



Designing Digital Signage Content in PowerPoint

DIGITAL SIGNAGE WHITE PAPER

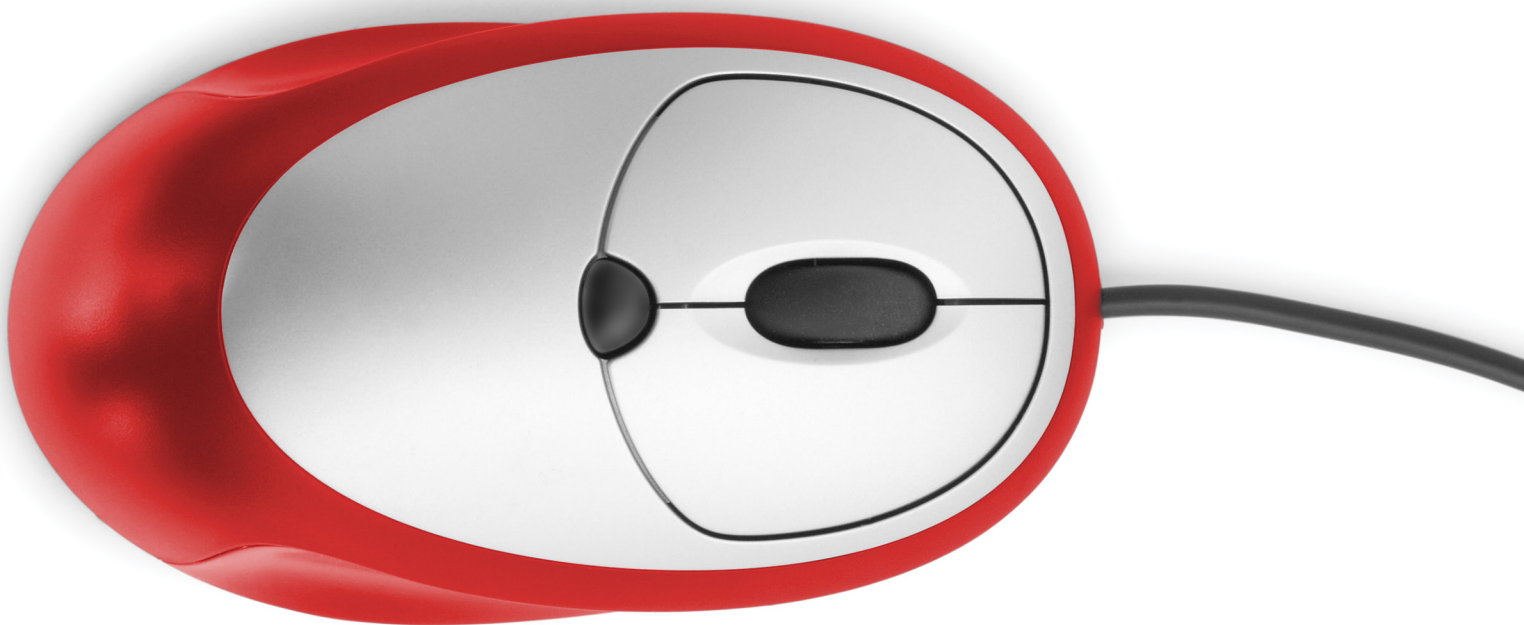


Table of Contents

Aspect Ratios	3
Color Schemes	4
Using the Slide Master	4
Backgrounds & Graphics	5
Avoid Clutter	5
Tighter Text	6
Text Styles	6
Using SmartArt	7
Animations & Transitions	7
Resource Links	7

We're here to help! If you have any questions about your application or our products, please contact us at **800.572.4935** or **salesteam@visix.com**.

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We have another white paper that details [Design Standards for Digital Signage Content](#), and that's a great place to start for general design advice. We highly recommend you read that paper in concert with this one.

In this paper, we may overlap some of those topics, but we'll drill down to cover PowerPoint presentations and slides designed with the specific intention of putting them up on the big screen.

