Chapter 21
Teaching with PowerPoint in the Net Generation

Chris Gurrie
The University of Tampa, USA

Brandy Fair
Grayson County College, USA

ABSTRACT
This chapter focuses on students’ perceptions of their professors’ use, abuse, and success with PowerPoint presentation software. Both recent literature about the Net Generation and this study show that the novelty of PowerPoint is wearing off. The researchers found that student perceptions ranged from highly critical of professors’ uses of PowerPoint, to delightfully engaged by the use of PowerPoint as a teaching tool. This research could benefit anyone looking to retool or calibrate current PowerPoint practices. The Net Generation of students has grown up with PowerPoint; its continued use is nothing new or novel when discussing student engagement and the transfer of knowledge. However, a return to best practices of teaching and engagement while implementing PowerPoint may help today’s learners better retain course materials.

INTRODUCTION
Blank stares during boring lectures are nothing new to educators and students alike. It only takes a stroll through a college hallway to see instructors speaking with low lighting, PowerPoint screens ablaze, and students trying to stay awake, or worse yet, busily doing other tasks on iPhones, laptops, or notepads. Multitasking used to be a term that referred to the ability to do laundry while cooking dinner, or juggling projects while managing to maintain daily tasks. Yet, today, the Net Generation claims to have an excellent ability to multitask—but it may be during a professors’ lecture or a trainer’s lesson. Is this a bad thing? Has an overuse and lack of novelty with PowerPoint led students down the path of doing other things while “listening” to a speaker drone on during a PowerPoint lesson?
Teaching with PowerPoint in the Net Generation

Literature in this chapter supports the idea that the novelty of PowerPoint has worn off. This is really not surprising considering the program has been around for almost 30 years. The Net Generation, generally accepted to have been born in 1980 and later (also called GenY and Millennials), has had access to PowerPoint its whole academic life—no novelty there. So, as educators, it is important to rethink ways of engaging this group of learners to better express messages. This chapter highlights issues of PowerPoint in education and considers how those issues could help or hinder Net Generational learning and what could be done to improve teaching and learning.

BACKGROUND

In 1990 the first version of PowerPoint was released for Windows software. The software was originally created to enhance presentations and allowed for ease of presentation by the presenter. Adler and Elmhorst (2005) discussed how a good PowerPoint presentation is governed by good practice. For example, slides should consist of seven lines with no more than seven items per line, known as the “7×7” rule. Although some texts suggest a “6×6” rule or “8×8” rule the overarching idea is to keep the slides as simple as possible (Ball, 2009; Dobson, 2006; Gareis, 2007; Leyes, 2007).

In addition to simplicity, it is important to analyze the listeners, ‘learners,’ and/or audience’s perceptions of the material being presented, keeping in mind that people remember more when they are able to see, hear, and write material being introduced (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). One of the best ways to use PowerPoint as a teaching tool would be to allow learners to see material and write notes on said material. However, this is not always the case in higher education classrooms despite being an important argument supporting the use of PowerPoint as a teaching tool. Many professors argue that using the program enables students to learn more information through a variety of channels, such as the instructor speaking and having the notes posted onto the screen simultaneously, thus appealing to the different learning styles that are present in the audience (Barnes, 2000; Doumont, 2005).

The authors of this chapter, being instructors in the communication field, have seen an array of issues dealing with PowerPoint and its use by faculty. Student advisees complain of lectures where professors pack data into 60 slides or more. Educators grumble about students using PowerPoint as a crutch to rely on when presenting final reports and papers. These issues are not unique; they affect today’s learner group which arguably consists primarily of the Net Generation. The authors of this chapter suggest that there are better ways to reach this population for a more effective message and better teaching. Students are bored with current approaches to using PowerPoint and practitioners need to make the effort to address this issue.

Net Generation

According to Eubanks (2006), understanding people according to aggregated characteristics of those born in the same time period became popular with the emergence of the baby boom generation. Today’s college students are no exception and are being labeled based on these characteristics that link them in age and in social characteristics. Eubanks defined the current group of traditional-aged college students as those born between 1980 and 2000 and calls them “Millennials.” Eubanks was careful to note that others have researched this group and have given them different names including Generation Y, Generation Me, and Net Generation.

Raines (2002) found the learning preferences of the Net Generation include teamwork, technology, structure, entertainment and excitement, and experiential activities. Millennials expect instructors to use technology within the college