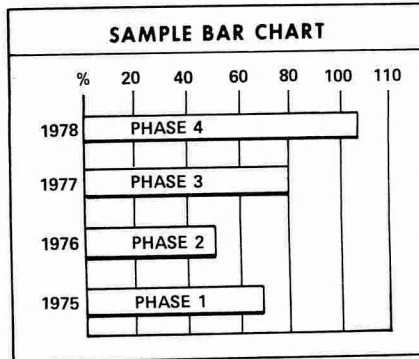
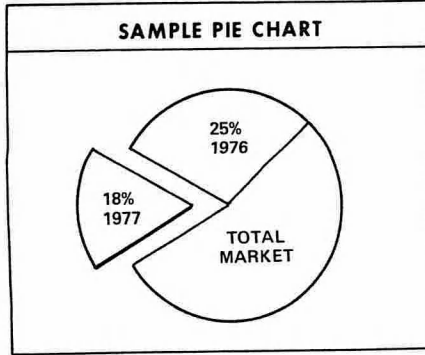


We have now reached that portion of the presentation when the speaker discusses numbers and the visual contains column upon column of six-digit figures that scare the audience. Here a color bar highlighting pertinent figures would have been more helpful, or a pie chart or bar chart may have been better.

In a verbal summary, our speaker once again regains the attention of the audience and drives home the closing points with all the art of

a professional presenter. If only he or she had taken the time to make sure the visuals played a supporting role, he or she would not have lost the audience midway through the presentation.

A speaker should never leave the room feeling that he or she did not get all points across. He or she should leave feeling that the audience absorbed not only the verbal material but the visual presentation as well.



Remember, amplification and reinforcement of a verbal presentation is the reason to use visual aids. A good presentation, whether technical or nontechnical, requires clear, concise visual reinforcement.

The following are some tips that may help you choose the right visuals.

- Plan each visual to drive home a single idea.
- Use two simple visuals rather than a single complex one.
- Line graphs are best for showing trends.
- Bar charts are most effective for comparing magnitudes.
- Pie charts best show relative portions of a whole.
- Symbolic representations of chemical structures or mathematical expressions are useful if carefully prepared.
- Schematic diagrams, if kept simple, usually convey flow or the

relationship of parts better than photographs.

• Photographs are effective visuals if kept within the context of the presentation.

• Drawings of equipment should show only as much detail as needed to indicate "how it works."

• Tables require interpretation and are less effective than graphic visuals. If used, tables should only contain items you will mention.

• Topic visuals center audience attention on key thoughts during orientation or transition parts of your talk.

• In all types of visuals, omit every line, number, or word that will not contribute to rapid understanding. Use simple terms and consistent notations throughout.

Dennis McBride is presently employed as presentations editor with Honeywell, Inc., Avionics Division, St. Petersburg, Fla. His responsibilities include providing instruction in audio-visuals for the training and development group of this division.



MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE

An incomparable, concise statement of contemporary management. One of the "blue book" series, *MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE* is available for the first time outside the National Defense University.

"This book covers a tremendous amount of material in a relatively short space. The new chapters in this edition are a major contribution." — Thomas P. Murphy,

Director,
Federal Executive Institute

Fred R. Brown, editor, *MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICE*. Fourth edition. 1977. 201 pp. \$8.95. ISBN 0-912338-15-6.

Write for a free copy of our 1978 catalog of books and monthly serials.

Lomond Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 56M
Mt: Airy, MD 21771

Circle No. 312 on Reader Service Card