Aspect Ratios

Aspect ratio is relationship between width and height of an image or a display. Some of the most common aspect ratios are 4:3, 16:9, and 9:16:

- Typically 4:3 and 16:9 are used for horizontal messages in digital signage.
- 16:9 is good for showing messages that require more space than a 4:3 message allows.
- 9:16 is good for displaying information vertically.



4:3



16:9



9:16

In digital signage (DS), we talk about aspect ratio in relation to the messages, the content blocks, the layouts and the displays. For the purposes of PowerPoint design, we are dealing with the aspect ratio of the messages.

The default aspect ratio in PowerPoint is 4:3, so if you haven't changed the page setup in PowerPoint, you are probably creating a 4:3 presentation. This is great because most of the messages you'll design for your DS software are going to be 4:3.

It's good to know the aspect ratio where your message will display before designing your content. We've all seen a digital sign with the message stretched or scrunched and cringed, which is what happens when the aspect ratio is wrong for the display. Checking your specs in advance can prevent your beautiful designs from being distorted when they get onto the screens.

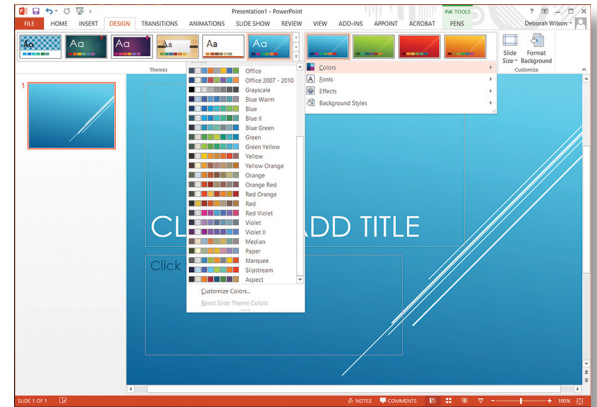


Color Schemes

When we talk about color schemes, we mean coordinated color combinations. It's more pleasing to the eye to see a harmonized visual presentation across the whole screen than a bunch of disparate designs that clash with each other.

Color schemes are important because they help create style and appeal for your digital signs:

- A basic color scheme will use at least two colors that look good together.
- It's a good idea to utilize the colors outlined in your organization's brand standards.
- Try to stay away from using too many colors in your scheme unless your brand allows it.



Contrast is key. Often times, you might hear someone say "I want my ads or message to 'POP'". What they're actually saying is "I want good contrast".

The contrast between colors is what makes it easy for us to see different elements of the message clearly. We want to use dark-colored text on light backgrounds and light-colored text on dark backgrounds for maximum legibility.

If you don't have set brand standards or need some inspiration, [Color Scheme Designer](#) is one of our favorite tools to create a scheme based on a few colors. [Adobe Kuler](#) can also create color palettes for you, or you can choose from the many palettes available on their website.

Looking at different websites is a great way to get inspiration for your color schemes. [Pinterest](#) is a good site for color scheme inspiration. And the website [Design Seeds](#) shows you that color inspiration can come from almost anything. It just has to look good, be eye-catching and not distract from the message.

Using the Slide Master

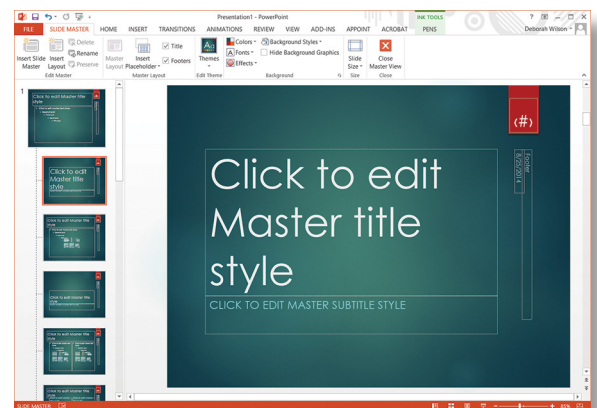
Master slides are very important when creating more than one slide in a presentation for your DS. The Slide Master feature in PowerPoint allows you to make global changes to many or all of your slides without having to make these changes to each slide individually. This can be a big timesaver.

