

The 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint by Guy Kawasaki

I suffer from something called Ménière's disease—don't worry, you cannot get it from reading my blog. The symptoms of Ménière's include hearing loss, tinnitus (a constant ringing sound), and vertigo. There are many medical theories about its cause: too much salt, caffeine, or alcohol in one's diet, too much stress, and allergies. Thus, I've worked to limit control all these factors.

However, I have another theory. As a venture capitalist, I have to listen to hundreds of entrepreneurs pitch their companies. Most of these pitches are crap: sixty slides about a "patent pending," "first mover advantage," "all we have to do is get 1% of the people in China to buy our product" startup. These pitches are so lousy that I'm losing my hearing, there's a constant ringing in my ear, and every once in while the world starts spinning.

Before there is an epidemic of Ménière's in the venture capital community, I am trying to evangelize the 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint. It's quite simple: a PowerPoint presentation should have ten slides, last no more than twenty minutes, and contain no font smaller than thirty points. While I'm in the venture capital business, this rule is applicable for any presentation to reach agreement: for example, raising capital, making a sale, forming a partnership, etc.

Ten is the optimal number of slides in a PowerPoint presentation because a normal human being cannot comprehend more than ten concepts in a meeting—and venture capitalists are very normal. (The only difference between you and venture capitalist is that he is getting paid to gamble with someone else's money). If you must use more than ten slides to explain your business, you probably don't have a business. The ten topics that a venture capitalist cares about are:

1. Problem
2. Your solution
3. Business model
4. Underlying magic/technology
5. Marketing and sales
6. Competition
7. Team
8. Projections and milestones
9. Status and timeline
10. Summary and call to action

You should give your ten slides in twenty minutes. Sure, you have an hour time slot, but you're using a Windows laptop, so it will take forty minutes to make it work with the projector. Even if setup goes perfectly, people will arrive late and have to leave early. In a perfect world, you give your pitch in twenty minutes, and you have forty minutes left for discussion.

The majority of the presentations that I see have text in a ten point font. As much text as possible is jammed into the slide, and then the presenter reads it. However, as soon as the audience figures out that you're reading the text, it reads ahead of you because it can read faster than you can speak. The result is that you and the audience are out of synch.

The reason people use a small font is twofold: first, that they don't know their material well enough; second, they think that more text is more convincing. Total bozosity. Force yourself to use no font smaller than thirty points. I guarantee it will make your presentations better because it requires you to find the most salient points and to know how to explain them well. If "thirty points," is too dogmatic, the I offer you an algorithm: find out the age of the oldest person in your audience and divide it by two. That's your optimal font size.

So please observe the 10/20/30 Rule of PowerPoint. If nothing else, the next time someone in your audience complains of hearing loss, ringing, or vertigo, you'll know what caused the problem. One last thing: to learn more about the zen of great presentations, check out a site called Presentation Zen by my buddy Garr Reynolds.