

Better Zoom Meetings with PowerPoint

REMEMBER IN-PERSON MEETINGS? COVID-19 HAS ALL BUT ELIMINATED THEM, AND ONLINE MEETINGS CAN BE DEADLY DULL. TODAY'S MODERN ONLINE MEETING APPS HAVE REMOVED MUCH OF THE COMPLEXITY OF EARLIER SYSTEMS, SO AT LEAST SOME OF THE PROBLEMS ARE SOLVED.

We now meet by using Zoom, Skype, Webex, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, or one of the many other similar applications. The current technology is both better and less expensive than what we had only a few years ago. I have participated in far too many meetings that used tens of thousands of dollars worth of specialized equipment, dedicated communications lines, and systems so complex that few could operate them.

Despite the capabilities of the hardware, these systems were so complex that advanced features were unused. Participants in one city couldn't hear those in another city, or something was set up wrong and there was nothing but deafening audio feedback.

Even if everything worked perfectly, one group of people in a conference room looked at another group of people in a conference room. Unless somebody was assigned to run the camera and establish a close-up of the speaker, people were too small to identify.

Today's conferencing applications eliminate many of those problems by using the camera and microphone in each participant's computer. The current speaker is highlighted on the screen, and each user is responsible for setting up their own audio.

The systems are all relatively easy to use: Zoom in particular gets high marks for ease of use.

Zoom offers a free Meetings plan (with some restrictions) as well as paid offerings start at \$150 per year. Most people who hold multi-person online meetings will need a paid

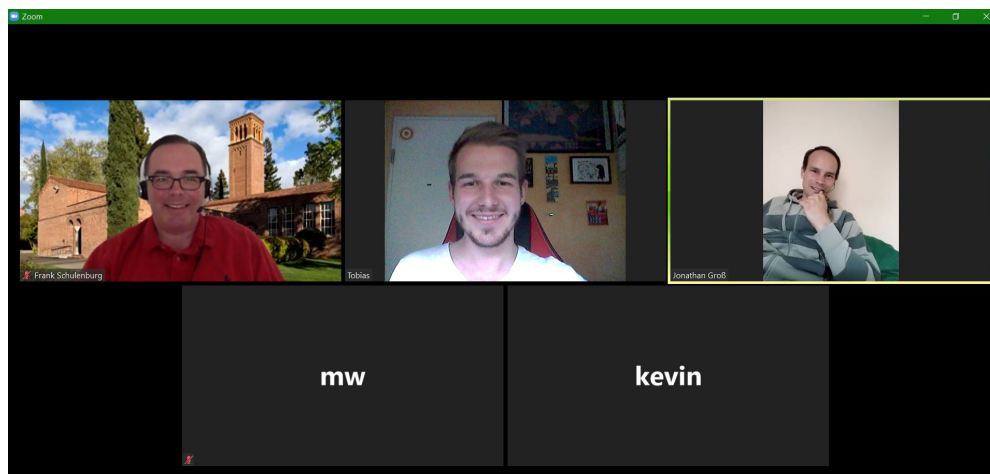


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account because the free offering limits meetings to just 40 minutes if there are more than three participants. There are no limits on the number or length of two-person sessions.

In addition to Meetings, Zoom offers a variety of other services that are intended for large organizations.

Zoom has resolved serious security issues that plagued users until mid-2020. Zoom Meetings is ideal for video calls while working from home, and for family get-togethers when the family can't really get together. Many school systems, colleges, and universities have chosen Zoom for their virtual classrooms.

Zoom is a good choice for work-related meetings, and Zoom also has specialized systems for healthcare and government use.

Problems Persist

DESPITE THE TECHNOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS, MANY ONLINE MEETINGS ARE DULL BECAUSE THEY CONSIST OF NOTHING MORE THAN TALKING HEADS.

When television was beginning to gain widespread acceptance in the 1950s, talking heads were fine. Find some early television news programs on YouTube, and you'll notice three differences from today's news programs: The programs were in black and white, network news in the early days was just 15 minutes in length, and there were virtually no visuals. Even so, just seeing the news announcer was sufficiently novel to attract an audience. Today talking heads are boring.

Talking heads are what you'll find in most of today's online meetings, but it doesn't have to be that way. Systems allow the host and participants to share what's on their screen

with the other participants, and PowerPoint can illustrate important points.

PowerPoint has negative connotations, though, and not without reason. How many outstanding PowerPoint presentations have you attended? The number is probably low, perhaps zero. Whether PowerPoint is being used for an in-person meeting or an online session, the presenter needs to avoid what is often called “death by PowerPoint.”

