
PART

I

The Seller as Focal Point

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CHAPTER

1

What Is Your Buyer Looking At?

"The soul never thinks without a picture."

—Aristotle, from his *De Anima*

You would think that any seller with a healthy ego would want to be the focus of a buyer's attention. You would assume that no seller wants to play second fiddle to a screen. Unfortunately, many sellers are perfectly willing to serve as a visual afterthought. They rationalize this secondary role 100 different ways, but it all boils down to the ease of using text on the screen.

If this describes your approach, you may have done so believing that "good" or "the right" information sells itself. If you are convinced that information sells, why bother verbalizing your ideas? Just put what you want to say in writing. It would save everybody an enormous amount of time.

We're assuming that no matter what your selling approach was in the past, you've recognized that words alone are not enough. When you've reflected on your selling experiences, you know that no idea sells itself. If words alone did the trick, religious groups wouldn't bother sending a multitude of missionaries to

convert prospects. They would simply hand out bibles and let the “good book” do the selling.

Before we explain how to take advantage of visual selling, we need to convince you that you should be the main visual. Let’s look at some powerful arguments that help make this point, starting with how your visuals should support you rather than vice versa.

The Most Important Visual

The seller must do the selling. This is not a task to delegate to a screen or hand out. You possess the experience and the expertise, the style and the savvy that will appeal to a prospect. You are much more likely to close the sale than an inanimate object. To sell your idea, all eyes must be focused on you. This means you must give prospects a compelling reason to look at you and make sure your visual support intensifies rather than diminishes this focus. In terms of this latter point, your visual support must fulfill the following criteria:

- *Hold viewer attention only briefly.* If prospects concentrate primarily on a screen, flip chart, poster board, or prop, the seller becomes secondary.
- *Allow sellers to deliver the message.* When text slides communicate the main selling points, they make presenters almost unnecessary. The ideal visual permits the seller to unfold the news and control the flow of information.
- *Reinforce the sale.* Slide-reading and paraphrasing hinders viewer retention. The visual must reinforce, not compete with, the seller’s words.

Images, not text, place the seller back in visual control. Let’s look at some examples that illustrate this truism.

Smoking Slide Example

Assume you’re a Canadian MD, PhD, and research director, delivering a keynote presentation on the hazards of smoking to Ameri-

can insurance executives. Your laboratory has gathered overwhelming evidence that cigarettes make smokers impotent.

This presentation is excellent PR for your laboratory and could bring your firm more research work. Therefore, you want to make a powerful presentation that sells your audience. Naturally, you consider a presentation that uses standard text slides (Figure 1.1).

It dawns on you, however, how powerful images are. Also, you decide to unveil the findings yourself and not have the slide preempt your flow. For your first image, you choose a visual from the Canadian government's anti-smoking campaign that looks like Figure 1.2.

After you project the above slide and pause, you say: "Cigarettes can cause sexual impotence due to a decreased blood flow. Our three-year study reveals that . . ."

Let's look again at the three criteria. First, does the image hold viewers' attention only briefly? Will people be reading text or looking at and listening to the presenter? Second, who delivers the news, the slide or the speaker? Third, which slide reinforces

