



# The Presentation Genius of Steve Jobs

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# 10 Techniques Jobs Used to Inform, Educate and Entertain

## Steve Jobs — Presentation Genius

For more than three decades, Steve Jobs transformed product launches into an art form. His bold vision for media consumption and his rise as the world's most celebrated corporate storyteller helped make Apple the most valuable company in the world. His presentations became the primary fodder for technology news and speculation media, always occupying above-the-fold coverage usually reserved for reporting on the world's most important political, social and sporting events.

Whether you're a CEO, manager, entrepreneur, small business owner or sales/marketing professional, there's so much you can learn from the man that turned product launches into global events. Here are 10 key techniques that Jobs used to inform, educate and entertain.



## 1: Planning in Analog

Steve Jobs made his mark in the digital world of bits and bytes, but he planned presentations the old school way of pen and paper. His presentations had all the elements of a great movie — heroes and villains, stunning visuals and a supporting cast. And, like a movie director, Jobs “storyboarded” the plot. Brainstorming, sketching and whiteboarding came before building slides. The narrative always came first; the slides were there to complement the story.

Steve Jobs never gave his audience time to get distracted. His presentations included demonstrations, video clips and other speakers — all designed to maintain the pace and momentum of the message. And all of these elements were planned and collected well before the slides were created.



@Carol: I heart this.

@Tom: I'm stealing  
this idea!

@Sammy: When's  
lunch?



@Laura: This presentation  
is awesome!

@Bob: ROTFL

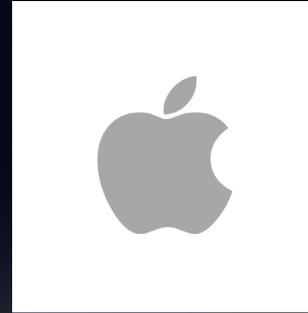
@Bob: Did u eat my  
sandwich?

## 2: Creating a Twitter-Friendly Description

Steve Jobs created a single-sentence description for every product. These headlines helped the audience categorize the new product and were always concise enough to fit in a 140-character Twitter post.

For example, when Jobs introduced the MacBook Air in January 2008, he said that is it simply “The world’s thinnest notebook.” That one short sentence spoke volumes. Jobs filled in the details during his presentation and on the Apple website, but he found one sentence or phrase — usually projected behind him in white letters on a black background — to position every product.

The audience needs to see the big picture before they can digest the details. A product or idea that can't be described in 140 characters or less needs to go back to the drawing board.



### 3: Introducing the Antagonist

In nearly every classic story, the hero fights the villain. The same holds true for a Steve Jobs presentation.

In 1984, the villain was IBM, known as “Big Blue” at the time. Before Jobs introduced the famous “1984” television ad to a group of Apple salespeople, he created a dramatic story around it. “IBM wants it all,” he said. Apple would be the only company to stand in its way. It was very dramatic, and the crowd went crazy. Branding expert Martin Lindstrom says that great brands and religions have something in common: the idea of vanquishing a shared enemy. Jobs created a villain that allowed the audience to rally around the hero — Apple and its products.

A villain doesn't necessarily have to be a direct competitor. It can also be a problem in need of a solution. When Jobs introduced the iPhone in January 2007, his presentation at Macworld focused on the problems mobile phone users were experiencing with the current technology. The iPhone, he said, would resolve those issues. Setting up the problem opens the door for the hero to save the day.

# Why should I care?

## 4: Focusing on Benefits

Steve Jobs knew what potential consumers always ask themselves (even if they're not aware of it): "Why should I care?" And that's why Jobs sold the benefit behind every new product or feature in a clear, concise manner.

Why buy an iPhone 3G? Because "it's twice as fast at half the price." What's so great about Time Capsule? "All your irreplaceable photos, videos and documents are automatically protected and easy to retrieve if they're ever lost." Even the Apple website focused on benefits with top 10 lists like "10 Reasons Why You'll Love a Mac." Nobody cares about products. They only care about how the product or service will improve their lives. Jobs made that connection with customers.



“Three stories from my life.”



## 5: Sticking to the Rule of Three

Nearly all of Steve Jobs' presentations were divided into three parts. For example: When Jobs took the stage on September 9, 2009, he told the audience he would be talking about three products: iPhone, iTunes and iPod. Along the way he provided verbal guideposts such as “iPhone. The first thing I wanted to talk about today. Now, let's move on to the second, iTunes.”

The number three is a powerful concept in writing. Playwrights know that three is more dramatic than two; comedians know that three is funnier than four; and Steve Jobs knew that three is more memorable than six or eight. Even if he had 20 points to make, Jobs knew that the audience was only capable of holding three or four of them in short term memory. Better that they remember three than forget everything.

So if three is such an important number, why does this e-book have 10 points? Because it's a written reference tool that is not intended to be delivered verbally. If this information were delivered verbally, we would only stick to three key takeaways. Remember, Steve Jobs will send his audience to the Apple website for more information, but he only delivered three points in a conversation.

## 6: Selling Dreams, Not Products

Steve Jobs was driven by a nearly messianic zeal to create new experiences. He didn't sell computers — he sold the promise of a better world. When Jobs introduced the iPod in 2001, he said, "In our own small way, we're going to make the world a better place." Where most people saw the iPod as a music player, Jobs saw it as tool to enrich people's lives. Of course, it was important to have great products. But passion, enthusiasm and a sense of purpose beyond the actual product are what set Jobs and Apple apart.

Jobs was also passionate about his customers, and he wasn't afraid to wear that passion on his sleeve. Near the end of a presentation in 1997, he concluded by saying, "Some people say you have to be a little crazy to buy a Mac. Well, in that craziness we see genius — and that's who we make tools for." He cultivated a sense of mission. Passion, emotion and enthusiasm are grossly underestimated ingredients in professional business communications, and yet they are powerful ways to motivate others. Jobs once said that his goal was not to die the richest man in the cemetery. It was to go to bed at night thinking that he and his team had done something wonderful. And judging from the outpouring of tributes after his death, that's what he did.

