

# Slides That Win!

A Review by Geetesh Bajaj

## Introduction

If you ever need a CBT on Microsoft PowerPoint, you'll be floored by the choices available. Being a part of Microsoft's omnipresent Office suite provides PowerPoint with a slew of advantages - there is no dearth of books, CBTs, training material or websites on the subject.

In many ways, PowerPoint itself is a fairly simple program - many of us can be productive using it without any further help. However, there is a caveat - PowerPoint's ease of use can be its biggest bane as well. Vast choices of templates, colours, designs, clipart, fonts and options are at your disposal - the temptation to get carried away is very strong, resulting in end presentations more akin to visual horrors rather than what they were intended to be in the first place.

Enter 'Slides That Win!' - technically speaking, you could define it as a PowerPoint CBT. Broadly speaking, Slides That Win! defies any classification within a single category. You could say it's a self improvement guide, a design and colour sense manual for presentations or an eye opener to hitherto unexplored PowerPoint possibilities.

## Behind The Scenes

Slides That Win! is from the house of Crystal Graphics, also known for their PowerPlugs range of PowerPoint add-ins.

Introduced on March 5th, 2001 at the Presentations 2001 Conference and Expo at Atlanta, USA - Crystal Graphics terms Slides That Win! as the world's first interactive guide to presentation design. That's a tall order indeed - let's see for ourselves what's behind that claim.

Crystal Graphics are not the only people behind Slides That Win! - involved in the creation of this unique product are two of the most talented presentation experts of our times - Jennifer Rotondo and Claudyne Wilder. You can read more about them in their overviews on the right column of this page.

## An Affair With PowerPoint

Slides That Win! has one nuance that deserves more than a passing look - although how can you look at something that's so elegantly invisible!

I'm talking here about PowerPoint itself - the entire Slides That Win! CD ROM runs off a PowerPoint Viewer engine on the CD. In essence, this means that Slides That Win! has been created completely within PowerPoint itself.

All the linked presentations within Slides That Win! can be opened within your PowerPoint application to learn more about how they were created in the first place. In this way, Slides That Win! does create history - it probably is the first ever mass produced CBT created using Microsoft PowerPoint. The last demo CD ROM from Microsoft I viewed was created using Macromedia Director!

### **An Evolution From...**

Whatever Slides That Win! may be, it certainly seems part of an evolution. How the idea originated?

This is what Jennifer has to say:

*We have a lot of individual clients that need PowerPoint training above and beyond what they can get in a PowerPoint training course but they cannot afford to have us come to them. And we see the same errors time and time again in the presentation that we fix. So, we decided to start putting our learning's and tips into a user-friendly format that these individuals could use when they want.*

Well, they certainly did hit the mark!

### **Running The CD**

To run the Slides That Win! CD, all you need to do is place it in your drive - the autorun features, created by the RunIt! product take care of initializing the program.

Although this does simplify matters, I wish there was option to create a shortcut on the Start Menu - after all many of us have disabled the autorun features of Windows, and more importantly, all you need to run the CD in such a case is to find a file called Launch.exe in the Slides That Win! folder.

### **The Sextet Approach**

Slides That Win!'s opening screen provides a link to the home slide - which gives you six entry points - a procedure which works very well indeed. You can choose to click on any of them, and you'll be glad to know that you need not proceed in a linear fashion, since all the six sections are self contained individual CBTs in their own right.

The six subjects you can choose from are:

- Slide Master
- Colour & Design
- Animation
- Content
- Sentences
- PowerPlugs

Three of these six subjects - Colour & Design, Content and Sentences are not limited to PowerPoint alone - indeed they are generic topics helpful in the usage of any other presentation program as well.

### **Into Details**

The Slide Master section details the usage and creation of slide masters and title masters within PowerPoint. It also provides insights into the positioning and font size of text elements in a slide. These elements include titles, subheads, bullets, etc. It further goes into providing distinctions between serif and sans serif fonts. This section ends with a very detailed look at the usage of logos in a master slide environment.

The Colour & Design section discusses the division of colour families between hot and cool types, individual colour characteristics - the mood they set, the message they convey and their usage guidelines. This section also elaborates on creating custom colour palettes, complementary colours, contrast, colour blindness, readability, creation and use of backgrounds, etc. It finishes with ideas to design for a company image.

The Content section is among the most comprehensive of the lot - topics covered include agenda slides, audience focus, executive summary, slide content, informative titles and phrases, subtitles, visual content, organization, process, timeline, benefits, use of AutoShapes and finally the advantages of creating a TOC slide.

The Sentences section ironically starts with the excellent 'Get Rid of Sentences' part - this details the usage of phrases, data groups, questions, tables and images in place of sentences and comparisons between each of them. This is followed by an illustration on timelines in a presentation to create more grasping overviews. Phrases receive more detailed treatment - being classified into parallel, non-parallel, time and comparison phrases. The section concludes with a look at shapes, images and quotes.

Animations is a section which broadly covers anything which moves - like custom animations and slide transitions. It begins with boilerplating animations using slide masters. It proceeds to various facets like timing, effects, play settings, suitable animation styles for various slide elements, etc. The whole section lays stress on the usage of understated, low-key effects rather than those of the noisy, blaring variety. Specific guidance tips are included for animating text boxes, bullets and AutoShapes - accompanied by excellent example slides. This is succeeded by ideas to create step-by-step animations as a process to creating a storyline. The section finishes with a comprehensive look at slide transitions.

The PowerPlugs section is the final of the lot - this provides a detailed sample overview of Crystal Graphics' award winning series of PowerPoint add-ins. These include Backgrounds, PhotoActive FX, SuperShapes, 3D Titles and Transitions.

### Extra Goodies

Apart from the actual Slides That Win! files, the CD includes demos of most Crystal Graphics' PowerPoint related products. The main folder also contains the entire content of the Slides That Win! program in Adobe's Acrobat PDF format.

There's also a Resources folder which contains another folder called 'Green Light Slides' - this contains the actual PowerPoint presentations you can use in realtime.

The Backgrounds folder contains a set of free PowerPoint templates from Creative Minds, Inc., Jennifer Rotondo's company.

The Articles folder contains in PDF format a few 'Before and After' columns written by Jennifer Rotondo and Claudyne Wilder for Presentations magazine.

### All in All

All put together, what places the Slides That Win! product a class apart is the way in which the authors have presented the information - all sections are self sufficient and well illustrated. There are over 300 before-and-after PowerPoint slide examples - and all of these can be opened from within PowerPoint itself if you please.

Most of these examples are actually comparisons between two slides - the first of these is a 'red light' slide where everything is put together in a haphazard fashion - the related 'green light' slide corrects these

mistakes, while explaining the reasons behind these corrections. All such comparisons are supplemented with a notes page - basically a Word document, detailing the procedure.

Both authors claim to have a combined experience of twenty years in the presentation field - and this certainly shines through in the actual product.

#### **About Jennifer Rotondo**

Jennifer Rotondo, Microsoft Certified Expert, Advanced PowerPoint trainer, published author of several books on presenting, and President of Creative Minds, Inc., specializing in professional design of presentations, multimedia and web sites, is a recognized authority on the art of presentations.

#### **About Claudyne Wilder**

Acclaimed speaker, coach, published author of several books on presenting, and co-creator of a CD on visual design, Claudyne Wilder is a recognized authority on the art of presentations. Claudyne teaches her one or two day in-house Winning Presentations Seminar. She has a customized version for sales people. She also licenses her seminars.

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