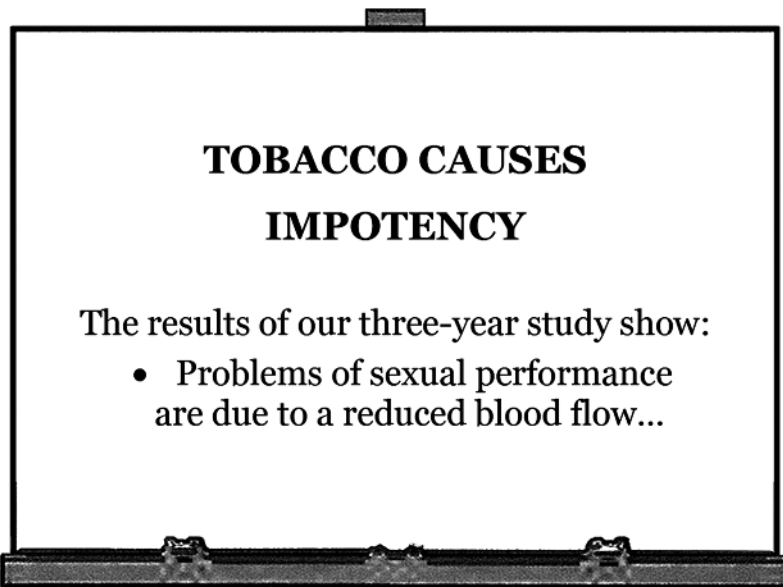


Figure 1.1 Impotency Text Slide

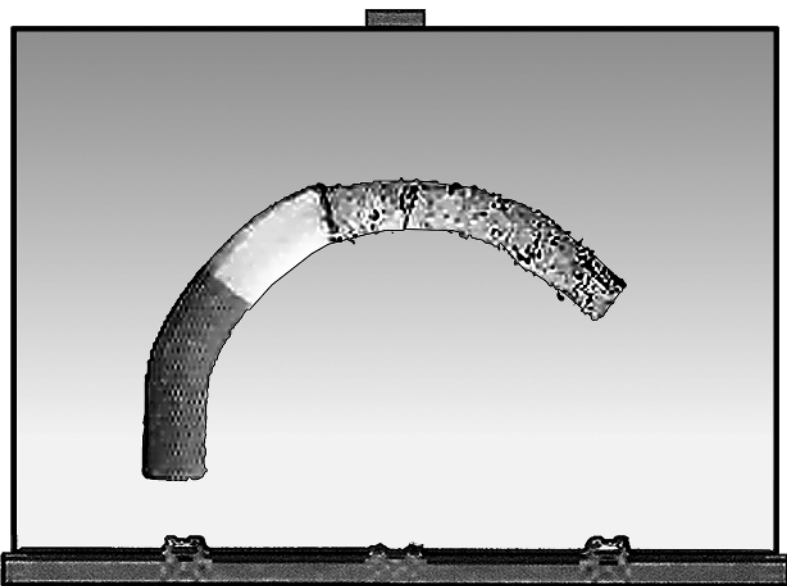


Figure 1.2 Impotency Image Slide (Source: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/photogal/label-etiquette/index_e.html)

the message? Are these insurance executives likely to remember the text or the cigarette image a month later when they're discussing who to hire to conduct a new research project?

Canada requires cigarette packages to contain anti-smoking health warnings with images as well as text. Figure 1.3 is one of the graphics from their website.

The Canadian government mandates images to support cigarette labeling because extensive research studies show they increase the effectiveness of the message. For example, when subjects viewed a warning text alongside a photo of an emphysema lung, 72 percent chose the photo-based warning as more discouraging of smoking, 11 percent said text, and 12 percent said neither. The larger photo-based warnings were found to be even more effective among youths than adults. A full 88 percent of young people chose the warning with a photo, compared with 7 percent for text, and 4 percent for neither (Canadian Cancer Society media release, 2000).



Figure 1.3 Canadian Cigarette Package

Images and photos can support your selling just as effectively. When the impotency concept floods the screen as a text slide, the presenter is merely a bystander. With the image slide, the speaker stands tall as a doctor, scientist, and persuader, but most of all, as the focal point. The presenter returns to the role of leading, explaining, and convincing.

Text Versus Images: Can You Identify the Salespeople Who Remain in the Spotlight?

Consider the following four slides, as shown and discussed by four presenters. Which visuals hold viewers' attention only briefly and allow the seller to deliver the news?

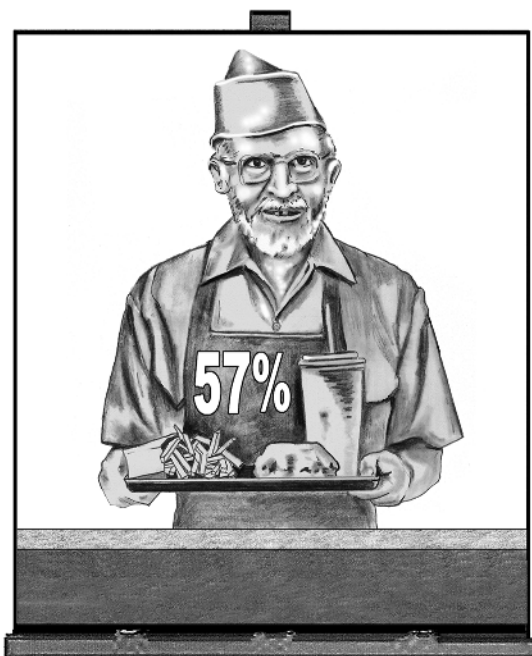


Figure 1.4 Retirement Reality

Presenter One

The first seller, a financial planner, displays the above slide (Figure 1.4) to a group in their mid-forties, pauses, and then says, “When you retire, you may be in for a rude shock. Statistics reveal that over half (the presenter points to the 57 percent) of retirees found they must continue working to maintain their previous lifestyles. Not only does their retirement income fall short, but also their new jobs rarely match previous responsibilities. They now find themselves selling fries or stocking shelves.”