Using the PowerPoint Slide Master allows you to:

- change font colors and styles for every slide
- add clipart or pictures to every slide
- add a footer or date to every slide

To access the PowerPoint Slide Master:

- Click on the View tab of the ribbon
- Click on the Slide Master button in the ribbon



Depending on which version of PowerPoint you're using, you may have the ability to add multiple design themes to a single presentation. There are many helpful tools that covers this topic more in depth [on the Microsoft website](#).

Backgrounds & Graphics

One of the things we should keep in mind as we design is that our backgrounds don't have to function like blank sheets of paper. You can integrate graphics and designs into the background to create a more dynamic and interesting message without taking away from the content of the message.



This message is a perfect example. In the background there's a faint image of a blueprint, as well as a screen of the letter U for our imaginary university. We get the point that the message is about a work zone and the need to be cautious; but, the image is more eye-catching and interesting because of the background, which reinforces the message without being intrusive.

Categorize and cross reference your backgrounds and images, so people can plan ahead what they'd like to use to create messages. One idea is to keep PDFs of all your images on your Intranet, so staff and students can access the information.

Keep your images fresh by swapping them out from time to time and creating different image libraries. That'll keep both your content creators and your audience interested in new messages.

Also, make sure to honor copyrights. It's easy to go grab an image from the web, but that's not the best idea. Instead, use royalty-free web sites to download quality images to build your messages. There are both free image sites and those that offer paid subscriptions. Three of the most popular are:

- [iStock](#)
- [Getty Images](#)
- [Shutterstock](#)

A Google search for "royalty-free images" will give you a huge array of options.

Avoid Clutter

Surprisingly, those very elements we use to create an attractive message can actually draw attention away from the message itself, giving the visual impression of "clutter".

If we put too many graphics, too much text, or a busy background into our design, viewers won't be able to recognize and understand the information in the short time that they see it on a digital sign. Remember that your goal is to communicate something. Don't let your point get lost in the decoration.

Test the images you're using by creating the message and putting it on a display. Walk past the message a few times to see how it appears to people as they pass the screen. If the image jumps out at you before the text, or the text is too hard to read, look for another image or dump the image altogether. Sometimes just the words are enough.

Tighter Text

Words on the screen are there to communicate a clear, concise message. Don't crowd your messages with too much text. Keep the type size large for readability at a distance, and present only the most important information.

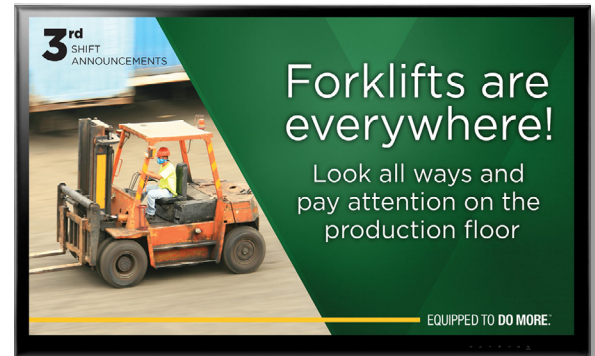
Try not to use more than three lines of text of five words each OR five lines of text of three words each. If you have a complex idea to get across, try video or a series of messages instead of trying to cram it all onto one announcement.

Tips to tighten up your text:

- Hit the high points – no need for extra words; use short phrases.
- Use bullet points – bullets and numbering are great ways to be concise, and help the eye quickly organize the information.
- Replace text with an image when possible but remember – do not to let the image overwhelm the message.

Things to keep in mind:

- Never bury the lead – put the most important information right up front.
- Drop unnecessary words – keep your messages, short, simple and to the point.
- Spell and punctuate correctly – mistakes detract from the authority of your message.
- Be specific about what your audience needs to do to act on your message.
- Present all the information your audience needs to act on the message.



Text Styles

Your brand standards may specify fonts to use in your communications. If not, pick fonts that enhance your message and keep the copy easy to read.

