

Building on Pecha Kucha

Japan's structured "chit-chat" presentations can teach how to focus on key points and stay on time



Richard Naish

At last November's Online Educa Conference in Berlin, there was a 'Mini Masterclass' on Pecha Kucha, with e-learning guru Jay Cross on the panel. Berlin is billed as the world's biggest e-learning conference, with over 2,000 delegates and 400 speakers from 92 countries. However this session, in a small room off the main conference room, was one of the highlights and may be adopted by e-learning conferences this year for at least one session. However it will certainly need a bigger room.

Pe-cha-ku-cha is the onomatopoeic Japanese word for 'chit-chat'. Chit-chat is quick and casual and so Pecha Kucha is usually pronounced very quickly as one word, sounding like 'pechaku-cha'. And yes, it was invented in Japan...but by two European architects, Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein, who still run their architectural practice there.

Avoiding death by PowerPoint

The format is that you give a presentation but with a twist; you are only allowed 20 slides and they are auto-advancing every 20 seconds. So you have a total of exactly 400 seconds (6 minutes 40 seconds) to give your full presentation. You cannot pause or go backwards and there is very little scope for the classic 'death by PowerPoint' technique of reading your slides out to an audience who can see the words.

This focussed presentation can be very engaging. For example, David James Clark gave a presentation on '10 Movies about Learning' and explained the

learning moral for each of the movie examples he gave. Top Gun and Star Trek both tell us that 'Training +rebellion=Hero', The Matrix shows us 'Just-in-time learning will save the world' and The School of Rock 'shifts the responsibility of learning to the students'.

Dytham and Klein started this format because they wanted other designers and architects to showcase and talk about their work, but knew that if you give designers a microphone and an audience they are likely to talk passionately, for a long time. So they invented Pecha Kucha Nights where one designer after another can showcase their work in just 6 minutes 40 seconds each.

What can we learn from this format?

The events are in galleries or bars and are very social and popular. In fact they were so popular, that the concept spread virally around the world and there are now Pecha Kucha Nights in 230 cities around the world from Dunedin in New Zealand to Tromsø in Norway. Check out www.pecha-kucha.org for an event near you.

Despite widespread use in the learning industry, PowerPoint presentations are not famed for enthralling and engaging audiences. However this format is very attractive, so must have some lessons for learning.


- *Storytelling*: the best Pecha Kucha presentations have an over-arching narrative that links the slides and draws the listener in. We can't forget that before the written word, storytelling was the main form of social entertainment and learning. 'Edutainment' was not a dirty word then. Likewise, a piece of learning benefits from having a narrative while at the same

time delivering new knowledge and skills.

- *Presentation skills training*: Pecha Kucha could make a desirable face-to-face training course again. A trainer could send out a presentation as pre-course reading and ask all group participants to bring their own presentation to share with the group. This way the delegates can learn the all-important techniques of condensing their material to the key elements and speaking to time.

- *Content development aid and icebreaker*: for the first stage of content development, the subject matter expert could produce a Pecha Kucha presentation with an audio track as a short introduction to a face-to-face/online course. This would focus on what the key topics were and how best to engage an audience with this content. Developing the rest of the material would be much simpler; it would flow from each of the 20 slides.

- *Re-enforcement of key learning points by participants*: After a week-long training course, each participant could be asked to produce a Pecha Kucha presentation of what they have learnt from it. Then these presentations would be run one after another on the last day, with the facilitator bringing out the key learning points as they went along. The course would then end on a high, participants would get to practice engaging an audience and the key learning messages would be re-enforced.

The Pecha Kucha organisation itself also sees such potential and is setting up 'Pecha Kucha learning' and 'Pecha Kucha corporate programmes' and licenses its format to conferences. 

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