

Introduction

Why did I feel the need to write this book? Because so many business professionals have asked me how I create the slide makeovers that I use in the customized workshops they attend. I take slides that the participants are already using and I show them how effective those slides could be. Naturally, they ask how I do it because they want a repeatable process they can follow.

I am not a designer. I have no graphics background and no design training. I have an undergraduate degree in Chemical Engineering and I have an MBA. So how did I figure out how to select and create effective presentation visuals? Frankly I had to think about the answer for quite a while. Years in fact.

In 2013 I once again started documenting and reviewing how I determine which visual would work in a certain situation. I've done this before, and shared some of my past approaches in my previous books. This time I was determined to find a step-by-step approach that any business professional could use. One that would work for almost any message a business professional would communicate.

In the fall of 2013 I started incorporating my new approach into my workshops. I needed to see how typical corporate presenters would react. Could they follow the approach? Would they find it easy to use? Almost immediately the feedback was very positive. A typical business professional with no design or graphics background could use the model that I had developed.

After teaching this approach for over a year, I decided it had proven its worth in the marketplace and it was time to share it in a book so others could also benefit. The process of writing this book has further refined and focused the approach. I have started using this refined approach in my work and it is effective.

I call my approach the HVF Approach, which stands for Headline, Visual, and Focus. The next chapter gives an overview of the approach.

The main focus of this book is the Visual step in the approach, which is the selection and creation of visuals for slides. Why? Because corporate presenters told me they need the most help with this area. The default approach of using overloaded bullet slides, entire spreadsheets copied from Excel, confusing default graphs, and the occasional poorly formatted diagram is not good enough. Audiences expect more from presenters today.

This book will help business professionals of all levels. If you are in an analyst or specialist role, you will be able to create slides that your executives can use in front of senior management. If you are in a management or executive role, you will have ideas on how to quickly improve the slides your staff creates for you. And when you want to spend less time revising their slides, get them a copy of this book and call me to deliver a customized workshop for the team.

There are almost 200 example visuals in this book and when looking at them you will notice that they are not high end design. There is no shading, gradients, and other techniques designers use. In fact, most of the examples use the default colors for the default PowerPoint template. Why? Because most corporate presenters don't want to become designers and they are restricted by the corporate PowerPoint template as to which colors and styles they can use. I want you to see examples that you will be able to create using the tools you already have and a few extra skills I share.

You will also notice that some of the terms or acronyms on the example visuals aren't easy to understand or don't make sense. That is because many of the examples are taken from the work I have done for my clients. I have tried to keep the slides substantially the same so you can see what that visual looks like in a real presentation. I changed some of the names, terms, or acronyms to hide the identity of the source.

Whenever you see a person's name in an example visual, it has been created from a random name generator and is not the name of the person at my client organization.

The focus of this book is not to list every visual that has ever been created. There are plenty of websites that list a lot more visuals than I have included here. This book will help business professionals select and create the visuals that are most likely to be effective in communicating key messages to business audiences.

In fact, there is a section close to the end of the book that lists a number of visuals that people may have expected me to include, but I left out on purpose. These visuals are excluded because either they do not effectively convey a concise message, or they are mostly used in academic or scientific situations, not business situations. Instead of using these visuals, use the alternative visuals I suggest that work better for business presentations.

There are a number of examples and links to resources that I am not able to include in this book, but I want you to have access to them. So check the last section of the book for the website and password where you can see more examples of great visuals, access written and video tutorials on creating visuals in Excel and PowerPoint, and get any updates to the book after it is published.

I am convinced more than ever before that business professionals can create effective presentation visuals using the HVF Approach in this book. You do not need to have any design or graphics background. You just need the desire to learn and the commitment to apply this approach to your presentations. If you invest the time in improving your presentations, your audience will notice, you will have a greater impact, and your career will advance more quickly.