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Presentations, Buffet Style

By Heather Baldwin

Imagine yourself and a few of your colleagues at an all-you-can-eat buffet. Tray in hand, you're each moving down the line choosing the exact items you want. You pick soup, salad, and a roll; another rep goes for the pasta and garlic bread. A third colleague decides on roast beef and mashed potatoes. You meet at the table with very different meals, but one important thing in common – you each got exactly what you wanted and thus will all leave the meal satisfied.

Now imagine using the same approach in building your sales presentations. That's the idea behind SlideManager, an online self-service presentation tool that houses and organizes a company's library of PowerPoint slides. After sales reps enter some basic information about their upcoming presentation and its objectives, they choose from a list of appropriate slides like a customer at a self-service buffet, dragging and dropping each selection onto their "plate." In a few minutes – voila! They have a completed presentation customized to a client's particular concerns and problems without having to dig through old shows and reformat slides from multiple locations.

"It's like an iTunes for your company's PowerPoint slides," explains James Theall, CEO of SlideManager creator Media Marketing, Inc. (www.slidemanager.biz). "SlideManager helps organizations organize and manage their essential information as uniquely segmented stories that can be searched, accessed, and merged with other relevant slides to create persuasive custom presentations that speak directly to the opportunities at hand."

Take the example of Tampa Tribune/Florida Publishing Group (TT/FPG). Prior to using Media Marketing's Immediate Suite (the media-specific version of SlideManager), the company's 120 sales reps were giving a total of 50 to 100 presentations a month. Why so low? Each presentation was funneled through the company's market research arm. Sales reps would request a presentation for a specific client and the company's analysts would create the presentation, turning it back around to the rep in about three days. By creating presentations in this way, TT/FPG ensured its messaging was on target, the presentations were customized to each client, and included the most current data. But the system had two major problems, says Ted Stasney, market development director for the organization. First, they were limited by time as to the physical number of presentations they could create. And second, analysts were spending so much time creating presentations that they couldn't complete other important research projects.

That was then. Now, TT/FPG's sales reps can go into a library of slides, drag and drop the half dozen or so slides they need into a new presentation file and "in a matter of minutes, they can put together a presentation," says Stasney. The group's analysts still update and add content, but their level of involvement is vastly reduced, leaving them free to do the work for which they were hired. And since reps no longer have to wait for days to receive presentation content, they are giving exponentially more

presentations. Last month, the organization's 120 reps gave more than 700 presentations and proposals. And Stasney estimates that the boost in presentation numbers has equated to \$250,000 to \$500,000 in additional revenue.

Still, Stasney points out that a tool like this "isn't magic." As with any new technology, "you need someone to champion it. Someone needs to be in charge of championing the initiation and then keeping it updated with new and effective sales information," he says.

Think you don't need a formal self-service presentation tool because you've got a homegrown portal or shared drive where your reps can access PowerPoint shows? Think again, says Theall. Homemade self-service tools have a host of problems associated with them that your reps know all too well. They require reps to spend time digging through old presentations to find the slides they want; they present the rep with time-consuming formatting problems when those slides come from different presentations; and there's no control over messaging. To go back to the buffet analogy, an in-house PowerPoint repository is like giving your diners access to the kitchen, but also giving them the burden of sorting through all the ingredients and making their own meals.

If your reps are spending more than a few minutes to create targeted presentations for their clients, it might be worth checking out SlideManager or any other presentation management application. After all, would you rather have your reps spending their time formatting PowerPoint slides that may or may not have the most current data and messaging, or out there building relationships and selling products?

Bon appétit!