Presenter Two

The second seller, also a financial planner, addresses a group of mid-thirty year olds. He reads word for word from the screen (Figure 1.5), saying, “Unfortunately, most workers have no safety net. Seventy-one percent of white collar workers over 45

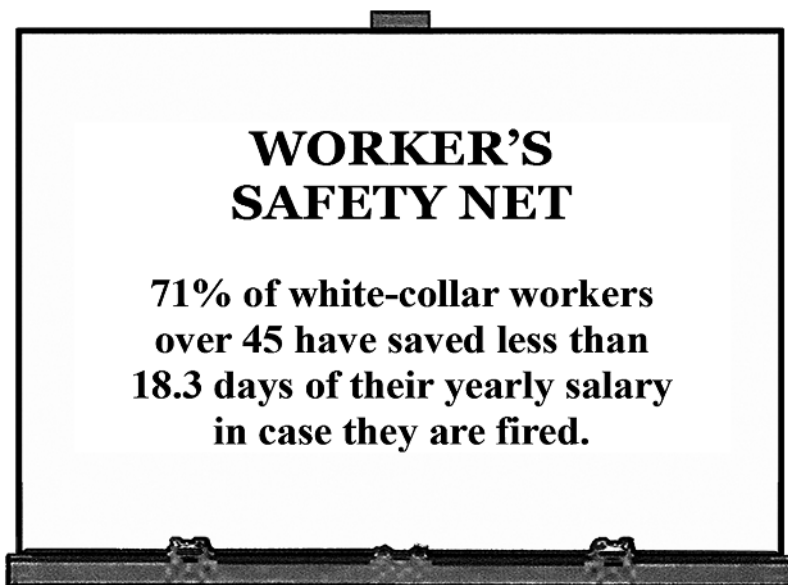


Figure 1.5 Worker's Safety Net

have saved less than 18.3 days of their yearly salary in case they are fired.”

Presenter Three

While the screen is blank, a third presenter states, “As you know, being the head of human resources, I was asked to evaluate how we could recapture our position on the 100 Best Companies list.”

On the screen pops an image with the words “100 Best” (Figure 1.6). The presenter continues, “It was unfortunate last year that we lost our footing on this prestigious list. We recommend improvements in three areas.”

On the screen, three more images appear. Pointing to each in turn, the presenter says, “The three I’ll be discussing are enhancing our childcare facility, providing more job rotation, and increasing work-hour choices. Now let me get into the details. First, our childcare . . .” This presenter never reads from the screen.



Figure 1.6 100 Best Image Slide

Presenter Four

A fourth presenter, also a human resources executive, hits the clicker and the title, “How to attract . . .,” and the first bullet point, “Provide a fuller . . .” becomes visible (Figure 1.7).

The presenter then says, “As you know, being the head of HR, I was assigned to try and figure out (He turns his back to listeners and reads from the screen.) how to attract better employees and get back on the 100 Best Companies list. It was unfortunate last year we lost our footing on this prestigious list. First, we’d recommend (Again he turns away from the listeners and reads from the screen.) providing a fuller range of daycare programs . . .”

As you can see, image slides do a better job of managing an audience’s attention. With image slides, people look at the screen momentarily then quickly shift their focus to the presenter. Just as you read the two text slides, so will the audience at a presentation.



Figure 1.7 100 Best Text Slide

Clearly, images satisfy the first two criteria for an ideal visual—holding listener attention briefly and allowing seller to control the flow of information.

Remembering the Message

Let's now examine the third criteria for an ideal visual—retention. Keeping your message alive in the prospect's mind is critical in promoting a positive buying memory. Do text or image slides do a better job of driving retention? Or look at this question another way: Are you more likely to remember the screen-projected words of a presenter or an image slide with the seller delivering the meaning that fills in the visual?

To help yourself answer this question, try and recall the details of the first two slides in this series of four. Even if you cruised through the last four slides quickly, you had no distractions. A

speaker wasn't reading or paraphrasing the information while you were absorbing the slides or reading the text. The first slide dealt with working after retirement, and the second was about workers saving money. Take a moment and reproduce both slides on paper.

Our experience and a wealth of research say you'll remember much of the image slide—the older worker serving fast food and even the number 57. But chances are you can reconstruct little or none of the text slide—"71 percent of white-collar workers over 45 have saved less than 18.3 days of their yearly salary in case they are fired."

Given this retention exercise outcome, consider these points:

- You're an ideal viewer. You are awake and attentive.
- You just viewed the material, so retention is the highest it's ever going to be.
- You were asked to recall only two slides.

Under these ideal conditions, the retention of only one text slide is minimal. Did you even remember its title?

In real-life situations, a seller operates in far from ideal conditions. People aren't always attentive. They are often thinking about their workload, their personal lives or phone calls to make after they're done meeting with you.

