



presentation management for the enterprise



Presentation Management Whitepaper

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Abstract

This document is designed to explain why the need for PowerPoint® presentation management exists, where the need exists, and how SlideManager™ Enterprise Presentation Management addresses these needs with its award-winning design. The person reading this should be familiar with PowerPoint and how people use it, and understand the pain involved in sharing and reusing PowerPoint content across an enterprise.

Problem

PowerPoint is a useful tool for the illustration and reinforcement of communication. A PowerPoint show is often the first impression people have of a company or speaker. PowerPoint is the "must have" behind the multi-billion-dollar presentation industry, which includes everything from clip art to multi-media presentation rooms. PowerPoint has been a behind-the-scenes tool in the sales industry's move from the "Willie Lohman"-type personality selling to fact-based solution selling, with visual aids to explain and reinforce sometimes complex concepts and data.

PowerPoint is a ubiquitous tool, used (according to Microsoft) some 30 million times per day¹ by students, educators, salespeople, trainers, executives and government organizations of all sizes and shapes. The original designers of PowerPoint assumed that this tool would be used by individuals² for "one-off"³ presentations. What they created was a very useful and easy-to-use tool. The ease of use is both its blessing and its curse.

The curse of PowerPoint's ease of use is that any novice can launch it and create a fairly decent presentation. Unfortunately, this means that they do not necessarily know what they are doing and so do not use the tool in a way that takes advantage of the built-in features which lend themselves to dynamic design and the corresponding reusability which these features provide. Even very skilled and experienced designers can create presentations that do not follow PowerPoint "best practice" methods. These designers, who may be more familiar with graphics programs such as PhotoShop or Quark, can create stunning presentations. Unfortunately, without an understanding of PowerPoint's unique and sometimes counterintuitive tools and behavior, their presentations may be so large that they cannot be easily shared, printed or even presented on "average" computers.

Poorly formatted slides are difficult to share because when they are copied from one show to the next or if new design templates are applied, the text often overflows and graphics overlap, creating a perception that rebuilding the slide

¹ May 28, 2001 *New Yorker* magazine

² It is of course assumed what they were thinking

³ "One-off" presentations are slide shows created for a one-time use, not to be reused or shared.

from scratch might be easier than reformatting. Bad experiences with formatting issues raise fear among designers, managers and PowerPoint gurus that the average presenter will not be able to handle the technology and should focus on presenting and not trying to master the intricacies of PowerPoint and visual design.

Besides the issues around reusability, anyone who has ever attended a conference or formal presentation in the last 10 years has inevitably sat through what some refer to as “Death by PowerPoint,”⁴ or too many slides with too many bullets. While some organizations have banned the use of PowerPoint to overcome this dependence on bullets over thinking,⁵ others have realized that a PowerPoint show is the cost of entry when presenting to venture capitalists, investors, most corporate boardrooms, conferences and other meetings.

All the inherent problems with slide reuse assume that appropriate slides can be found by the people who need them. Organizations that have hundreds and thousands of people creating slide content often have terabytes of PowerPoint content scattered across multiple islands and locations, with various revisions, duplications and in some cases, languages. PowerPoint does not have a useful method of cataloging and retrieving shows and the tools it does provide are slow and woefully inadequate.

Slide reuse also often involves a group of people who are very skilled, experienced and qualified to create PowerPoint presentations, needing to support a much larger team of presenters who require customized, targeted content, often in great volumes if they are to meet their organization’s objectives. This situation poses the problem of how to supply the demand for customized presentation content without losing the design, message and compliance control required by their organizations. Many of these groups have created their own homegrown systems of presentation management which are not scalable and become very dependent on limited personnel resources with “irreplaceable” expertise.

The issue of “path of least resistance” is also a major factor in organizations with centralized presentation creation teams. One critical aspect of homegrown presentation management systems is the required turnaround time and its effect on the volume of requests. Below is a real section from a “Presentation Request Form” used by the sales team of a major media company.

⁴ “The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint” by Edward Tufte

⁵ Scott McNealy, CEO of Sun Microsystems. [SJM, 03Aug97. Keith Bostic] But remember that it was not just the 12.9 gigabytes of PowerPoint slides that McNealy was revolting against...it also, surely, had something to do with his contempt for Bill Gates and the thought that Sun would be dependent on any Microsoft tool.

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Request for (check one):
<input type="checkbox"/> RAW RESEARCH DATA (1 week notice)
<input type="checkbox"/> INFORMATIONAL SHEETS (1&1/2 week notice)
<input type="checkbox"/> FULL PRESENTATION (2&1/2 week notice)

Example of presentation creation timelines

For obvious reasons, this major media company must remain nameless, but it is important to note that one division of this company has 300 sales people supported by 83 presentation builders, and they created over 2,000 full presentations in calendar year 2004. While this may seem impressive, consider that this is just over six-and-a-half presentations per year, per salesperson. And each salesperson handles over 60 accounts, which they should see at least once per month if not more frequently. Their presentation volume should be 10 to 100 times this level, but they could never afford the staff required to scale to this level.

