

How Steve Jobs beats presentation panic

by [Thomas Wailgum](#), CIO.com

Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted from [CIO.com](#). Visit CIO's [Macs in the Enterprise](#) page.

Steve Jobs had a serious and embarrassing Wi-Fi problem to deal with. It was plain to the thousands in attendance and the tons more people watching online: On Monday at the Worldwide Developers Conference, Jobs was struggling with wireless connectivity while attempting to demonstrate the new features of Apple's iPhone 4.

"Our networks in here are always unpredictable, so...I have no idea what we're going to find," he said. "They are slow today."

What Jobs did next, according to [Carmine Gallo](#), author of [The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs](#), was vintage Jobs (and a model for how presenters should deal with stage crises): He did not panic. He did not look hot under the collar of his trademark turtleneck. His hours of practice and intimate knowledge of every inch of every slide made him comfortable enough so that he could jump around to another part of the presentation (in this case, to look at photos).



Steve Jobs holds court at this week's Worldwide Developers Conference.

Jobs "trouble shooted" his problem by asking the audience (and, presumably, his back-stage engineers) for a little networking assistance. "You know, you could help me out. If you're on Wi-Fi, if you could just get off," he pleaded, to roaring audience laughter. "I'd appreciate it. We're having a little problem here."

K

And he sprinkled in several more bits of humor to diffuse any audience insecurity. "I've got time," he joked, while waiting for the audience to "police each other."

"It was brilliantly done," Gallo says. "He's so well prepared that he knew what was coming next. He had a backup and went back to the photographs without missing a beat. And it didn't bring the whole presentation to a halt."

What every presenter needs to realize about this episode: It certainly wasn't the first time Jobs suffered a presentation-related mix up, and it probably won't be the last. High-tech gear has become intertwined in almost every presentation today, and technology, as we all know, is like child actors and animals: It can never be counted on to act predictably once up on stage.

So, what should you do if this type of a Jobsian situation happens to you? Here are expert tips for recovering from a presentation problem.

Have backup plans

The list of things that could go wrong during a presentation is horrifying and endless: You're using PowerPoint, and the application freezes. Network speeds plummet. Your handheld device crashes. An embedded video that is a key piece of your presentation just won't load. And then you start getting heckled, and your powers of comedic relief are inaccessible.

Cue the dreaded awkward silence.

First things first: Practice, practice, practice, implores Gallo. "Jobs knows every slide on that presentation, every font on that presentation," he says. "I can't tell you how many hours he put into that presentation, but guaranteed, he put in more rehearsal time than 99 percent of people ever will, because most people do not put in this time." (Gallo notes that those apps developer who shared the stage Jobs most likely "put in 100 hours of work for their two minutes.")

That preparedness can equal comfort up on stage when things go awry, because they always do, Gallo says.

"No matter how much time, work, energy and money you put into presentation, guess what: Something will probably not go according to plan," he says. "It's Murphy's Law: When something is supposed to work when you're introducing a new product or system, there's going to be a glitch."

What typically happens to those unprepared is this: The presentation comes to a screeching halt. "The speaker really doesn't know what to do next," Gallo says. "They stop talking. They

start fiddling with the product, and you can see the brains and the wheels spinning as to: What am I going to do next?”

Gallo adds: “You need to ask yourself: What’s my backup? On that one part of the presentation, when I have to go to something technical or go to a live link or demonstration: What’s my backup if it fails?”

You can be imperfect, but be entertaining

Sure, he’s the CEO of the tech company with the highest market cap on the planet. But Jobs is well aware of the power of a self-deprecating joke or humorous story. Or a plea for help.

“People get a little too consumed into thinking: I’m the presenter. Everything has to be absolutely perfect,” Gallo says. “And then when you’re up on stage and something goes wrong, you’re kind of naked. Then it becomes uncomfortable. But Steve Jobs is always comfortable.”

Gallo says any presentation must do three things: 1. Inform. 2. Educate. 3 Entertain. “If you forget the entertainment part, that’s when you’re going to get caught up in yourself, and small glitches are going to turn into big problems,” he says. “It’s OK to entertain people and make jokes about what’s happening.”

Gallo recalls a presentation Jobs made a few years back when a presentation slide wouldn’t advance. Calmly, Jobs announced that the slides weren’t advancing—“so that his people would know there was an issue,” Gallo says. “And he’s troubleshooting as he’s speaking: “There’s a slide problem and they’re not advancing...oh well, someone will get that fixed.” That led Jobs to bring up a fond and funny story about him and cofounder Steve Wozniak. While Jobs told the story (which the audience loved), the Apple team fixed the slide problem, and when Jobs ended the anecdote, he simply moved on.

“He never let that glitch set him off his game,” Gallo says.

Don’t sweat the small stuff

The ability to deal with glitches demonstrates the difference between a good presenter and a below average one.

“If it’s a small enough glitch where nobody in the audience knows that something is supposed to happen, don’t call attention to it,” Gallo points out. “I’ve seen this happen all the time. People said: ‘Oh, that slide is not supposed to be there.’ Or: ‘Oh, I don’t want to show you that!’ It

makes you look bad, and it brings the whole presentation to a halt.”

In addition, you shouldn't panic over a couple of seconds of silence as you gather yourself after a technical hiccup, such as a slow network connection. “When something like that happens, take your time, pause for a minute, and remember that it's OK to have some dead air,” Gallo says. “People keep thinking they just have to keep talking, talking, talking through something because they are afraid of a vacuum of silence. Twenty seconds to you may seem like an eternity, but it's not too big a deal in the context of a presentation.”

During Jobs's WWDC presentation, there were several instances where he took some quiet time to try to remedy his technical issues and figure out his next step. “He was not afraid of the pause,” Gallo points out. His use of humor (and, admittedly, an adoring crowd) also helped to diffuse any audience discomfort.

Gallo's own “One more thing...” (e-mailed to me after our interview) is a useful analogy that he tells his clients to remember when they invariably have to deal with a presentation mistake: “When a figure skater falls, everyone is rooting for the person to get up and finish the performance,” Gallo says. “Pull yourself up and get on with it. Enjoy the performance.”