Given these realities, why would a presenter show 20, 30, or even 50 text slides? If the message of one text slide can't be retained, then 20 to 50 such slides will merge into a truly unmemorable mass.

Researchers tell us the mind stores and retrieves pictures more efficiently than words. A face is easier to remember and recall than a name. Cognitive psychologists call this phenomenon the "picture superiority effect." Though researchers have not determined exactly why this phenomenon exists, some psychologists attribute it to the theory that images are remembered both as words and shapes. Others speculate that the unique shapes of graphics might be a superior memory hook.

Whatever the cause, research demonstrates that pictures are easier to recall than words, in both the short term and the long term. In one study, subjects recognized 612 pictures with 98 percent accuracy in the short term and even recognized 58 percent of them after 120 days (Shepard, 1967). In another by the same researcher, participants shown 2,560 images over several days recognized 90 percent of them. In a third concerning 10,000 pictures, subjects could both remember and recognize pictures more easily than words. After seeing them just once, they remembered pictures with surprising accuracy for as long as three months (Higbee, 2001, pp. 64–78). Some researchers speculate that human beings may have an almost unlimited capacity to remember pictures.

Images, therefore offer a *huge* retention advantage to those competing against sellers using text visuals.

When the Visual and Auditory Messages Are Out of Synch

To help a prospective buyer retain your sales message, you may read the words that appear on a screen. Your assumption is that reading what a prospect is seeing reinforces the message. In fact, it distorts the message, garbling the transmission.

Average readers zip along at 250 to 300 words per minute (wpm). Fast readers easily hit 600 to 800 wpm. But a presenter can speak no faster than 160 words per minute. Therefore, people can and will mentally read much faster than a presenter can speak.

When sellers read aloud, prospects are forced to struggle with a very disjointed message. Their ears hear the speaker while their eyes are scanning way ahead. It's hard to think of a worst way to process information than reading and hearing an out-of-synch voice. Try it with someone. It's extremely difficult to concentrate. Besides, why read or paraphrase visuals unless viewers are illiterate? Why risk sending the message to prospects that you think they're not bright enough to "get it" unless you read what

they can't? Again, this approach moves the focus to the words on the screen, encouraging people to read rather than pay attention to you.

Repositioning Handouts

Handouts also drag people's eyes away from you. Imagine sitting in front of your boss's desk, asking for a much-deserved raise. Your sales volume tops the list, so you richly deserve a substantial increase. For a few minutes, your boss looks right at you, paying complete attention. Then he or she opens a report and starts turning the pages, glancing at you only occasionally. You would be furious. Not only is this rude behavior, but the boss is also missing large parts of what you're saying.

Now translate this scenario to a sales pitch. Consider what happens when you hand prospective buyers a brochure or other type of reading material. Naturally, their focus will drift to what you handed them. If you create a document—especially one that is colorful and eye-catching—they will invariably look at it. By avoiding handing out any material when you're speaking, you retain your prospects' attention except for those moments when you direct them to an image on a screen.

Companies often use the term “deck” to mean a document containing a printout of all the slides used during the presentation. It is distributed beforehand so listeners can follow along. If the deck is passed out after the presentation, it is usually referred to as a “handout.” While it's fine to use the deck as a handout after the presentation is over, using it simultaneously is even worse than a simple handout because there is much more material to distract your prospective buyers' attention. Nothing you do will mutilate your message more than having prospects leaf through a deck while you sell. The moment you pass out a deck, you lose control. Prospects are torn three ways: they can flip through the deck, read what's on the screen, or listen to you. The deck is a sure winner; the seller is a sure loser.

Don't compete with simple handouts or more complex decks. You'll bet against yourself and lose.

Don't Fall for PowerPoint's Allure

Finally, we want to issue another PowerPoint warning. As many times as we advise our clients against relying on PowerPoint, we find that they are sometimes drawn to its use against their better judgment. PowerPoint text is like an outdoor light that attracts moths, and then destroys them. Like moths, sellers are drawn to PowerPoint's brilliance. Creating text with PowerPoint is easy and the finished product looks professional. There are colored backgrounds, fancy type styles, words that enter the screen turning and spinning. Background noise adds to the sensory appeal of the type and a sprinkling of clip art fosters the illusion that you're using images effectively.

Unfortunately, PowerPoint, like decks, handouts, and reading to your prospects, is a trap that's easy to fall into. The software lures people with the promise that a pitch will be easier to deliver and more effective. Moths feel equally drawn to the light until they slam into the bulb. It's too bad sellers don't find themselves stunned and flopping around on the floor. Fortunately, however, unlike moths, most sellers are capable of learning from their mistakes.

The first lesson we hope you've learned is to grab the prospect's visual attention and keep it. Once you've done that, the next step is polishing your visual self so that prospects like what they see.

