



**ProPoint Graphics** Contributor



LEADERSHIP | 8/03/2011 @ 8:00AM | 129 views

## Let's Have a Party!

Last May an unlikely Swiss political party popped up on our radar. It bears noting here because it's the [Anti-PowerPoint Party](#). Founded by public speaking trainer Matthias Poehm, this is a real honest-to-god political party devoted to the extinction of bad presentations. Obviously, I've got a vested interest in this movement. And given the number of horrible presentations I see, I had half a mind to try to snag a position in the APPP Cabinet myself. But beyond the obvious, what's it all about? And what on earth is Mr. Poehm thinking?

According to the founder, the APPP wants to call attention to the untold ineffective and boring PowerPoint (and Keynote, Prezi, and other software assisted) presentations given in Switzerland and around the world every day. His stated hope is to rid the world of countless hours wasted in such presentations and thereby save the world billions. Mr. Poehm [estimates](#) that in Switzerland alone 2.1 billion Swiss Francs are lost paying people to sit through worthless PowerPoint presentations annually. To combat this, Mr. Poehm recommends two things: 1) use flip charts instead of presentation software; and 2) buy his book.

Mr. Poehm tries to quantify the damage, but his argument uses a stream of vague and at times nonsensical statistics without referencing a single source (See [The Solution to PowerPoint](#) for a good example). As far as I can tell, Mr. Poehm has absolutely no way of substantiating any of the data represented on his website. Given that, I can't really argue with the basic gist of the APPP's agenda. There are indeed lots of bad presentations out there and yeah, it'd be great if there weren't. But that's not really telling us anything new – everybody knows that.

As for solution #1, the flip chart, Mr. Poehm's point is simple. PowerPoint deadens a live presentation. Using more unsourced data, we are told a flip chart is three to five times more effective because it allows the speaker to more easily interact with the speaker's content and his audience. While Mr. Poehm reimagines Martin Luther King Jr's *I Have a Dream* speech as a [bad PowerPoint slideshow](#), I amuse myself thinking of Lincoln at Gettysburg with a flip chart by his side. To each his own, I guess. But again, I agree with the root premise. Reading bulleted text from an on-screen presentation is a phenomenal way to put your audience to sleep. But there are plenty of ways to get around that without busting out the magic markers. In reference to his video examples, I simply disagree when he says a flip board is the best way to illustrate a chart. Many of my clients want to see actual data and actual trends so they can make accurate assessments of the speaker's argument. Hand-

drawns just wouldn't suffice. Of course, that's just one way PowerPoint can be used to one's advantage, but Mr. Poehm completely ignores that and other potential benefits of the software, focusing only on misuse of bulleted text.

Solution #2 is really the heart of it all. When you get down to it, Mr. Poehm's entire political movement and website are really just a clever way for him to sell his book. Mr. Poehm has found a great way to get worldwide publicity, and I applaud him for that. But it's a transparent effort nonetheless. Too many of Mr. Poehm's statements about presenting are arbitrary, debatable, and impossible to substantiate. One can certainly give a phenomenal presentation using a flip chart, but it's definitely not the only way.

In the end I'm actually in complete agreement with Mr. Poehm that countless terrible PowerPoint presentations are given every day. But where I differ is that I prefer not to shoot the messenger. PowerPoint is a great tool that can be extraordinarily effective if used thoughtfully, but it's still just a tool. It's like saying hammers are bad because it really hurts if you bang your thumb with one. Great presentations often have nothing to do with visual aids. I don't care if you use PowerPoint, Keynote, a flip chart, chalk board, white board, or a stick in the sand. The quality of your presentation depends on you and your ability to tell your story. The tools you use are secondary. To paraphrase the old NRA bumper sticker, PowerPoint doesn't bore people. People bore people.

***Jim Confalone is the Co-Founder and Creative Director for ProPoint Graphics.***

---

**This article is available online at:**

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/propointgraphics/2011/08/03/lets-have-a-party/>