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A Neuromarketer's Presentation Advice

A.K. Pradeep, founder and chief executive of NeuroFocus, says that how you display visual information will enhance—or detract from—the effectiveness of your overall message

By [Carmine Gallo](#)



A young man sits in a comfortable chair, watching TV ads and flipping through stacks of marketing materials. Sensors and wires attached to his scalp measure electrical signals that represent

subconscious brain activity. This scenario plays out daily at Berkeley (Calif.)-based [NeuroFocus](#), one of the world's leading companies in the burgeoning field of neuromarketing. One 30-second commercial can generate 5 billion data points that NeuroFocus researchers will

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analyze to determine its overall effectiveness. The company sells its findings to clients such as Microsoft ([MSFT](#)), Google ([GOOG](#)), and Citigroup ([C](#)). I recently spent time with A.K. Pradeep, founder and chief executive officer of NeuroFocus, to learn how his findings apply to presenting visual information.

Here are three tips you can employ in your next presentation:









1. Place images on the slide's left, text on the right.

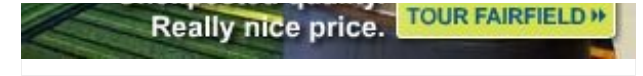
Items in the left field of vision are interpreted by the right hemisphere of the brain, which is better at assessing and processing images. Simply put, the brain prefers this layout. Pradeep says most marketers, advertisers, and website designers fail to follow this fundamental rule. He estimates that as many as 75 percent of websites get it wrong. In my own experience as a communications coach, I find that most PowerPoint presentations break this rule as well. Photos and images are often placed all over the slides, with no insight as to how audience brains will best process the information. Frankly, most people just don't know because the science is so new.

2. Use neutral faces. "Our brains are irresistibly drawn to human faces," says Pradeep. NeuroFocus often recommends that clients portray faces in packaging designs, websites, and ads. With this caveat: The brain prefers ambiguity. That means effective packaging, ads, and presentations should show faces that are neither smiling nor frowning. Check out the models in fashion magazines or cosmetics ads—few smile or frown. There's a reason why the *Mona Lisa* has been one of history's most compelling works of art. People are drawn to the puzzle she represents.

"The ambiguity grabs us every time," says Pradeep. As a viewer's brain redoubles its effort to figure out the puzzle, it forms new connections to register the information. Says Pradeep: "If you apply the principle of ambiguity to some—not all—of your advertising and presentations, you engage the brain to an extra degree. And by doing so, you increase the chances that the overall message you're conveying will be better and more fully absorbed by the subconscious."

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3. Apply unique fonts. Font structure plays an important role in advertising, packaging, and presentations. That's because novel stimuli activate both attention and memory retention. Novelty—especially in font choices—contributes to interest, surprise, attraction, and purchase decisions.

"Packages that have interesting, unique, or funky fonts convey a sense of whimsy and a sense of the product," explains Pradeep. Coca-Cola ([KO](#)) is an excellent example of a brand whose font expresses the brand, even from a distance. Now I know why my PowerPoint designer pushes me to use nontraditional fonts such as Myriad Pro, instead of relying on the standard Arial or Times New Roman. She intuitively knows what brain science is confirming. The brain is attracted to novelty.

To reinforce the concept of novelty, Pradeep uses the analogy of a monkey swinging through the trees, spotting a plant with a new kind of fruit. The fruit could represent a new nutritional source for the monkey (a benefit). First the monkey must notice it (pay attention). Second, he has to remember where he saw it. So use unique or unusual fonts—within limits. Pradeep has discovered that packages using more than two kinds and three sizes of fonts suffer major drops in effectiveness vs. packages with fewer fonts and font sizes. I would extrapolate that the same applies to the visual presentation of material in a PowerPoint deck.

These findings are intuitive to many of us. I'm in the midst of judging a presentation contest and am noticing that many of the entries follow the principles Pradeep has discovered with the help of electrodes. They use effective images, ambiguous faces, and novel fonts. I don't think designers are following these rules because they've studied brain science; they just find it appealing. Still, as Pradeep likes to repeat, now that you know what the brain prefers, follow the rules.

[Carmine Gallo](#) is the communication skills coach for the world's most admired brands. He is a popular speaker and the author of several books including [The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#) and [The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#). More of Gallo's columns are available in his biweekly [series](#).

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