

By Katherine Murray

Imagine this: You've just returned to your seat for this afternoon's training seminar. The morning session was pretty interesting, providing information about the design and development of your company's newest product. Lunch was great—a big catered affair—and now you're settling in for this afternoon's topic: *Technical specifications*. The presenter begins in a tired, flat voice. You watch as slide after slide of monochrome bullet points appear on the screen. You lean back in your chair. Your eyes glaze... you stifle a yawn and begin to imagine yourself in your backyard hammock.

Wait! Come back. It's only an example.

Your presentations always influence others to take some kind of action. The action might be to listen carefully and learn new information or it might be to drift off toward Dreamworld. The way in which your presentation delivers information has everything to do with how well it will be received. Here are some quick ideas for livening up your presentations to keep the after-lunch crowd awake in their seats.

1 Make your diagrams move

PowerPoint XP, 2003, and 2007 all have diagramming capability (in PowerPoint 2007, the diagram tool is called SmartArt)—and diagrams are great because they break up slides full of bullet points and convey information quickly and clearly.

You can go a step beyond your run-of-the-mill diagram by adding animation effects to it. Because the different shapes and text boxes in a diagram are all counted as separate objects in PowerPoint, you can assign animation and timing features to each of those elements so they slide in at just the right moment in your presentation. A little movement goes a long way, however, so be careful not to overdo it. You might do a simple slide-in-from-the-left for all the elements in a pyramid chart, for example.

2 Make it easy for your audience

A truly great presentation offers smart, memorable content in a design that helps reinforce the message and keeps people interested. You can write, edit, and organize the content in your presentation in a way that makes it easy for your audience members to follow your main points.

To make sure your ideas are crystal clear, write the content of your presentation in Outline view (**Figure A**) before you focus on the design elements (which can be distracting because they're so much fun). Make your main points your slide titles, include summary slides at key points (wherever it's appropriate), and end the presentation with a quick review of what's been discussed.

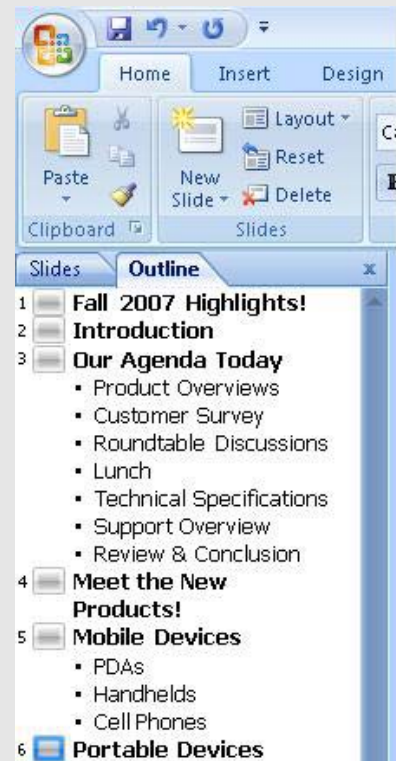


Figure A

3 Get great new backgrounds

The templates provided with PowerPoint XP and 2003 may be contributing to the low-oxygen lag in your afternoon sessions. PowerPoint 2007 introduces some new templates (and you can always browse the offerings on Microsoft Office Online to see what users like yourself have created and added). But if you have a special presentation that you want to really wow your audience, consider checking out a cool third-party site, like Powerpointed.com for some really stunning backgrounds. With just a little searching, you're sure to find a fresh look that matches the message you want to convey.

4 Let the Master do the work

If you don't use PowerPoint often, you may not be comfortable working with the whole Master idea, but Masters can save you a lot of time and help keep your presentation consistent. Suppose, for example, that there are three main sections in your presentation. By creating three Masters, one at the start of each section, you could add a colored bar as a tab along the right side of every slide, with red for the first section, blue for the second, and green for the third. Tie the color scheme in with the slide title for each section (as well as the summary slide), and you've got a color-coded presentation that continually lets audience members know which section is being discussed and how many sections are left before the break.

5 Create custom bullets

We can get bored to death with bullet points, but even the biggest bullet-detractors have to admit that they serve their purpose. Ideally, bullet points provide information in a succinct, easy-to-understand format. PowerPoint makes it easy for you to substitute other characters for the regular round (or square) bullets that are part of the presentation template. But did you know you can add your own artwork easily to create customized bullets?

Just display the Bullets And Numbering dialog box and click Picture. If you want to choose one of the snazzy bullets shown in **Figure B** (by default, PowerPoint 2007 includes bullets from Office Online), simply click the bullet you want to use and choose OK. If you want to add your own art, click Import. Then, navigate to the image you want to use (a stylized version of your company logo? The staff mascot? A thumbnail picture of your product?), select it, and click Open.

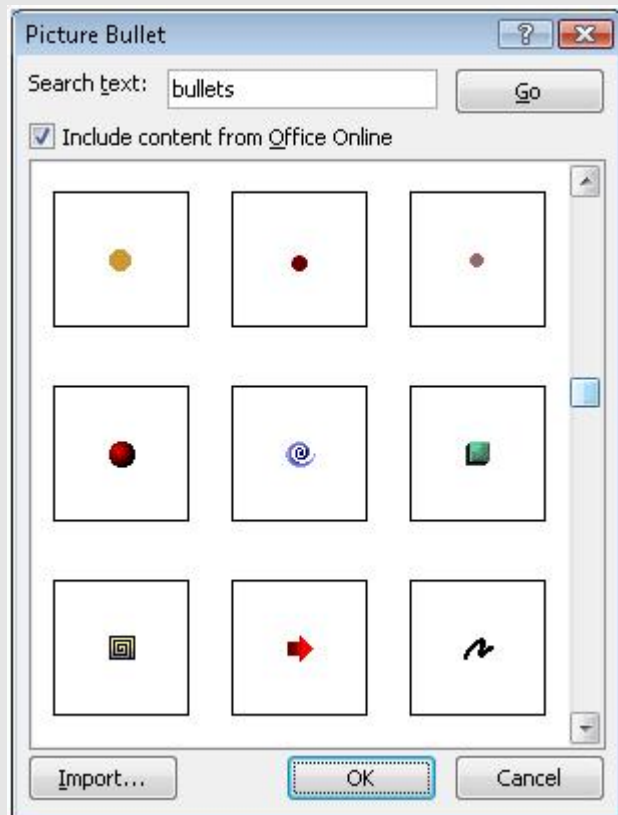


Figure B

