

Bill Gates vs. Steve Jobs (Suck vs. Awesome)

Step 1: Watch a cheesy video - "Present Like Steve Jobs"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-ntLGOyHw4> (see dp blog for link)

Step 2: How "Sticky" are you?

Read and annotate the blog attached to this document: "Learning from Bill Gates and Steve Jobs." Highlight key points, making note of the strengths and weaknesses of each presenter. (This is old. Bill Gates has progressed tons since then!)

Step 3: "The Evolution of Bill Gates The Presenter"

Go to the article "The Visual Transformation of Bill Gates the Presenter" from Presentation Zen (<http://www.presentationzen.com/presentationzen/2010/08/the-naked-transformation-of-bill-gates-the-presenter.html>). Browse that article, and the blog. Explore the links embedded in each. Jot down the strengths and weaknesses of Bill Gates over the years in the organizer below.

Step 4: Don't fear commitment!

Now, commit to 3 focus points. Fill out the organizer below and get sticky.

Bill Gates Crapometer:

What does the old Bill Gates do that you will avoid?

I will commit to focusing on the following 3 things. (Can focus on doing, or focus on not doing, but make them clear, decisive, and thoughtful)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Bill Gates Awesomatron:

What techniques does the new Bill Gates use that are more effective?

Blog: Learning from Bill Gates & Steve Jobs¹

It's been almost two years since I wrote this post comparing the approaches to presentation by Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. Since PowerPoint 2007 has been out quite a while now I wondered if Bill Gates' visuals and delivery have improved along with the software. So I watched this entire Bill Gates presentation recently (twice). Now, I like Bill Gates a lot. He's a nice guy and he's certainly a great philanthropist. My friends at Microsoft tell me he's a pleasure to talk to one-on-one. I'm sure that's true, but mastering the large keynote presentation on stage still eludes him. His keynotes are not terrible, they are just very average and unremarkable. His style is "normal" and "typical" and his presentations are largely unmemorable as a result. Bill Gates is a remarkable man, why can't his presentations be remarkable too? Every time Bill does one of these "PowerPoint presentations" he legitimizes and validates this tedious style of presenting with slides.



I am not suggesting that Bill Gates change his presentation style (though I'd pay my own way to Redmond and work for free to help Bill with his next presentation). He's been doing it "the Microsoft way" for a long time and the world keeps on spinning. The point rather is that you and I cannot present like Bill under any circumstance. I don't care if you are pitching to investors or presenting a paper at a conference filled with stuffy, pedantic anthropologists, there is no excuse for tedium. We can still learn a lot by examining the different approaches taken by Bill and Steve.

Bill needs to be stickier

Remember that the Heath brothers found that sticky messages have six key attributes in common: simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions, and stories. Bill has more credibility than you or I will ever have; he's one of the most famous people on the planet. But his presentations are usually weak in the other five areas. They are rarely simple (though the topics are not overly complex), his visuals are cluttered, he speaks in abstractions with few if any surprises and little emotion (Steve Ballmer, on the other hand, gets high marks for emotion).

Bill & Steve redux

You may say that comparing Bill's presentations and Steve's keynotes is apples & oranges, that it's not fair to compare Bill's talk about technology trends to Steve's product introductions. If Bill were talking about the intricacies of insurance premiums and actuary tables, you may have a point. But in this May 16th presentation by Bill Gates, the Microsoft chairman is talking about "technology megatrends that will shape the future of business and society." The audience included CEOs from top technology-related companies and the thousands watching on the webcast. There is no reason that this talk about "the future" and "business" and "society" had to be a bullet-point filled snoozer.

Bill's "voice" vs. Steve's "voice"

Steve's tone, pace, and the words he chooses all come together to make his "voice" conversational and natural. Steve appears comfortable, smiles, and uses humor just the right amount. He's relaxed so the audience is relaxed. Bill appears less comfortable and his speech is more vague and filled with abstractions. Bill also uses more jargon and terms like "...rich capabilities," "rich fonts," "...working together in a rich way," "...use these tools in a rich way," and "...watching something rich like learning about an election." (See the rich transcripts of Bill's May 16th CEO Summit 2007. Watch the webcast of Bill's presentation.)

¹<http://www.presentationzen.com/presentationzen/2007/09/steve-bill-redu.html>

Bill's slides vs. Steve's slides

Both Steve and Bill use slides to complement their talks. Steve's visuals are a big part of his talk. The visuals are necessary not decorative. The visuals do not overpower him but they are an important component of the talk not just icing on the cake. Steve uses the slides to help him tell a story and he interacts with them in a natural way, rarely turning his back on the audience (monitors in front show the same onscreen image). Steve uses the huge backlit screen behind him in the same spirit at least that George Lucas uses his screen: to help tell a story. Lucas uses actors, visuals, and effects to convey his message, Steve uses visuals and his own words and natural presence to tell his story. In Bill's case the slides are not only of low aesthetic quality (though this may be a matter of taste) they simply do not really help Bill's narrative very much.



Steve points to the slide.

It's not the slides, it's the way they are used

But the biggest difference is not the fact that Steve's slides are simpler with fewer elements and fewer bullet points, the biggest difference is in the way they are used. If you want to appreciate the difference you have to watch both presentations (Steve, Bill). The difference is that Steve's slides flow smoothly with his talk. Bill's slides aren't really necessary; they are more of an ornament or a decoration off to the side. Bill would have been better off just pulling up a stool and sharing his ideas and then answering questions that audience members could have submitted before the talk so that Bill could select which ones he'd answer.

Bill's Slides

Below are most of the slides Bill used in his CEO Summit presentation.



Steve's slides

Below are just a few (Steve uses far more slides) of the slides Steve used in his August Special Event keynote on the Apple campus (watch video).



If your ideas matter

Bill's topic/subtopic bullet point style is very common, very bland, and rarely effective. He can get away with it, but you and I can't. I am not saying that solid presentation skills will make you successful, but do not dismiss remarkable presentation skills as something soft, fluffy, and superfluous. Why aim to be successful in spite of your presentation skills? Why not allow your presentation skills to be an advantage that helps you make a difference and spread the word about your cause? If your ideas matter, then the presentation matters, right? You don't have to use slideware for every presentation, but if you do the visuals should seem part of "the show" not something "over there" off to the side.