

Powerful points

by Joy Schwabach

The Rotarian

When Suzanne “Sam” Martinez returned from a service trip to Guatemala, the first thing on her mind was how the other 43 Rotarians in her group could best share their experiences with their clubs and communities. They all had good stories.

Martinez, of the Rotary Club of Wauconda, Ill., USA, decided to create a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation (a computerized slideshow) and give copies to her fellow travelers. The slides displayed pictures of Rotarians painting houses, attending a club meeting, and visiting an orphanage and a home for at-risk girls. While the images flashed by during her presentation, the volunteers were on-hand to tell stories about helping villagers whose homes were destroyed by Hurricane Stan.

As Martinez discovered, computer programs are handy tools that can enhance speeches and help publicize Rotarians’ service work. Chances are, you’ll need to give a talk at some point as a Rotarian, whether it’s to fellow club members interested in your profession or to community groups raising money to build a playground. Here are some tips on jazzing up and sharing your presentation.

Do it

>> Select your program. We’ll focus on PowerPoint because it’s so widely used, but many of these tips apply to other presentation software, such as Apple Keynote, Corel Presentations, and Impress, part of the free OpenOffice.org suite that works with multiple operating systems, including Windows, Mac, and Linux.

>> If your computer is less than a year old, you may be using PowerPoint 2007. Take advantage of its new features, including a context-sensitive toolbar called the “ribbon,” which changes the available commands based on the items you’ve currently selected, and “document themes,” which allow you to change colors, styles, and fonts while maintaining a consistent look. Plus, a “live preview” allows you to see the effects of these changes before you incorporate them. But don’t forget: If you share your presentation with people who have an older version of PowerPoint, you’ll need to save it in a format their program can open. If the recipients don’t have PowerPoint at all, they can download a free viewer from Microsoft Office Online.

Improve it

>> Get rid of those bullet points. Place only one headline and one image on each slide, says Cliff Atkinson, author of *Beyond Bullet Points*. According to his book, research shows that “learning can

be hindered when you add interesting but irrelevant words, pictures, sounds, and music to a presentation.”

>> Get training. Look for the free tips available on many Web sites, including Microsoft Office Online. You can also subscribe to training video sites like Lynda.com. For a fee, the instructors will walk you through every aspect of PowerPoint 2003 and 2007 at a pace that even a beginner can follow, and you'll get access to materials on other products.

>> Download visuals. Sites that offer graphics, photos, or art include Corbis, Getty Images, Hemera, Microsoft Office Online, and SXC.

Share it

>> Burn your presentation onto a CD. That's what Martinez did. Once she distributed copies to the other Rotarians on her trip, they could give presentations in their own communities. Just click File and Package for CD. A free PowerPoint viewer is automatically included on the CD you produce.

>> If a CD isn't practical or a file is too large to e-mail, try uploading it to a site like MediaFire, MediaMax, or Megaupload. Then, instead of sending the actual file, just e-mail a link to the presentation, which recipients can download.

>> Put the presentation onto a DVD. Just save the slides as JPEG files, then use Windows Movie Maker 2007 (or a similar program, such as Adobe's Premiere Elements). Drag your photos, music, and movies onto the movie editor's timeline to set their order and playing length, then burn everything onto a DVD.

>> Turn the slideshow into a video file. Once you convert the presentation to an AVI, MPEG-4, WMV, or other popular format, you can upload it to a video-sharing site like Google Video or YouTube. Windows Movie Maker is a good tool for this task.

>> Post the presentation on a personal Web site by saving a copy in Flash or PDF format. FlashPaper, which you can download from www.adobe.com, saves in both formats, and WildPresenter, from www.wildform.com, saves in Flash.

>> Save your presentation as an old-fashioned HTML file. An HTML presentation can be opened in any browser, so it's a helpful option if you're not sure whether your audience has a free Flash or PDF plug-in installed. Choose Web Page under Save As.

>> Compress it with PPTminimizer. Useful for e-mailing your presentation to the media, this tool lets you shrink a presentation from 20 megabytes to 1.