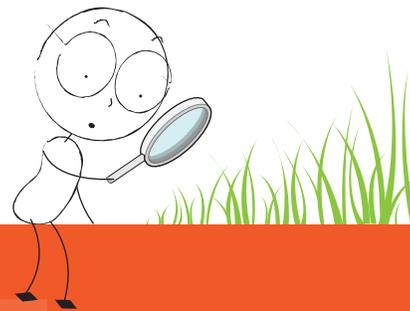


How to make a BORING subject INTERESTING



52 ways that
even a nerd can
be heard

Geni Whitehouse

2 A Matter of Entitlement

Finding the Right Title
For Your Presentation

CHAPTER 2

A Matter of Entitlement:

Finding the Right Title for Your Presentation

When I was working on the journalism staff at my high school newspaper, I can remember laboring for hours over the headline. A good headline had to be both compelling—so it could grab the reader’s attention—and concise, so it could fit in whatever space was allocated.

Just like headlines for newspaper articles, presentation titles are important because they “sell” your message. If the title doesn’t grab your readers or your audience, they aren’t going to stick around to hear whatever you are trying to say.

I think coming up with a good title is one of the most fun parts of crafting a presentation. You get to switch to the un-nerdy side of your brain and dig for some creative insights. Sometimes the title comes first and then the presentation follows. Other times, you get all of your ideas for a message fully formed and then the snappy title comes to mind.

A good title can keep people guessing and can even be the memorable scrap of information that allows other people to spread your message for you. So keep it short but make it memorable.

Here are some of the approaches I’ve used to come up with my own little piece of entitlement.

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Tie Your Message Around Numbers

Numbers aren't always boring.
Where do most people love to see numbers?

In song titles: 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover

In late-night TV: Letterman's top 10

On book covers: Like this one

You get the idea. Titles that incorporate a number are one of the most popular ways to get a reader's attention.

Try using this approach for your topic. Use a Top 10 list or similar framework to organize your message—but make sure you keep your audience's perspective in mind.

By the way, this method works especially well for accountants. Their world is numbers. So if they are your audience—it's gonna be a slam dunk. (Note my clever use of sports analogies. This always works for male audiences or UNC Tarheels...)



Recycle, Reuse, Repurpose.

Nerds of a feather flock together.

Are there some expressions you've heard one too many times? Try repurposing them to serve your own selfish needs. Why start from scratch when you can take someone else's tired over-used topic and convert it to a title for your next presentation?

I live in Northern California, so if I hear about global warming or "going green" one more time I might just scream. But in an effort to save my sanity, I might just do a presentation called "Stop Global Boring" about teaching scientists to make better presentations.

Same topic, but delivered to a room full of accountants? Since my fellow accountants are constantly talking about GAAP or Generally Accepted Accounting Principles*, I might title my presentation "Generally Accepted Presentation Principles." Who says you have to be totally original?

Sick of hearing "think outside of the box"? How about "think outside of the Milky Way" for your next presentation at a Star Wars convention?

I've got a million of these things.**

* Reason #1265 you might want to avoid accountants at a dinner party.

** Reason #472 you might want to avoid me at a dinner party.

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Use Juxtapositioning to Your Advantage

If you find yourself in a Scrabble game and want to use “juxtapose” it is worth a whopping 25 points. You can send me my 5-point commission (or just the letter K) if you use it.

Juxtapositioning means putting two unrelated ideas together. And as useful as it is for Scrabble, it’s an even more useful idea for creating a compelling presentation title. By placing two items that you would never expect (or frankly hope) to see in the same sentence together, you make your audience curious. They’ll be dying to know, “How in the world is he/she going to tie these two items together?”

One of my favorite examples of juxtapositioning is the “Shoes and Cheese Store” that actually exists in Tennessee. What were the owner’s of that store thinking? The only common bond I can come up with is smell—both cheese and shoes have a distinctive odor. I still regret never actually going in that store to find out how they merged these two items. I can only hope that the cheese was not tucked into various shoes so that you could sample your favorite Asiago while you were trying on a nice pair of Bandolinos. And talk about pairings. “Does Swiss or Gouda go better with these Hushpuppy loafers?”

You can see how the art of juxtapositioning opens up worlds of possibilities and gets the creative juices flowing for a great presentation.

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Let Your Audience Be the Judge

“Brown vs. The Board of Education”

“Roe v. Wade”

If it works for the Supreme Court, it can work for you.

Let’s say you are trying to make a point on a particular subject. Give your presentation a title that befits a court case, and you’ll intrigue your audience from the beginning. They’ll expect you to show both sides of the argument in your presentation (and of course you’ll deliver.)

List all of the pros and all of the cons and then let your audience reach their own conclusions. You might even treat them like the jury at a trial. Of course, you need to find plenty of information that supports your point of view. And it wouldn’t hurt if the opposing arguments were on the weak side. Hey, this isn’t a matter of life or death. We’re talking about a presentation here.

By the way, this is a great example of how your choice of title can drive the whole format of your presentation—making it interesting from beginning to end.