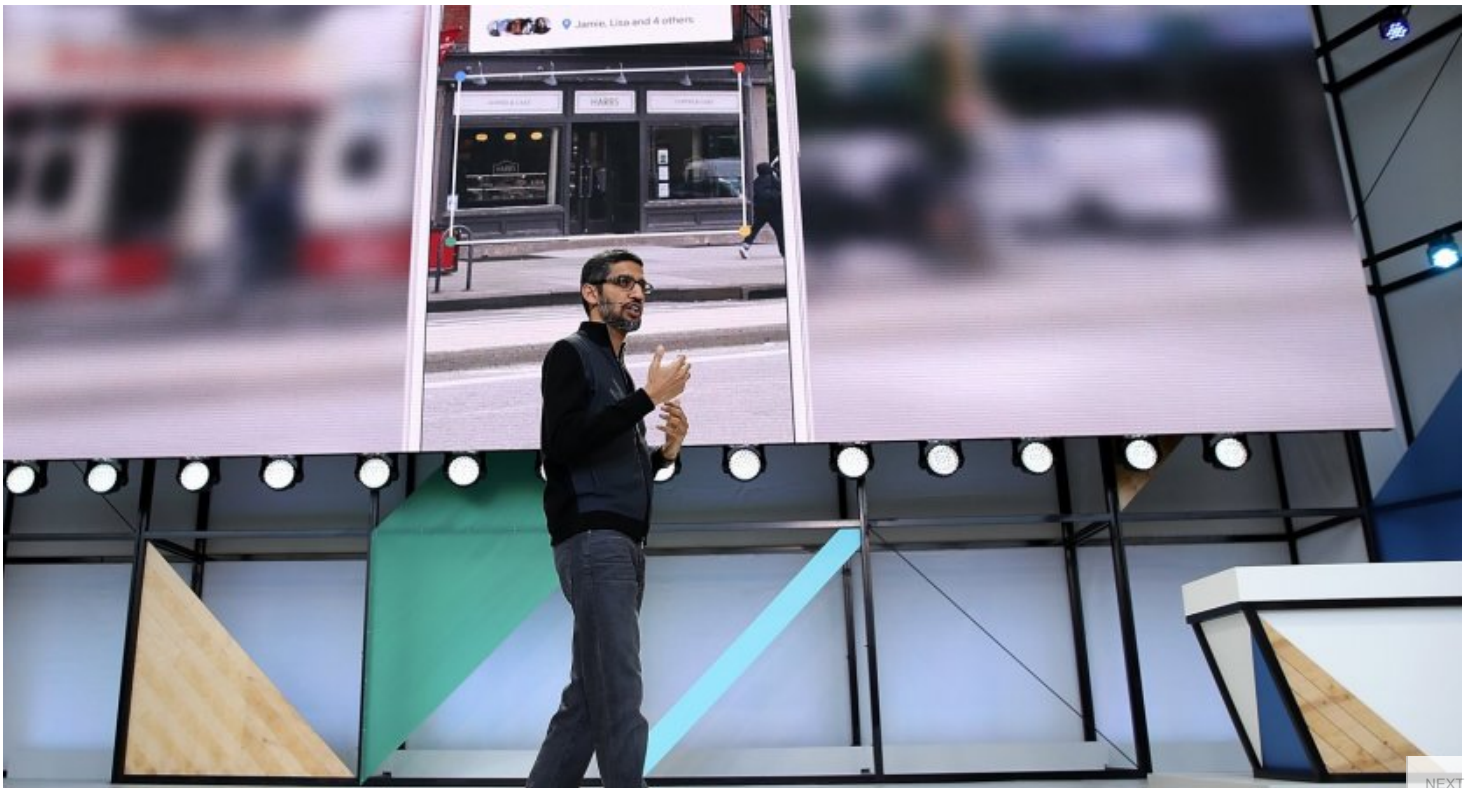


GROW

## Google's CEO Doesn't Use Bullet Points and Neither Should You



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Sundar Pichai. CREDIT: Getty Images

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Google CEO Sundar Pichai recently announced at the company's 2017 developers conference that Google is "rethinking all our products" as it moves from a mobile-first world to an "A.I.-first" one. His presentation also reflected a rethinking of traditional presentation style.

Senior managers and executives at Google have told me that visual storytelling plays an important role in getting their messages across. In fact, Google's employees are being trained to present in a bolder, fresher style—less text heavy and more visual.

"Since stories are best told with pictures, bullet points and text-heavy slides are increasingly avoided at Google," Pichai said at the conference. His slides were remarkably uncluttered. The first thing you noticed in his presentation was the large amount of white space on each slide. Just as professional ad designers avoid filling up an entire page with text, Pichai didn't clutter his slides with extraneous words or numbers.

One researcher concludes that the average PowerPoint slide contains 40 words. From the beginning of Pichai's presentation, it took about 12 slides to reach 40 words. The slides were mostly photos and animations. When text did appear, it showed up as a few words to describe the photo or image.

For example, Pichai's first slide had seven logos for Google's primary products (Search, YouTube, Android, etc.) and the following text: "1 Billion+ Users." The point of the slide was to explain that Google's products each attract more than 1 billion monthly users.

## The brain can't do two things at once

Pichai and Google's slide designers are creating brain-friendly presentations. Cognitive scientists say it's impossible for us to multitask as well as we think we can. The brain cannot do two things at once and do them equally well. When it comes to presentation design, we can't read text on the screen and listen to the speaker while retaining all of the information. It can't be done.

University of Washington biologist John Medina has done extensive research into persuasion and how the brain processes information. His advice is to burn most PowerPoint decks and start over with fewer words and more pictures. According to his book, *Brain Rules*, "We are incredible at remembering pictures. Hear a piece of information, and three days later you'll remember 10 percent of it. Add a picture and you'll remember 65 percent."

If you want to create visually interesting slides, less is more. Slide design guru Nancy Duarte recommends following a **three-second rule**. If viewers do not understand the gist of your slide in three seconds, it's too complicated. "Think of your slides as billboards," says Duarte. "When people drive, they only briefly take their eyes off their main focus, which is the road, to process a billboard of information. Similarly, your audience should focus intently on what you're saying, looking only briefly at your slides when you display them."

When is the last time you saw a billboard with a bullet-point list? Bullet points are the easiest design to create on a PowerPoint slide and the least effective.

In his book *TED Talks*, Chris Anderson writes, "Those classic PowerPoint slide decks with a headline followed by multiple bullet points of long phrases are the surest single way to lose an audience's attention altogether.... When we see speakers come to TED with slide decks like this, we pour them a drink, go and sit with them at a computer monitor, and gently ask their permission to delete, delete, delete."

According to Anderson, each bullet point becomes its own slide. A bullet point might become one sentence on a slide or be replaced entirely with a photo. In Pichai's Google presentation on A.I., slide number five carried the theme. There were five words on the slide: "Mobile first to A.I. first."

Pichai's slide obeyed the TED rule--delete, delete, delete. It works for Google. It will work for you.

How to Deliver a Presentation That Doesn't Put Your Audience to Sleep



