Multimedia Design Considerations

Multimedia software packages are usually loaded with features. You can choose among several hundred colors, dozens of fonts, a wide variety of color-coordinated templates, multiple transitions, and many other dazzling options. Good design, however, dictates that you carefully select what is needed from this cornucopia of choices. In other words, *just because it's there, it doesn't mean you should use it*. So what should you consider when designing a multimedia presentation?

- The purpose of any presentation is to communicate a message or group of messages. Everything in your presentation should support the message you are trying to convey. If a feature stands out by distracting the viewer from the message it doesn't belong there ... no matter how cool it is! If in doubt... leave it out!

- Make your presentations consistent. The transitions from frame to frame should all be the same. The slide backgrounds should be the same. Title sizes and text fonts should be the same. The use of color to highlight or separate text should also be consistent. We are used to reading from left to right - top to bottom, deviating from this pattern is confusing. The trick is to use the options available to you to visually focus the learner on your message.

- Choosing the right font type is important for clarity. Projecting text onto a television monitor or a five foot square screen requires a font that is easy to read. I prefer Verdana or Arial fonts of at least 24 point size. These sans-serif characters project well in both types of displays and are large enough to be read from the back of a large lecture hall. Surround everything with lots of white space.

- You may want to add a second font type for variety and emphasis. *Unless you are a professional graphic designer, resist the temptation to use more than two font types.*

- The visibility of your text depends upon the contrast between the text color and the background. For screen projected images blue and black text on a white background are easy to read. Red can be used to highlight a single key word. Television monitors can handle a greater range of text/background combinations. Because of the greater color saturation you do need to watch out for color clashing (red text on a green background).

- If you are using a television monitor you may want to set a mood with your color selection by choosing among pastels, earth tones, neon or primary colors. Look at presentations that appeal to you and copy their color schemes.

- Many designers put too much text on the screen. Limit the number of lines of text to six or eight. The same goes for graphic elements. Keep the number down to two or three at most. Don't clutter the screen and remember "One main point per frame."

- Many presentation packages default to advance to the next frame after a set number of seconds. This is a recipe for disaster. Always build user controls into your presentations so that you decide when the next slide appears. It is also important to be able to back up when you want to.