

## The Lunacy of the Leave Behind (May 08)

By Rick Altman

I am a pragmatic being. At my core, I understand the values of efficiency and expedience. I embrace the art of compromise and understand that life often gets in the way of ideals and theories. Reality is often harsh and not adjusting to it often harsher.

Yet there is one principle relevant to our community on which I do not yield. One ideal to which I hold stubbornly. At this windmill, I gladly tilt: it is the notion that a presentation content creator can create one set of slides that will function ably for the projected content and for the printed material.

This is an impossible notion. Everything else in life might be possible if you work hard, but not this one thing. In my 15+ years as a presentation consultant, I have not once seen it done successfully.

### **Not once!**

When you set forth to create content for a presentation, you work with two forces that are fundamentally at odds with one another. You want to create projected content that is compelling and you want to provide information that is useful. The pragmatic being in you usually prevails, and in the interest of time, you look for a happy medium.

Unfortunately, that twain shall not meet. Nary.

As discomfiting as it may be for content creators, a properly-prepared set of visuals for a presentation will fail as leave-behind collateral. Your slides are supposed to be incomplete; they are supposed to be no more than the tease for the words that you will speak. If they say too much, they inhibit your ability to tell the story.

My colleague and friend Dave Paradi ([www.thinkoutsidetheslide.com](http://www.thinkoutsidetheslide.com)) conducts an annual survey of the most annoying qualities of a PowerPoint presentation. The current survey lists the following as its top three:

1. Speaker reads the slides to the audience
2. Speaker creates full sentences instead of bullet points
3. Text is too small to read

All three of these annoyances are inevitable when content creators attempt to have their slides double as printouts. In other words, this one issue might be responsible for ALL THREE of the sins that have been voted most egregious.

And I'll go one step further: overladen slides that try to tell too much turn otherwise smart people into blithering idiots. Can PowerPoint make you stupid? When there is too much blather being projected, the answer is most decidedly yes.

It is practically a litmus test that we all must take. *How are your visuals? Would they make really lousy printouts? Yes? Great, you're all set to go!*

We live in a world of compromises, but this is one place where you cannot succumb to the expedient route. You must think of your projected content and your printed content as two distinct projects. Otherwise, they both might fail, and you will fail.

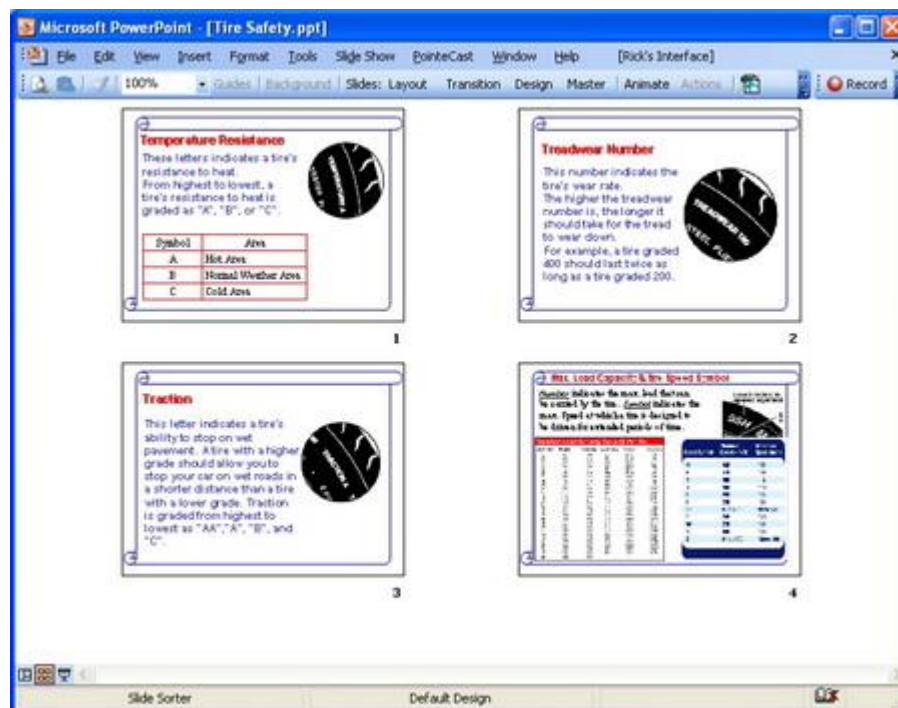
A perfect example of this dynamic came to us recently during our ongoing invitation to see work from the presentation community. The Saudi Iron & Steel Company created a short slide deck on the all-important topic of tire safety. There is probably a lot that you do not know about tire maintenance; I learned several things from surveying a few slides in this deck. Any soccer mom or softball dad would be heavily emotionally invested in this topic.

