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Personal computers and powerful presentations

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Some of the best public speakers use personal computers to prepare their talks. They keep a file of speaking materials: quotations, examples, statistics, stories, poems, visual aids, and structured experiences. These items which they keep on a disk become nuggets of thought and are like money in the bank—always ready when they need them. Speaking is not communicating unless some of these materials are used.

“A great speech is built 90% on great material, and only 10% on your style of delivery.”

In the past, speakers paid more attention to collecting information, like the above quote, than on keeping track of it. Finding ideas from previous speeches using even the best of filing systems was a time-consuming, frustration chore that derailed their train of thought. Now, the smart speakers balance the need for new information with software programs that index every word of their previous presentations. They spend more time creating and less time searching. Need a quotation or story? Just select a word, or string of words, and up pops several different possibilities. A presentation that would take weeks to prepare in the past now can be done in just a few hours.

Speakers can easily generate professional looking visual aids using graphic and draw programs. The diagrams produced by a computer are eye catching, cleaner, and more precise than most of those put together by hand. Some of the programs will even generate colored transparencies or slide masters. Instead of bringing a roomful of people together to listen passively to you speak, you can connect the computer to an LCD display, on top of an overhead projector, and click through a slide show or sequence of computer scenes.

Below is a computer screen displaying an outline on using personal computers for quality presentations.

Computer can help

1. Word processing
2. Well-chosen material
3. Visual aids

Does this look like a quality outline? There are three main points. Yet this is not an acceptable outline. It would take much more typing to be complete and acceptable. This outline or menu, however, is loaded with hidden details. You can instantly expand it to reveal those hidden details with information management programs. You can collapse subheadings into headings, expanding them whenever needed. Not only headings, but passages of text can be collapsed or expanded into headings or subheadings. This means you can collapse a large outline containing dozens of pages of text into a single page overview. By selecting menus, it's easy to work on one section while keeping an overview of the entire presentation.

Do you remember what a complicated machine a computer was at first? Experience made it simple. The more familiar you are with the above programs, the quicker you can use them without having to think about them. They will give you a skill that is valuable today, but invaluable in one year. So, the next time you are asked to deliver "a few well-chosen words," use a personal computer.