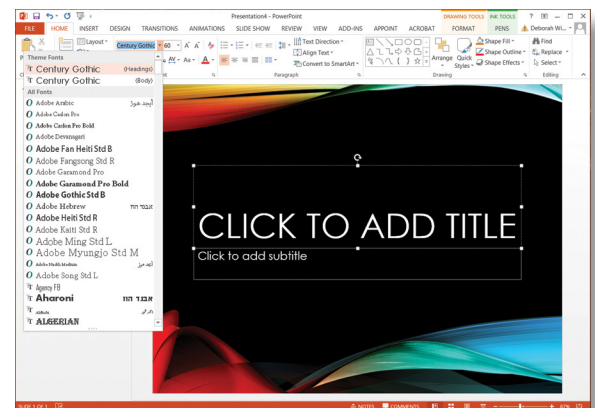
Legibility is your primary goal, so consider the size of all of the text on the screen (not just the headline). It's unfortunate when we see a message with a great design, big headline, medium message text, and the call to action is so small that no one can see it.

Remember that your audience may be looking at screens hung high in the air or from quite a distance – adjust text to meet their needs, not your design.

A “serif” font is a typeface that has small strokes on each character, like **Times New Roman**. Serif fonts are better for long text like books, because they help the human eye track from one word to the next.

Fonts like **Arial** that don't have serifs are called “sans serif” and are easier to read in short messages.

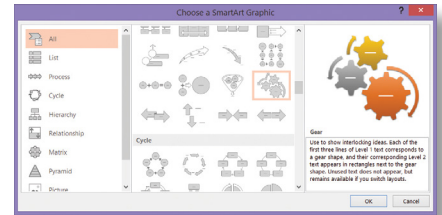
- Use bold, color and separation from other copy to call out text that should be read first.
- Don't use more than two fonts in one message because it will confuse the eye.
- Use italics sparingly, as they can be hard to read from a distance.



Using SmartArt

A good use of SmartArt in your presentation is customizing bullet points. SmartArt allows you to dress up your bullet points into more interesting graphics, and it's very easy to use.

First, type out your bullet points in a separate text box. Then, right click on the text and select Convert to SmartArt. Make your selection from the options presented. In newer versions of PowerPoint, start on the Insert tab and choose SmartArt in the ribbon, and then enter your text and format the SmartArt.



SmartArt can be styled with your color scheme, and you should do so whenever possible. If it doesn't match your color scheme, at least it should complement the overall design of your screen (like all elements in the slide should).

Animation & Transitions

If you're going to use animations, keep them simple. Every line of text in your message doesn't need to fly in from left field or spin around.

Again, your PowerPoint is probably only one item of many on the digital sign, so adding chaos won't draw attention – it will confuse the viewer. Even if it is the only thing on the screen, you only have your viewer's attention for a few seconds – don't waste that time on animation – use it to communicate the meat of your message:

- Keep it clean – Avoid adding too many animation effects or transitions.
- Keep it clear – Similar to the color scheme, find what works and stick to it.

There are many animations and transitions at your fingertips in the PowerPoint animations menu. Simpler is usually better – like appear, disappear and fade – which won't overpower your message. Animations that break the visual plane or border of the message can confuse your audience.

In terms of transition time, keep your content management software in mind. Most software requires you to set a specific number of seconds for your message to be displayed. It's better to use this feature and not use a transition time in PowerPoint, or you'll have to synchronize the two, which is cumbersome.

Resource Links

- Color Scheme Designer – <http://colorshemesdesigner.com/>
- Kuler – <https://kuler.adobe.com/>
- Pinterest – <http://pinterest.com/>
- Design Seeds – <http://design-seeds.com/>
- Microsoft PowerPoint templates – <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/powerpoint-templates-FX102828209.aspx>
- iStock – <http://www.istockphoto.com/>
- Getty Images – <http://www.gettyimages.com/>
- Shutterstock – <http://www.shutterstock.com/>
- Colour Lovers – <http://www.colourlovers.com/palettes>
- Color Spy -- <http://www.microtask.ca/colorspy.html>
- Tumblr – <http://www.tumblr.com/>

Want to learn more? Contact us at salesteam@visix.com.