Now imagine if you were a salesperson calling on five or six accounts a day and you knew that a presentation might help explain some complex recommendation or illustrate your competitive advantage, but you were told that you needed to plan for that two-and-a-half weeks in advance. Would you postpone the meeting or just wing it? Of course, you'd just wing it - even though having the right facts might assure that you close the sale.

Recently, message and legal compliance issues around corporate communications, marketing claims and sales pitches have been in the news. Because of this, compliance has become one of the top ten reasons driving demand for well designed and implemented presentation management systems.⁶ Message and legal compliance is not an option for companies who have been themselves or have seen their peers heavily fined for mismanaged communications.

Some of these organizations, in an attempt to completely lock down communications, are losing the competitive edge that is dependent upon their ability to customize communications to a unique situation or seize a timely opportunity that could disappear before they could get a custom solution from their presentation building team – a team that often requires days if not weeks to turn around a presentation request.

⁶ FDA, SEC and Sarbanes Oxley regulations require companies to control and track what is being said and how it is being said by every representative of the organization.

SlideManager™

SlideManager is an ASP.NET web application with a powerful SQLServer database backend. It can be placed on your internal intranet network or published externally with password protection and thus accessible from any computer with an Internet connection and the proper user credentials.

SlideManager allows administrators to search and upload content, add contextual information about how the slides are supposed to be used and then publish the content out to users. Users can build presentations by searching for keywords contained within slides or associated with slides. They can build shows dynamically by selecting from various alternative introductions, stories and conclusions, or simply grab a ready-to-go show, add a custom cover and appropriate design template and head out to their meeting. This often takes only minutes, which means that a person building their own presentations can have a custom targeted presentation for every meeting, every day. Compare this to a team like the one mentioned above, trying to support that number. They would have to add over 1,100 new presentation builders. Of course, most organization's presentation needs are not nearly that extreme, but it is still easy to see that SlideManager can generate dramatic ROI. For instance, another company that recently purchased SlideManager generated a 7,000-plus percent ROI in only three months based on the increased revenue generated by the increase in more effective sales presentations.

SlideManager has a complete presentation, slide and usage tracking system so an administrator can track how everything is being used and by whom. The slide usage and data update reports are also useful for managing content and data update cycles.

Administrators can also control which users have access to specific content and program features, as well as how "locked down" the content is. Locked-down options currently span the spectrum, from completely editable slides in default PowerPoint editor mode to partially locked or read-only password protected PowerPoint content. Future versions of SlideManager will also incorporate Office 2003+ IRM which will control other digital rights management options such as printing, emailing and corporate-verified domain control.

How SlideManager addresses the problems

SlideManager addresses the basic features that any true presentation management system must:

1. Provides a central, universally accessible repository for PowerPoint content so that both administrators and presentation builders go to one place for all their presentation creation and slide maintenance needs.

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2. Manages PowerPoint at the slide level, as opposed to the document level, where PowerPoint shows are treated the same as PDFs, text documents or JPEGs. PowerPoint is a collection of slides and the management of PowerPoint documents severely limits reuse and the effectiveness of presentations through targeted messaging.
3. Provides for the management of design templates and slide content separately, so appropriate designs can be used with any template the user selects.
4. Tracks and manages slide, presentation and license usage.

In addition to these features, which are the basic ante for any tool entering the Presentation Management field, SlideManager one-ups other solutions by:

1. Going deep into the inner workings of PowerPoint's sub-slide level to identify and avoid the common formatting problems experienced when using PowerPoint.
2. Allowing experienced communication executives and PowerPoint experts to embed knowledge into the system that guides the most effective way to address specific presentation objectives and audience needs.
3. Locking slides together so slides which flow onto multiple slides are never separated, and slides which contain legal disclaimers or other required supporting information are always included and cannot be moved or separated from their siblings.
4. Providing an award-winning intuitive interface which is immediately identified as being easy to use, easy to train and easy to maintain over time.

Besides feedback on SlideManager's ease of use, we frequently hear comments along the lines of:

- a. "Finally, a company that 'Gets It'"
- b. "SlideManager fulfills my dream"

Conclusion

If you are a member of an organization which is trying to better manage your communication efforts, improve your PowerPoint usage or simply comply with corporate branding or message mandates, you need to look at presentation management. If you want to keep your total cost of ownership down, you need to look at a system which is immediately recognizable as being easy to use. If your demands require you to control complex messaging guidelines and deal with unpredictable formatting standards, then SlideManager 2005 is the best of breed solution for your organization.