

**Note:** This interview originally appeared at Indezine ([www.indezine.com](http://www.indezine.com)).

*James Theall (pictured to the right) is CEO of Media Marketing Inc., a Boulder, Colorado-based software and service company that has recently launched SlideManager for PowerPoint. He leveraged his degree in advertising and design with eight years experience giving competitive sales presentations to develop a software solution that automated the*

*selection and management of presentation elements for effective custom presentations.*

*James remains obsessed with automating the model that shifts individuals creating their own presentations (PowerPoint's original model) to the hub-and-spoke model that moves presentation building out into the field while maintaining knowledge, story points and design standards.*



**James Theall**

**Geetesh:** Tell us more about yourself and Media Marketing Inc.

**James:** Media Marketing, Inc is in our 18th year of business. We are located in a very picturesque setting, in the foothills of the Rockies just north of Boulder, Colorado.

I started this company at 27, after spending eight years doing marketing and sales presentations in very competitive media markets.

While I wrote all of our early software, I am now focused on knowledge dissemination through our consulting, professional services, sales and account management teams. My coworkers will tell you that I am obsessed with the underlying concepts of slide reusability and presentation management.

We have 30 employees who deliver a full complement of software, training and services. Our original product is called imMEDIate<sup>®</sup>, which is a suite of solutions used by approximately 500 media companies such as newspapers, cable television companies, etc. We've also developed software that creates dynamic, data-based PowerPoint slides with MapPoint<sup>®</sup> geographic analysis and media scheduling tools. Another solution manages large media survey databases and streams data onto slides as

charts, tables and preformatted text that summarizes trends and significant data points.

At the core of the imMEDIate suite is a PowerPoint presentation management engine. In 2003, we began exploring and prototyping a horizontal version of this engine for other industries that rely heavily on PowerPoint. We named this product SlideManager and after several tests and redesigns, we had our official launch of the current web-based SlideManager in early 2005.

SlideManager is doing well. We have seen the most sales in the tech, financial and government sectors. I am excited at the incredible reception we have received from "blue chip" clients.

**Geetesh:** What sort of presentation cataloging solutions work best for small business and enterprise level users - and what solutions do your products offer to both of these markets?

**James:** We have developed a cataloging model that has proven the test of time and adapts well to all scales of use, across every type of use, across every type of sales, consulting, training, HR or executive presenter. The more complex the audience, objectives or products, and the more competitive the market, the more important it is to have a solution that stands up to the

challenges.

Some users are just looking for a central repository for presentations that will be used the same way every time, and some want a library of searchable slides that a knowledgeable user can recognize and merge into a presentation. These basic functions are important, but we are inspired by a wider view of what presentation management can do with the right approach - and the right model.

The right model eliminates bottlenecks by moving presentation assembly out into the organization. In the typical hub-and-spoke workflow, you have multiple presenters, the "spokes," who are relying on the centralized services of designers or the marketing department (the "hub"). This hub-and-spoke model severely limits the volume of presentations that can be delivered and the ability to customize messaging - and it's not scalable to fit enterprise needs.

Our approach to cataloging is "top down," and begins with defining and segmenting the various groups who will need access to presentation content. For each of these groups, we segment the audiences, products, languages - whatever organizing factors are the most appropriate for the needs at hand. Every organization is unique. SlideManager's

indexing scheme can be set up for any scenario, or even accommodate multiple models.

Then, each of these segments is explored to define the types of story points, questions, actions, etc. that the presentation might include. These could include alternative beginnings, middles and ends which are organized into a story flow. Each of these items is called a Topic, but you can think of them as story points. Each of these story points may require one or several slides to tell the story, and if that's the case, we have the option of locking these slides into an intact sequence to make them easier to manage.

When a user launches SlideManager, he or she only has to see and work with the slide content that is relevant to their task. The presentation builder selects from a list of topics they want to talk about and merges the slides that support these story points into the presentation.

And, while presentation management catalog modeling is the number one most important key to success in presentation management, it's followed closely by PowerPoint Best Practices, which guide the appropriate use of placeholders, layouts and color schemes to assure slide designs are completely dynamic. ▶

**Geetesh:** *How can a typical PowerPoint user benefit from cataloging presentation content using your Slide Manager product - and is there a learning curve involved?*

**James:** PowerPoint was created during the early personal computer revolution and still reflects this “personal” user model. If people are still using PowerPoint just for their own use or they largely create presentations with content that never gets reused or is always used in exactly the same way, then they may not benefit from SlideManager’s enterprise presentation management solution.

