



## What Are Virtual Presentations Missing?

As virtual presentations become ubiquitous, and more and more attendees complain how dull they are, one has to ask the question: how do we present better virtually? How do we capture and sustain attention? At Connect Solutions, we have the perfect technology in place to reach tens of thousands of viewers. But how do we ensure they are really watching? And how do we make that event worthwhile? To find answers, we interviewed Dr. Carmen Taran, from Rexi Media, the authority in virtual presentation skills. Rexi Media has discovered the magic formula for successful virtual presentation skills.

**Cory Lovell: Audiences often voice unfavorable opinions towards virtual presentations. What is missing?**

*Carmen Taran:* Edge, energy, and emotion. This is a mandatory formula for any presentation. The “edge” part is often catered for because most industries are adding edge through advanced technology. For instance, computer scientists are working on enabling us to turn different surfaces into touch screens. Soon you will be able to have a chat window right on the breakfast table. Medical technology is now prolonging life spans. Soon you will be able to celebrate your 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. Connect Solutions can bring HD video broadcasts right to your desktop. Soon, you will be able to reach 100,000 people with a presentation. As you can see... there is lots of edge through technology. However, being able to send emails using your shower wall, or to outlive turtles, or talk to very large audiences is not sufficient; you still have to have something meaningful to say and be able to say it with just the right energy and emotion. It’s what completes the formula to sustain attention.

**Cory Lovell: How do you get to just the “right” balance of energy and emotion in virtual presentations?**

*Carmen Taran:* Content design and delivery style. Neglecting one or the other is an invitation to audiences to multitask. Content design should involve the writing of a powerful script, intended for the mind and the heart; it should also involve the creation of enticing media, such as PowerPoint slides, graphics, animation, and, video. Unfortunately, audiences have been hit with too much “sameness”. How often do you see the typical PowerPoint slides, with the typical robotic language of bulleted text? And how often do you see graphics purchased from a stock database, showing people shaking hands or

looking through binoculars into the future? Mediocre content design leads to mediocre presentations, regardless of how powerful the technology.

Another culprit for sameness is the use of templates. Templates are great for ensuring consistency in branding and cutting design costs, but are not always conducive to creativity or aesthetics (both important for adding energy and emotion). I remember a great TV ad, which showed the owner of a hair salon placing a banner outside his business, advertising “\$6 Haircuts”. A competitor next door saw the banner, and instead of being bummed that he could not compete on price, he placed this banner above his salon: “We fix \$6-haircuts”. We witness the same in presentation design, especially for virtual presentations. A lot of companies come to us to “fix presentations designed with templates”. Remember: If you’re using generic stock photography and templates, you are more at risk. It’s worthwhile to invest in good design if you want to sustain someone’s attention.

**Cory Lovell: I know you always advocate the importance of aesthetics in presentations...**

Carmen Taran: Yes, aesthetics as defined by a harmonious blend of text, graphics, lines, shapes, colors, and textures, attracts attention and invite users into a space that they want to share. In which room below would you rather spend some time to read and relax? It’s the same with presentations: strive to show viewers areas that are balanced, pleasing, and harmonious. No longer distinctive, PowerPoint slideware has become stigmatized by mass-manufactured graphics and hurried thoughts expressed as bullets. Research shows that products perceived as beautiful are considered more useful and are used for longer periods of time. Imagine the return on investment then for your presentations if your viewers go back to them frequently and for longer periods of time. Imagine how that could impact your persuasive power. Aesthetics is a silent sales partner.



**Cory Lovell: What about delivery style in virtual presentations?**

Carmen Taran: It’s a fallacy that good face-to-face presenters are good virtual presenters. Additional coaching is needed for virtual presentations, particularly in the areas of audience participation, vocal variety and media training. Maneuvering chat boxes, polling questions, and interactions with media files such as Flash can add participation, which implies action, which implies attention. Melody, pitch, articulation, pace, pauses, and volume – all these are necessary to force the ear to listen. Some presenters think vocal variety happens naturally. This is an illusion. Practice and feedback from a

qualified coach lead to an attractive voice. As webcasts become more prevalent, presenters need media training. This should be mandatory. For instance, in video, knowing where to stand in relation to PowerPoint visuals or other presenters is crucial because the right-hand side of the screen is dominant. Other details such as how to use the microphone, where to look, what to wear, and how the camera perceives your posture, are just a few of the elements that contribute to a well-done webcast. Given that most presentations these days are recorded, everything about that event will live forever. With adequate coaching, you will be excited when peers, bosses, potential employers or future spouses access those recordings.

**Cory Lovell: Once the excitement of the virtual technology wears off, how do presenters still add edge?**

*Carmen Taran:* With a little conflict. Conflict generates cognitive tension, which in turn generates attention. Throw your viewers off a bit. I remember listening to a presentation that started with “Follow your heart, says your brain”. Or another presenter who said “Once upon a time an ethicist had a brilliant idea for a prison. Today we all live in it.” This kind of unexpected, incongruous information gets attention immediately. I remember buying a bottle of juice just because the label on the back told me how the ingredients would fight off bad molecules, the kinds that “trash your cells like rock stars trash hotel rooms”. Do you feel the edge, energy, and emotion? Compare that to a label that advertises a refreshing drink. A tiny touch of conflict can be created with visuals. For instance, if you had to speak to an audience on the topic of trust, which slide below would capture attention and pique interest more?



**Cory Lovell: Overall, how can presenters generate more energy and emotion?**

*Carmen Taran:* Chemistry. Presenters need to feel something for the content they deliver. Presenting well is a bit like being in love. The closer you feel to the material you’re disclosing, the more energy and emotion you exude. When there is chemistry, you can also find what’s juicy about your content and squeeze it in your presentation (versus presenting whatever has been given to you). Don’t present out of obligation or speak on matters that are not appealing to you. Get excited about something when presenting, even if it’s just about presenting itself. The difference between one speaker’s good presentation and another’s bad one is just that: chemistry.

*Rexi Media is delivering an advanced Presentation Skills workshop in Washington DC on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010. To obtain a discount, follow this [registration link](#) and use the code REXIFY at checkout. To find out more about presentation skills, download the recent Rexi iPhone app, titled [PresenterPro](#).*