

A Clear Presentation Danger

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<http://govm.geospatial-solutions.com/gssgovm/content/printContentPopup.jsp?id=577970>

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By: Art Kalinski

Several years ago, there was a "Dilbert" cartoon in which the title character was giving a talk, and he had just reached the 397th slide in his presentation. An audience member who was actually paying attention could take no more with a scream, he passed out. Wally, who had been sleeping, examined the unfortunate soul and declared him a victim of "PowerPoint Poisoning." This may seem funny, but it strikes too close to reality.

Over the past year, I've attended more than a dozen GIS-related conferences and watched at least a hundred presentations, most of which were conducted in Microsoft PowerPoint. It's been years since this now-ubiquitous software made its entrance, yet I still find myself suffering through absolutely horrible presentations. PowerPoint has made slide creation so easy that neurotic presenters with no skills, no taste, and no judgment are free to make us squirm in our seats. I've finally reached my limit, and I feel compelled to get on my soapbox.

First, a little history from an old guy who did presentations in the early eighties the hard way: with a grease pencil on overhead projector glass. In the late eighties I was lucky enough to be at a command where the graphics department could create professional-looking transparencies or 35-millimeter slides. The slides looked good, but because of the cost and hassle involved, presenters thought through their points carefully and used the slides sparingly.

In the early nineties, Harvard Graphics and PowerPoint hit the streets along with LCD projectors, and what should have been a wonderful tool quickly became a curse to many. Edward Tufte, the well-known author and Yale professor of information design, railed against PowerPoint. He used the famous 1869 graphic by Charles Joseph Minard of Napoleon's march to Moscow as a superb example of the right way to communicate data graphically. This graph is still considered...

For the rest of the story and graphic,

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