PowerPoint is not a teleprompter. A presentation that consists of a wall of text will quickly bore participants. People don’t need to follow along as you read verbatim what’s on the screen. You might think that showing and telling will help participants to absorb more of the presentation. After all, they’re receiving



ONLINE MEETINGS ARE LIKELY TO BE THE NORM FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD, AND THEY COULD BE THE PERMANENT NEW NORMAL AS WORKPLACES CHANGE AND MORE PEOPLE WORK FROM HOME.

FRAMMIS-GLONTSO HISTORY

The company was established in 1910 by George Frammis, who had emigrated from Bolivia in 1899 and found his way to Dubuque, Iowa, by way of New York City and Cleveland, with a brief stop in Chicago.

The Frammis Company was an immediate success in Dubuque, growing to five employees in the first 15 years of operation. The company outgrew its original location, a small shack behind the Frammis family home and moved to a considerably larger shack.

The stock market crash in 1929 and the following depression caused few problems for the Frammis Company as the organization's primary products continued to be in demand.

In 1939, George Frammis encountered Horatio Glontso while blind drunk in a speakeasy in Davenport. The two men established a friendship that lasted the rest of their lives, drunk or sober. Mostly, though, they were drunk. Glontso returned with Frammis to Dubuque and joined the company as its sixth employee.

By 1941, Glontso was a trusted employee of the Frammis Company and George Frammis made Horatio Glontso an offer that he could not refuse: That of being a full partner in the firm.

Following the Second World War, Glontso's name was added to the company name and the Frammis Company became Frammis-Glontso Limited.

In the years since then, Frammis-Glontso Limited has grown to seven employees and is located in a luxury shack that was once occupied by the Burlington Northern Railroad.

THE WORST POSSIBLE APPROACH IS SIMPLY A WALL OF TEXT THAT THE PRESENTER READS.

the same information two ways; but that’s exactly the problem.

Avoiding Audience Confusion

PRESENTERS CAN UNWITTINGLY CONFUSE MEETING PARTICIPANTS BY CREATING SLIDES THAT WITH FAR TOO MUCH TEXT.

The part of the brain that processes text is also the part that processes speech, and our brains are abysmally slow at multi-tasking. Computers can switch between tasks in milliseconds; our brains are slower, so we don’t absorb what we hear if we’re reading or what we read if we’re listening.

PowerPoint is better when illustrations or brief snippets of text set the stage for what the presenter is saying.

One of Apple’s first employees, Guy Kawasaki, who is now a venture capitalist, sits through lots of PowerPoint programs every year. He says “most of these pitches are crap: sixty slides about a patent pending first-mover advantage — all we have to do is get one percent of the people in China to buy our

FRAMMIS-GLONTSO HISTORY

THIS SLIDE ALLOWS THE AUDIENCE TO CONCENTRATE ON THE PRESENTER’S SPOKEN WORDS.

product startup.” Kawasaki says successful presentations have at most 10 slides for a 20-minute presentation, and none of the text is smaller than 30-point type.

Nancy Duarte has written books about successful presentations. She has a three-second rule for slides: If a viewer isn’t able to understand the key points of a slide in three seconds, it’s too complicated. She tells her clients to think of slides as billboards: Use minimal type and strong graphics to communicate.

Simplify

POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS, WHETHER ONLINE OR IN A CONFERENCE ROOM ARE BETTER WHEN THERE’S LESS TEXT ON THE SCREEN.

If you’re explaining the history of a project, a slide with the single word **HISTORY** is sufficient to inform the audience what you’re talking about. Don’t burden the meeting participants with line after line of dates and events.

Adding illustrations can help, too. Not clip-art from the 1960s, but color photographs that

FRAMMIS-GLONTSO

Our History

THE GRAPHICAL ELEMENT ATTRACTS ATTENTION WITHOUT DETRIMENT TO THE SPEAKER’S MESSAGE.

illustrate the point you’re making. The images need to be relevant so meeting participants won’t be sidetracked by trying to determine the point of the graphic.

Several web-based operations offer low-cost or free images. It’s important to use one of these instead of performing a Google search and grabbing an image you like. Using images without permission from the creator can be costly. Instead, obtain images from services such as [Canva](#) (\$125 per year) or free services such as [Unsplash](#), [Pexels](#), or [Pixabay](#). The image at the top of this page is from Canva.

It’s likely that we’ll be participating primarily in online meetings for the next year or so, maybe longer. Now’s the time to make your presentations stand out from the ordinary.

If you’re looking for help in learning how to do that, check out [Rick Altman’s Better Presenting annual conference](#). The 2020 event was a virtual conference, and the conference videos will remain online until early in 2021. 🎧