7 rules for PowerPoint simplicity

Using PowerPoint visuals that only Einstein could decipher doesn't make the presenter look smarter. Complicated visuals will cause an audience to focus less on what the presenter is saying and more on trying to figure out the images.

So, when creating a PowerPoint presentation, follow these seven rules for keeping visuals clear and powerful:

1. Follow the "Six-by-six rule": Use no more than six words per line and no more than six lines per visual.

2. Apply the "billboard" test to each slide or transparency: "Could people read and understand the information while driving?"

3. Realize that people may forget lists, but they'll recall images. Just don't overdo the graphics.

4. Avoid using "chart junk," fancy shadings and patterns in most drawing software. You'll create the "Two C" effect—comical and confusing—by trying too hard to jazz up a chart.

5. Think "thin" when deciding on line thickness and "discreet" when picking colors. *Reason:* Thick lines and garish colors will distract readers.

6. Use the "one" principle: Limit each visual to one idea, one concept or one point.

7. Put it to the one-minute test: If the audience will need more than 60 seconds to figure it out, it's too complex.