If, on the other hand, they are a member of an organization where PowerPoint is an integral communication tool and they need to share content in a way that ensures design integrity, message integrity and compliance, then SlideManager can greatly benefit them in simplifying the process and providing the enterprise capabilities that PowerPoint lacks.

Regarding a learning curve, the overwhelming top comment we get is that SlideManager is very easy to use. It has an intuitive interface that works similar to the way iTunes organizes a song list for the iPod. So it takes literally only minutes for shows to be imported and published. The interface also ensures that new users are quick to grasp the concept and begin assembling cohesive presentations right away.

There is a learning curve, but instead of it being about learning the software, it is centered more around the initial setup paradigm shift from a tool designed for individuals to the mode of using PowerPoint

as a communication tool for organizations.

This involves both organizing and formatting content for the enterprise slide reuse model. Our trainers offer both web-based and onsite training to guide content administrators as they organize and implement their library. Or, acting as outsourced administrators, we can manage the full process of content formatting, library planning and maintenance.

**Geetesh:** *Can you share some case studies involving use of your products and solutions?*

**James:** Some of our most promising relationships are relatively new and in some cases we are working under non-disclosure agreements, so I must defer on naming names for now.

We have a media group in northern California that is projecting a 125-to-135-percent increase in presentation volume for 2005, and another well known media giant that has reported over five thousand percent ROI in their newspaper division for the first three quarters of 2005.

We do track and monitor metrics on all our projects and encourage our clients to identify success factors in advance and measure these during implementation and beyond. We have several case studies that show impressive increases in custom targeted presentation volumes after implementing our presentation management software. The improved effectiveness of these presentations typically results in shortened sales cycles, better sales close ratios and dramatic increases in sales revenues. In some cases, these revenue increases have been in the

millions of dollars .

**Geetesh:** *Tell us more about your support infrastructure.*

**James:** Once a company signs up with SlideManager we begin a structured implementation process which includes live web training, a content review and library consulting. Our account manager works closely with clients in the initial stages of implementation, and remains proactively available throughout the solution lifecycle. Our technical support department is available via phone, email or web conferencing to help clients with specific questions.

On the media side, we also have a team of people who do data integration, creating thousands of data slides based on survey research and custom design templates. For our non-media clients, our work has largely been consulting and optimizing their existing content to meet reuse objectives that require every slide being dynamic enough to work with every design template used by the enterprise. We have received inquiries regarding our getting more involved in content creation and design for larger organizations, or converting content to PowerPoint. We are currently developing a network of consultants and contractors to handle this kind of work, allowing us to focus more on implementation.

**Geetesh:** *What is the future of PowerPoint related media asset management - and how is your company placed in this market ?*

**James:** The future of PowerPoint related media asset management is very exciting. We’re certainly looking forward to the Microsoft Office 12 rollout, with its back-end

server element.

It does not surprise us that Microsoft has decided to make this part of their next release. We know from the hundreds of organizations we have talked with since releasing SlideManager that everybody is looking for a better way to manage the content, knowledge, task and compliance regulations of their media assets. But PowerPoint documents aren’t like other documents; they need an additional layer of automation to be adequately managed. That’s where we can help.

We expect that Office 12 will provide tremendous additional value to what we are doing. We intend to be very involved in supporting Office 12 and integrating SlideManager with its new functionalities. We feel that our years of experience in enterprise-wide PowerPoint content management position us well in being able to do this.

**Geetesh:** *Can you share some trivia - perhaps an unconventional use of SlideManager or something similar?*

**James:** Media Marketing was founded in 1987, when I was out of work and won the \$7,000 Mac II door prize at MacWorld Boston. Fast forward to 2003 when, in conjunction with the launch of Office 2003, SlideManager won the Grand Prize in Microsoft’s Office Solution Builder contest. The Grand Prize came with a bunch of cash and marketing services to help develop and launch SlideManager. We think that winning this prize bodes just as well for the future success and longevity of SlideManager as my original Macintosh win was for launching the company.