



Dear Reader,

May's **Buzz Off** to the expression "No problem" used as a substitute for "Thank you" leads to another business etiquette peeve this month. I recently attended an excellent presentation that incorporated many of the presentation tips previously featured in **EC Buzz** in March 2006 that we've reprised in the present issue.

Unfortunately, the speaker was interrupted literally every two minutes by BlackBerry™ bleeping in the audience. After an hour, this noise had become so distracting that I was tempted to say something to the BlackBerry owners that was truly worthy of being electronically bleeped out.

Read on for **EC Buzz's** take on tackling this irritating phenomenon.

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Three Simple Ways to Spruce up your Presentations

1. **Keep it snappy.** To avoid losing your audience, stick to the following principles:
 - Present only one main idea per slide.
 - Use bullet points instead of full sentences.
 - Include no more than 6 bullet points with no more than 6 words in each (the oft-quoted 6-by-6 rule).
 - Don't cheat by shrinking the text size to cram more words onto a slide. Ideally text size should be between 24 and 32 points.
 - Don't overdo the number of slides – the average person's attention span is no longer than 45 minutes.
2. **Take advantage of special features.** Presentation software products have many features to enliven presentations, or at least make them easier to follow. Here are a few useful ones:
 - Have bullet points on the same slide appear one at a time to prevent people skipping ahead.
 - Provide handouts that include screen shots and writing space to allow the audience to take notes.
 - According to the old saying, a picture is worth 964 more words than the 6-by-6 rule would allow. Try including some well-chosen graphics.
3. **Proofread.** The critical proofreading step is often skipped when preparing presentations, perhaps because they aren't traditional "publications". Yet grammar and spelling blunders look even worse when they're projected behind you on an enormous screen. Run the spell-checker, but also pay close attention to these error-prone areas:
 - Product names
 - Company and department names
 - People's names
 - Deviations from house style

Buzz Off : *BlackBerry bleeping*

Constant email access has an addictive appeal, which is how the BlackBerry earned its nickname "CrackBerry." But the BlackBerry has been around for little more than a decade, and business somehow managed to get along fine before that.

Is having constant access to the external world really necessary when you're supposedly engaged in some other activity, such as participating in a meeting? Try turning off that little device and enjoy the feeling of your electronic leash slackening for a while. Take a deep breath. Focus on just being where you are. Pay attention to your surroundings. Give your attention to the task at hand. Be an active listener. Your colleagues will appreciate having you fully there in mind and body.

And if you can't bring yourself to actually turn the cursed thing off, at least put it in silent mode and stop the incessant bleeping!

Which buzzword is your pet peeve? Send your suggestion to writer@ecwriting.com, and we'll do our best to send it packing in a future issue.

Parting Words

"Writing is the best way to talk without being interrupted."

– Jules Renard, French author (1864-1910)