

HOW TO PRESENT TO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

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Let's begin our discussion with a quiz. How well you fare will in large part depend on your age. Listed below are text messaging symbols. See how many of them you can decipher.

WOMBAT _____

WDALYIC _____

TTFN _____

FOMCL _____

PRW _____

AYTMTB _____

@TEOTD _____

(Answers listed below)

These text messaging symbols are second nature to what I call the “opposable thumb” generation—that generation that grew up using their thumbs to play video games, dial cell phone numbers, and text message their friends.

Every generation has its own language, whether Millennials (1980-2002—Sometimes called Generation Y), or Generation X (1960-1980), my generation (The Boomers: 1943-1960), or The Veterans, as some demographers call them (1922-1943). These different generations also have different ways of communicating, listening, interacting, interpreting, and responding to the way a presentation is delivered.

First The Big Picture:

The Internet, CNN, YouTube, USA Today (check out the 1986 front page of The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal if you doubt me) have changed everything—the way we buy our Xmas presents, the legibility of cursive penmanship, even the way religious leaders communicate with their congregations.

For instance, some new generation rabbis in Israel are communicating with their followers via text messages. They receive as many as 3,000 messages a month, with such words as “faith,” “doubt,” and “sin” typed in requesting a theological reply.

An Internet story this week discussed parents who obsess with their mobile messaging and ignore their children. Mental health professionals say the intrusion of mobile email gadgets into family life is a growing topic of discussion in therapy.

And don’t even bring up cell phone rudeness. Everyone has a horror story.

How does all this relate to giving business presentations? It means we need to rethink how we present, adapt to our audience’s needs with more precision, and strategize our message not only for its purpose—but also for the generation receiving it.

Here are some practical Do’s and Don’t’s for the different generations. For simplicity’s sake, I have divided the generations into 3 basic technical categories: Young and Savvy (under 40), Middle-aged and Capable (between 40 and 60); Older and Trying (over 60). There will be many inherent generalities stated here, but most observations will be on target.

- 1. First, we ALL hate to be read to, but the Younger generation hates it even more. So do NOT have Power Point slides filled with words and sentences, as if you were writing a novel on a Power Point. And most importantly, do NOT read them off the slide.**

If this is your style, just hand out the slide copies at the door, go stand in a corner, let people read your slides at their pace (it will be quick, I promise you), and see if they have any questions (they won’t).

- 2. For all generations use the old IBM Power Point rule of thumb: 5 x 5: No more than 5 bullets per page and no more than 5 words per bullet. It is essential to include pictures to capture the essence of the point. The bullets are nothing more than “brain prompts” for you. They are not the presentation.**

3. Which brings us to our third point: **YOU** are the interpreter of the message, not the reader of the message. You may have a handout or leave-behind—to be given at the close of the program—which contains all the verbal elaboration and additional graphs, etc., but this is not on the Power Point slide.
4. **The Older Generation** (of which I am a part) can tolerate more words on the slide, and we are more comfortable “reading” along with you, **IF** the text is animated so that only one main point appears at a time, not all five. Otherwise, we skip to point #5 while you are giving your powerful analysis of point #1.

Boomers and Veterans have a low tolerance for Flashy Power Points. Remember, Special Effects are an option—not a requirement. Choose wisely.

5. **For all generations: Know your equipment! Have it all set up long before the audience arrives. Can you imagine still having the stage crew setting up the props in a stage play during Act 1? Keep your “stage” clear: no laptop bags, no sloppy wires, no purses, no bottled water.**
6. **For all generations: “OWN” your equipment (even if it’s rented!). Never—even if you are the President of the company—have a secretary or “secondary” person in the company pressing the laptop forward button for you. For the younger generations, it looks extremely autocratic and removed. And having to say “Next” 52 times is awkward and distracting for any generation.**
7. **Make sure you use a remote. Even if your company has one, I can promise you it will be “missing” when you need it, so buy your own. For all generations, but particularly the younger ones, presenter credibility is immediately built up when the presenter seems “with it”—prepared, comfortable with all the equipment, including the remote (do not aim the remote at the screen and point and click and then look amazed when it actually works!)**

8. We all have shorter attention spans now, but the younger audiences have even shorter ones. Prepare your presentations carefully and make them focused, clear, and engaging. Younger generations do not like to be lectured “at,” resenting it even more than their older counterparts.

Why? Because they have been on interactive video games since they were 18 months old; they are used to being in control of how quickly their information flows and what information they choose to take in. Capture them with engaging material and an engaged and conversational presenter.

Here, then, are the most important points about presenting to different generations:

- 1. No one likes to be bored.**
- 2. We all want to feel respected by the speaker.**
- 3. We all enjoy an energetic, passionate, engaged speaker, even if the subject is technical**
- 4. We all want the session to begin and end on time**
- 5. We all want to feel the presenter is prepared and in control of the technical equipment**

Yes, there are many differences among the generations, but we have much more in common than we have differences. And, yes, it makes our job as presenter even more of a challenge because we have another strategy to consider: what is the best way to present this message to this audience?

But isn't this, after all, the question we should ask ourselves as we prepare a presentation for every generation?

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SIDEBAR—Just for Fun

Text Chat Emotions

:-X Kiss on the lips

“-# Kiss with Braces

{:-) Toupee Smile

I—0 Yawn

:-----) Long Nose (Liar!)

: -)~ I’m Drooling



Answers to opening quiz:

**Waste of Money, Brains and Time
Who died and Left You In Charge
Ta Ta For Now
Falling Off My Chair Laughing
Parents Are Watching
And You’re Telling Me this Because....
At The End Of The Day**