But when Figure 1 arrives on screen, is it going to have an impact? Of course not. And when the well-intentioned presenter begins to speak, it will be almost impossible to avoid reciting the slide. And before you know it...instant Death by PowerPoint.



Set aside the dubious design motif used here – the real crime committed was when the creator tried to have it both ways and create a presentation deck that could double as printouts.

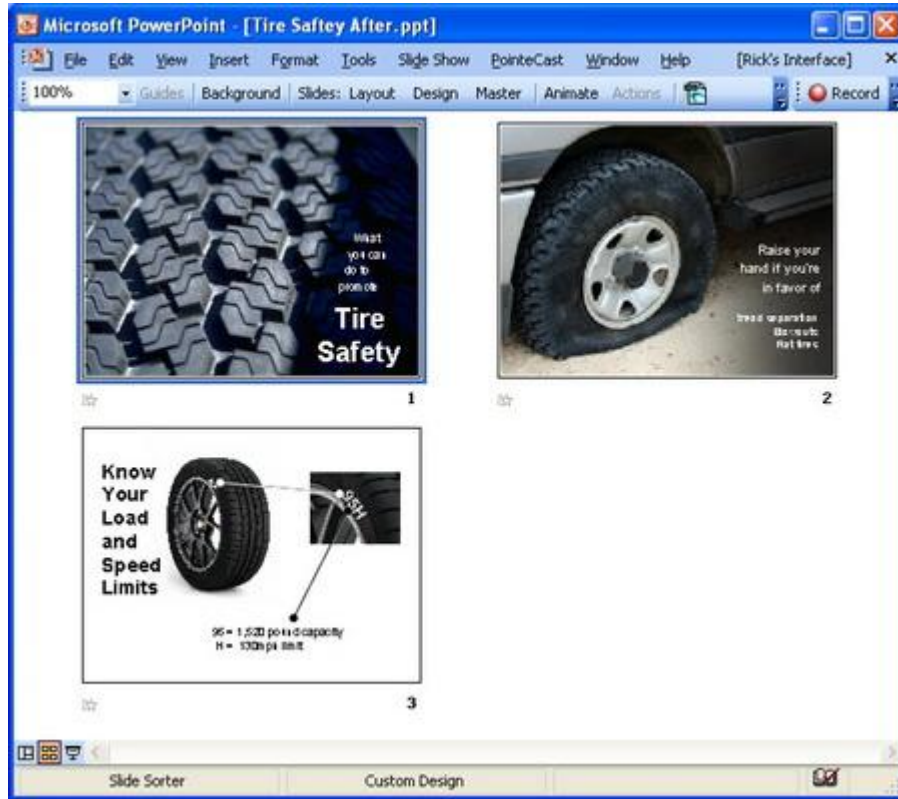
Figure 2 shows the continued decline in what could have been a noble effort: educating an audience about the different qualities of tires and how understanding them would make your car safer.



All of these words make it impossible for a presenter to get to where he or she really needs to be: appealing to the emotional side of a story and getting the audience to feel its weight. Very few audience members are moved to action by what their brains tell them; there must be an emotional component to

the story. Tire safety is low-lying fruit to any parent of a young child who needs to be driven hither and yon to this playdate and that gymnastics class.

