

Flashy PowerPoint presentations that complicate the real issues

At an ICT conference recently, an entrepreneur in attendance was lamenting at his inability to use software applications such as PowerPoint to communicate. This comment followed a particularly spectacularly presented PowerPoint presentation made by one of the younger presenters. The entrepreneur confided in us that he had actually never used PowerPoint and felt that his business was handicapped as a result. For some of us who had invested sometime in the corporate world, his fears could not have been further from the truth.

In the business world today, there is far too much hype about strategy. This is especially augmented by the fact that many corporate men and women have become accustomed to the use of flexible presentation software applications such as PowerPoint to compose seemingly highly intellectually presentations to make sales pitches.



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Unfortunately, more often than not, there is often much too much emphasis on the quality of the presentation and the pitch rather than the quality of business acumen and ideas. Most of the time, the presenters spend numerous hours worrying about what presentation templates, fonts and colours to use rather than dealing with substantive business issues.

The entrepreneur in question has figured out that strategy is irrelevant for strategy's sake and the magic word is actually execution. His focus is on listening to his customers and em-

ployees and executing what they tell him to do. The notion of strategising and hypothesising scenarios is simply not in his vocabulary. In the corporate game, typical PowerPoint presentations elevate format over content and unfortunately from the observation of some top CEOs in the country, they have realised that the fancier the presentation, the less the content.

Most corporate employees have never talked directly to customers about their organisations' products. Chances are that they have not used the products themselves, even though some

have worked for the same companies for over twenty years. Worse still, some top executives have never actually used the product they purport to sell. Take a sample of insurance executives and ask them what policy covers they have for themselves and their kin and you may get some interesting answers. The case of bankers is even more interesting. It is not uncommon to find most employees of banks running their main bank accounts out of competitor banks!

The entrepreneur needs to know that lacking PowerPoint skills is not necessarily a liability. His world is more pragmatic as the opportunity of strategising via PowerPoint is a lost business opportunity or sale. He needs to know that most of the presentations made in conference rooms in most corporates are filled with buzz words such as "leveraging assets", "first-mover advantage", "multipoint competition", "value chain analysis" and other similar jargon that is picked up and processed in business schools. A casual conversation with many top executives will reveal that a lot of time is spent sitting around thinking and planning instead of going out

and trying some stuff, seeing that it works, and learning by doing.

In this day and age, we have marketing managers who have never set foot in their customer environments, leave alone even talked to them. They are glued to the seats in their offices and more preoccupied with either theorising on what their customers may need, or simply hiring research companies

to conduct studies that result in endless hours of hypothesising and analysing. Entrepreneurs on the other hand immerse themselves in their customer environments and strive to create meaningful connections with them.

In this regard, it may be of interest for corporate business leaders to note that some leading CEOs of Fortune 500 companies have opted to ban the use PowerPoint presentations in the organisations that they lead.

They have realised that most over ambitious employees focus more on dazzling their colleagues with their perceived intellect and sophistication and less on substantive issues that require to be addressed to drive their organisations ahead.

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