

TECH SAVVY:

BOOSTING MEETING AND PRESENTATION ENGAGEMENT

SPECIAL SECTION

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SHUTTERSTOCK

Admit it. You hate sitting through a presentation that focuses on slide after slide of unending, dry text just as much as I do. You also are likely not a fan of Microsoft PowerPoint presentations riddled with pictures, sounds and annoying moving graphics. Meetings, of course, can be equally dull. But, let's not be too

hard on those running meetings, leading seminars and the like — they are competing for attention against our smart phones and other mobile devices. We all know our devices can be overwhelmingly alluring, even to the most committed and focused professionals. So, that means if you want your message to get across, it's all about keeping your audience focused and engaged. Personally, I recommend fighting fire with fire. Here are some ideas for

utilizing technology to reengage the attendees at your next presentation or meeting.

KEEP IT VISUALLY APPEALING

Former Apple CEO Steve Jobs was known for his epic presentations. While there are books out there that detail his unique style, two techniques stand out to me: eye-grabbing graphics and very little to no text. Jobs wouldn't read off of his

slides; he would magnetically engage his audience with a story. Keep the visuals appealing, the text minimal and the information engaging, and you will be well above the curve. Need photos? Whenever possible, use originals, but in a pinch, you can grab some beautiful photos at istockphoto.com. Of course, any approach with limited text to reference requires you to really know your topic — hey, I didn't say it was easy, but it does work.

ADD ELEGANT MOVEMENT

Still think those presentations are just too flat? If you are really set on adding movement to your presentation, try Prezi.com. Not only can you create beautiful presentations that allow you to zoom in and out of specific parts of each slide (trust me, it's much better than the zoom feature in Microsoft PowerPoint), but you can also share your presentations using a personalized link, synching your presentation to an iPhone or iPad or embedding your presentation anywhere on the web.

UTILIZE POLLING

A free service for groups of 40 or less, Polleverywhere.com will allow you to poll and engage your audience in real time. Simply type in your question, and your audience can respond from their seats with their mobile devices. This is a great way to receive instant feedback and may even help course-correct a presentation or meeting going in the wrong direction. Polleverywhere.com is just one option — there are other polling and voting options out there, so just dig a little.

BRAINSTORMING AND PLANNING

Looking for ways to capture and sort ideas or tasks for a project? Try Trello.com. I owe my knowledge of this gem to my friend, Jim Lilkendey, of ApogeeCoaching.com. In my company, we project Trello up on our presentation screen during meetings and actively update and assign tasks as we move through the meeting. You can also just as easily have multiple people updating Trello from different locations. Trello is a great way to get clarity around goals and projects and keep people on task. Best of all, the basic version is free.

TRACKING INFORMATION FROM MEETINGS

Designate some or all of your attendees to take notes during the meeting directly into an electronic format such as SharePoint or Google Docs (we use SharePoint's Discussion app). You can automatically email the meeting summary to all of your participants following the meeting, and best of all, the record is stored in one place for historical purposes. SharePoint will also allow users to add comments or questions post-meeting to keep the conversation going.

These tools barely skim the surface of what's out there. Entire conferences are going completely mobile these days, with everything from registration, floor plans and interactive games designed around the event provided right through an app. Whatever you might imagine you would like to try, there is probably a website or app out there already that will let you test-run your idea for free or for a very low entry cost. All of these solutions will

require Internet access to use, of course. But, if you want an engaged audience, you will need to recognize that you are competing with attendees perpetually bound to the Internet. Use this to your advantage! Best of all, utilizing the cloud in this way (which is what you are doing by putting your data on the Internet) allows your attendees to have access to the information from anywhere they can use a mobile device or computer. So, at the next meeting or presentation you are leading, try something new. Implement at least one new technology tool into your bag of tricks. It just might make that meeting more fun and engaging for you as well!



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