My makeover of this deck attempts to make the emotional case, while allowing the presenter to inform the audience on the important specifications of tires. As you can see in Figure 3, if these slides were printed and delivered, they would not be very helpful. They require more complete leave-behind information.



Here are a few ideas and techniques to help you deal with the unavoidable fact that you will need to prepare your material twice—once for the presentation and once for printouts.

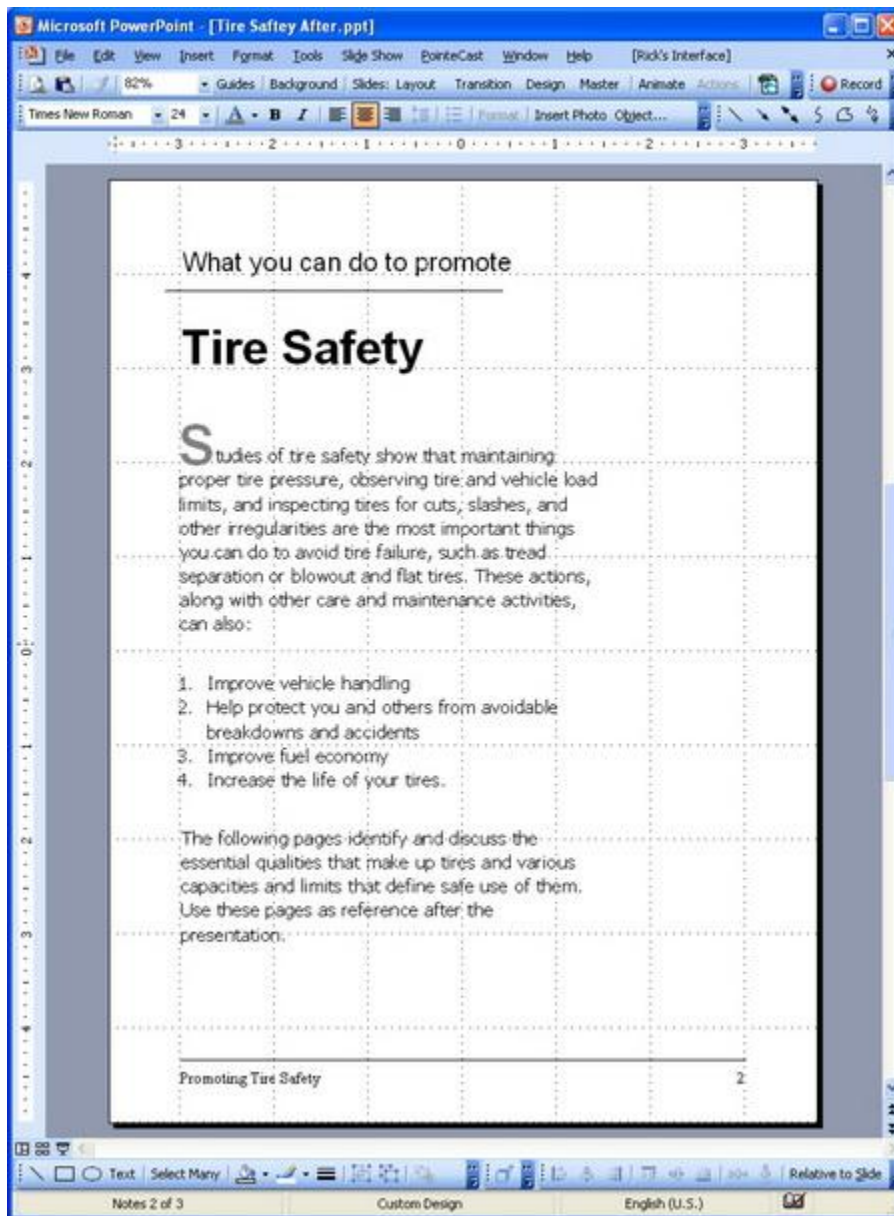
### 1. Acknowledge it early

The best time to prepare the detail for handouts is before you go anywhere near PowerPoint. Taking notes...composing your thoughts...fleshing out your ideas...these are all great things to do long before you think about how you might engage your audience on multiple levels. When you prepare the meat of your presentation first, you are more likely to pick a better tool for the printouts, like a publishing application or a word processor with a good design template. And having poured over the details to this degree, you are in a better position to then choose more compelling visuals to help you tell the story to your audience.

