East Midlands Regional Event – 9th October 2012: Presenting Powerful Presentations

At some point we have all attended meetings, seminars and conferences where too much information is relayed using presentation software. However, how can we improve our presence and deliver powerful and meaningful presentations?

At our first East Midlands event we were delighted that James Turner, Instructus Chief Operating Officer, led an excellent training session about improving our presentation visual aids and commentary.

After networking and hot food, the session began by discussing how to improve our presenting styles.

Although it was not a training session about how to use PowerPoint, James highlighted that it is the most widely used software - but that most of us use it badly. This is because we often rely on it being the star of the show rather than us, as a presenter. Visual aids should be just that. They are there to support you and enhance your message.

Some top tips included:

♦   Create your own PowerPoint template
♦   Stick to a subtle and professional look and feel to your presentation. Avoid overusing animation
♦   Remove as many bullet points and text from your slides as possible
♦   Use no more than three or four colours. The most successful colour pairing on slides is a blue background with yellow text.
♦   Only use high quality graphics and photographs
♦   Use graphical information very carefully. Think about how your message is conveyed
♦   It is far better to prepare a detailed written handout that your audience can take away than to try to cram it on to the slide – and then read from it.

After a period of discussion we were encouraged to look at example slides, and critique what was required of the presenter to make them successful. We then looked at the simple rules of using flip charts. James was quick to point out that these are great for groups of fewer than 30, but that you need to think about the messages you wish to convey.

Tips included:

♦ **Pre-prepare if possible**
♦ **Number your flipchart pages**
♦ **Use a blue or black thick pen. Red is good for emphasising points**
♦ **Use large printed letters and capitals with plenty of space. Avoid overuse of words**
♦ **Pre-sketch any diagrams using pencil. The audience won't see this**
♦ **Only use the top two-thirds of your page**

What we found most helpful was the guidance on how to write and structure effective presentations. This started with watching an example presentation and then identifying its structure. We then learned, in a group activity, about the importance of positive openings and endings; repeating regularly; making the material relevant to the audience; and how to engage.

We went away from the session considering the 'elevator test' – and how we can look for ways to improve the clarity of our presentations. Always go for simplicity and ways to connect with your audience.

Thanks to James for providing an excellent insight into presenting powerful presentations.