## 7: Creating Visual Slides

Apple products are easy to use because they eliminate "clutter." This same design philosophy applied to every Steve Jobs presentation. There were no bullet points in his presentations. Instead, Jobs relied on photographs and images. Where the average PowerPoint slide has 40 words, it was difficult to find seven words on 10 of Jobs' slides. This technique is called "Picture Superiority" — information is more effectively recalled when text and images are combined.

For example, when Steve Jobs unveiled the Macbook Air, Apple's ultra-thin notebook computer, he showed a slide of the computer fitting inside a manila inter-office envelope. That image was worth a thousand words. "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication," Jobs once said.

## 8: Making Numbers Meaningful

In every Apple presentation, big numbers are put into context. On September 9, 2009, Apple VP Phil Schiller said that 220 million iPods had been sold to date. He placed that number into context by saying it represented 73% of the market. He broke it down even further — and took a jab at the competition—by saying Microsoft was “pulling up the rear” with its 1% market share. Schiller learned his technique from Jobs, who always put large numbers into a context that was relevant to his audience.

The bigger the number, the more important it is to find analogies or comparisons that make the data relevant to your audience. For example, when the U.S. government bailed out the economy to the tune of \$700 billion, it was too huge a number for most people to comprehend. Journalists tried to put it into context. One example in particular seemed to capture the attention of the press — \$700 billion is like spending \$1 million a day since the day Christ was born. Now that’s a big number!

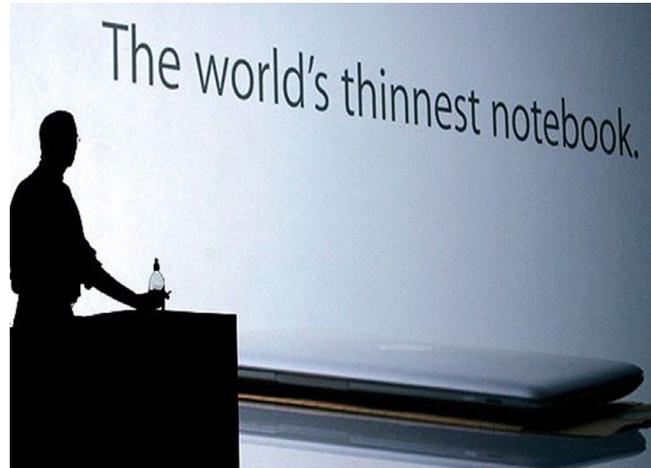
## 9: Using Zippy Words

Steve Jobs spoke in plain English — and had fun doing it. He described the speed of the iPhone 3G as “amazingly zippy.” Where most business presenters use words that are obtuse, vague or confusing, Jobs’ language was remarkably simple. He rarely, if ever, used the jargon that clouds many corporate presentations — terms like “best of breed” or “thought leadership.” His language was simple, clear and direct.

## 10: Reveal “Holy Smokes” Moment

Every Steve Jobs presentation had one moment that neuroscientists call an “emotionally charged event.” The emotionally charged event is the equivalent of a mental sticky note that tells the brain, “Remember this!”

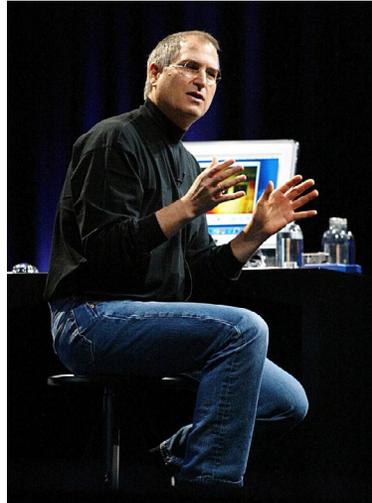
For example, at Macworld 2007, Jobs could have opened the presentation by telling the audience that Apple was unveiling a new mobile phone that also played music, games and video. Instead, he built up the drama: “Today, we are introducing three revolutionary products. The first one is a widescreen iPod with touch controls. The second is a revolutionary mobile phone. And the third is a breakthrough Internet communications device ... an iPod, a phone, an Internet communicator ... an iPod, a phone, are you getting it? These are not three devices. This is one device!” The audience erupted in cheers because it was so unexpected and very entertaining.



## And One Bonus: Practicing. A Lot.

Steve Jobs spent hours rehearsing every facet of his presentation. Every slide was written like a piece of poetry, every presentation staged like a theatrical experience. Yes, Jobs made a presentation look effortless, but that polish came after hours and hours of grueling practice.

Jobs improved his style over time. If you watch video clips of Steve Jobs' presentations going back 20 years (you can look them up on YouTube), you will see that he improves significantly with every decade. The Steve Jobs of 1984 had a lot of charisma, but the Steve Jobs of 1997 was a far more polished speaker. And the Steve Jobs who introduced the iPhone in 2007 was even better. Nobody is born knowing how to deliver a great slide presentation. Expert speakers hone that skill with practice.



## About Carmine Gallo

Carmine Gallo is the communication skills coach for the world's most admired brands. He is a sought-after keynote speaker, seminar leader, media training specialist, crisis communication specialist, presentation expert and communications coach. His clients appear in the news every day and many would not think of launching a new product without his insight. Gallo is a former CNN business journalist and a current columnist for BusinessWeek.com. He is the author of several books including his latest, *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs: How to be Insanely Great in Front of Any Audience* and *Fire Them Up! 7 Simple Secrets of Inspiring Leaders*.

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