### 2. Use Notes View

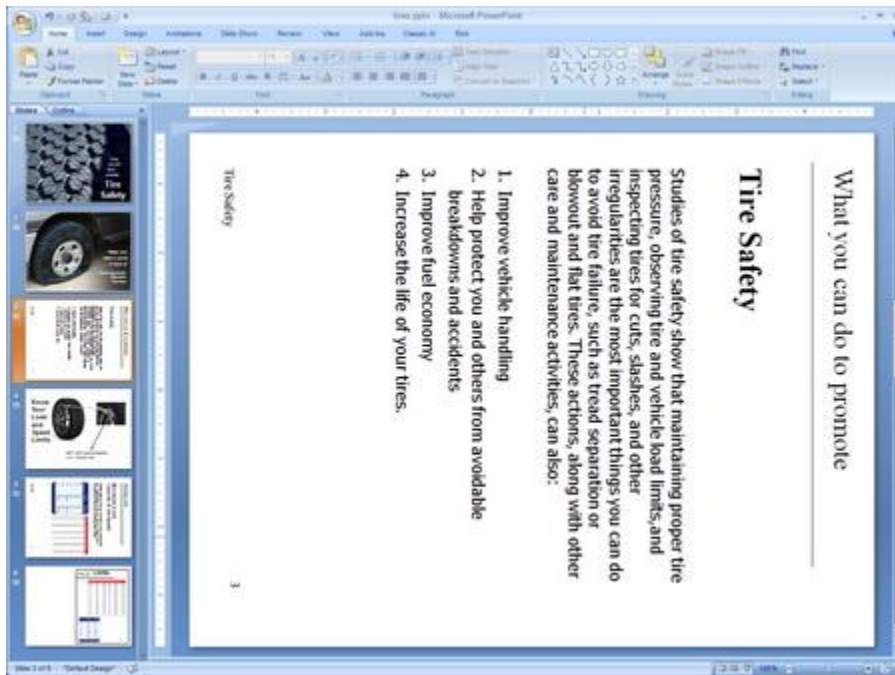
If you or your boss committed the popular sin of writing out an entire speech on the slides themselves, you are just one cut-and-paste maneuver away from salvation. That verbiage belongs in the Notes view, but this is not to suggest that it be there for the speaker to refer to. Having complete sentences in your notes is just as dangerous as displaying them on screen—it could turn you into a drone either way.

The idea here is that your Notes pages become your printouts, to be delivered to your audience members during or after the presentation. Notes view has its own master and can be customized far beyond what most users realize. Figure 4 shows the degree to which Notes view can be designed for optimized leave-behind material. The text here is a direct splice from the original slide.



### 3. Use Version 2007 Slide Masters

The current version of PowerPoint—still foreign and unfamiliar to many—has a few compelling features that might merit your taking a closer look. One of them is the new and flexible layouts that are now part of the slide mastering creation process. Figure 5 shows a layout that is actually rotated 90 degrees, making it optimal for standard printouts. When you apply this layout to a slide, all of the content is rotated to fit a standard portrait layout.



In this scenario, you would either keep hidden the slides that are part of the printouts, or create two custom shows, one for display and one for print.

**The value of either of these strategies, using Notes view or V2007's slide masters, is your ability to keep the printout material in the presentation file itself, instead of having to deal with two separate files.**

But that's the only free lunch you get here. If you try to cut a corner with leave-behind content, you are guaranteed to fail. If you just suck it up and accept the fact that you need to go the extra mile, your audience will love you for it, and your presentations will be much, much better as a result.

### **About the Author**

Rick Altman is the host of PowerPoint Live and the author of Why Most PowerPoint Presentations Suck...and how you can make them better.

©2008 Rick Altman