

Mark

When presenting facts and figures, beware of data-dumping. This is when you fill your slides with more information than your audience can easily digest. Is *this* a familiar scenario in the presentations *you* attend? ...

Presenter

OK, now, you'll find full details of the risk management model in the report in front of you, but here is a simple overview of how the system works ...

Mark

'Simple overview'? Yeah, right! A helpful guideline to avoid data-dumping is if your audience needs more than five seconds to get the message of your visual, you've got too much data!

Now, it's true that some audiences – technical ones, especially – want *all* the details. And some speakers are expected to post a copy of their slides on the company intranet after their presentation, so they need to read like a full report. But this is a big mistake. What you end up with is what presentations designer Garr Reynolds calls 'slideuments' – too superficial to be proper documents and too overloaded to be effective slides.

So what can you do? You've got four options. Option one: edit. Keep most of your data in reserve – to hand, in case you need it – but only show the most important stuff. Put the rest in a report. Option two: have more visuals. If you must include everything, the least you can do is spread it out over more slides. Option three: use a technique known as 'a reveal'. This is when you use the 'custom animation' function on your slideware to show your data bit by bit, like this ... or – show it all, but then quickly zoom in on the relevant parts, like this

Option four: make sure you put all your key figures into a memorable context. Listen to this

Presenter

Did you know that 97.25% of the world's water is undrinkable saltwater, and of the mere 2.75% that is fresh, only 0.005% is easily accessible surface water, half of which is polluted, causing the death of five million people a year?

Mark

Er, excuse me?

Presenter

That means if all the water in the world was poured into a bucket, only a spoonful would be drinkable. A further spoonful would be enough to kill the total population of Norway ... in a year.

Mark

OK, right, now I get it! Whoa! Those are frightening statistics. Remember, the figures *never* speak for themselves. Complex numbers just leave people cold. To make them meaningful, they need to be placed in context. Watch this presenter contextualising data in order to persuade their audience ...

Presenter

Do you know how much spam is costing you annually?

I happen to have the official figures. The amount of energy we use to transmit, process and filter spam amounts to thirty-three billion kilowatt-hours every year.

Thirty-three billion. It's enough electricity to power two point four million homes.

That's more than the total number of homes in Budapest, Warsaw and Vienna. It's enough electricity to produce the greenhouse gas emissions for three point one million cars.

That's more than the total number of cars in London. Spam isn't just wasting our *time* – it's wasting our *money*. Depending on how much we pay for our electricity, it's probably costing us altogether at least five billion dollars annually. But what can we do? After all, it's not us sending out all this spam, is it? Would it surprise you to learn that eighty percent of the energy wasted by spam comes not from spamming, but from end-users, like you and me, deleting the junk as we search for the email we want? To deal with the threat, my company has taken spam filtering technology to the new level. We stop spam at source.

Mark

For a presenter, carefully selected facts and figures can be powerfully persuasive. But, bombard your audience with too many, and they rapidly lose their power. Remember, in an age of information overload, less is more.