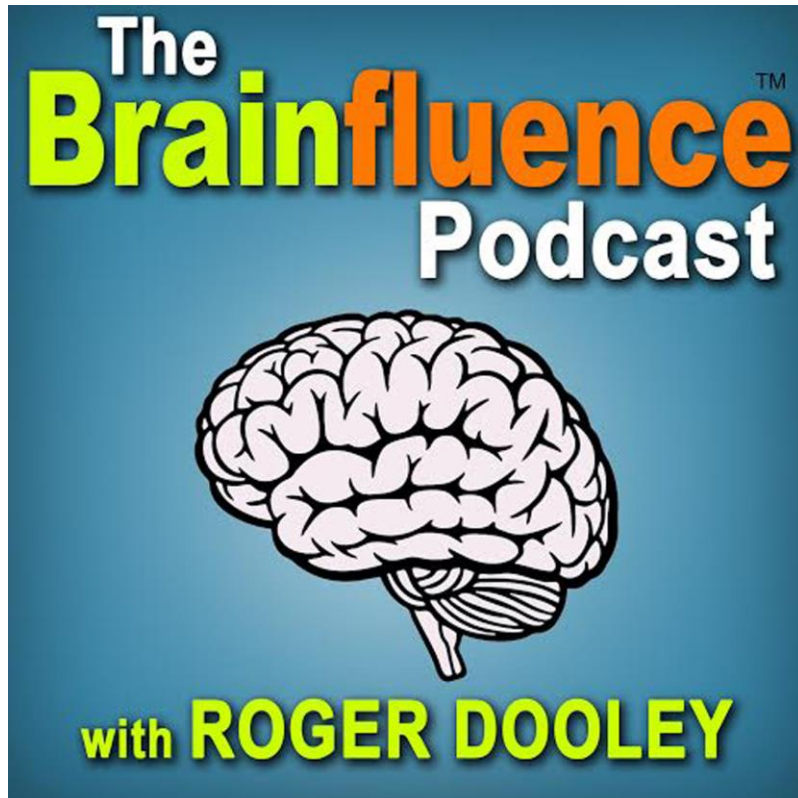


Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte



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**Roger Dooley**

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## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. This is Roger Dooley and sitting with me I have Nancy Duarte. Nancy is the founder and CEO of Duarte Design and a true thought leader in the space of persuasive presentations. She is the author of Slideology, the art and science of creating great presentations, resonate, present visual stories to transform audiences and the HPR guide to persuasive presentations. Her new free E-book is Slidedocs, and it is about creating visual documents to spread ideas. Nancy, you've been in this visual presentation space for a long time, not to make you sound really old but can you give our listeners a brief account of how you got started in the area and how you've evolved overtime?

Nancy: Yeah, that ...

Roger: Because obviously, your books represent an evolution.

Nancy: Yeah, they do, actually that's great you could see that. Yeah it's funny, people are like, "How did you know since you were a little girl you wanted to do this" I was like, "Oh! Gosh, I did not know." It's been a lot of getting up every day and choosing what I want to do, what brings me passion and what brings me peace. The evolution happened actually, lot of people don't know that my husband started the company in 1987. He worked really, really hard one summer moving furniture, and he saved up enough money to buy a Mac Plus.

Now believe it or not, last year was our 25-year anniversary, and we just moved into one of the buildings he moved furniture from 25 years ago, a 35,000 square feet building. It's so funny.

Roger: Oh, no kidding. That's a great story.

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

Nancy: If he'd had an open vision back then he is like it would've freaked him out. I think we both would have been freaked out. We originally started to just ... I joined him. I was like, "Hey, if I can sell it, you can keep it, but if I can't sell this, you got to go and get yourself a real job, dude." I was very pregnant and very mad, coming home every day, "Get a real job" and I was like, "Hey ..."

Roger: Right, like every other practical ...

Nancy: Yeah, like I'm like if I can sell it, you can keep it. I picked up the phone. I made three phone calls. We won three major accounts, two public companies, and NASA and I joined him. At first it was like, "Hey, let's just work from home." Kids are crawling underfoot. Then we had to become a real company and get real employees and then find a real space and pay for overhead. As it's grown, I think that the core purpose has stayed the same and that's to create environment where people make their best friends, where people can feel the affection and the passion for what we do, like when they walk in the door.

I feel like it's been amazing. It's been an amazing journey with five different re-inventions, but all still focused on the spoken word. It's a delight to ... not only have had a small business indoor for this long, but to actually be known for helping people craft messages that are actually making a difference in the world.

Roger: Now, that's great. Really, 25 years is an incredible ...

Nancy: Yeah.

Roger: Length of time for just about any business to survive, even if it's evolved and pivoted occasionally that's still pretty amazing. Congratulations on that.

Nancy: Yeah.

Roger: Right now, the company actually creates visual content or other content as well as teaches people how to do that themselves. Correct?

## **Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte**

Nancy: Yep, it does. For about 20 of those years, we were doing it on behalf of others and then when my first book came out, I started to get calls. “Hey, will you do training,” and I’m like, “Oh, I did not think that would happen.” As a capitalist, I decided to build a training organization and it has been so fun to see people pick up the skills for themselves. It’s been more transformational and just a lot more gratifying work on the training side. It’s been really fun.

Roger: Yeah. I’m sure it’s great to create something that makes a change, but at the same time, when you can teach other people to do it that’s got to be very rewarding.

Nancy: Exactly.

Roger: Let’s start with, everybody’s either favorite program or Nemesis PowerPoint, it’s got a bad representative, but probably I would guess you would say only because it’s so often misused and it isn’t the tool itself that’s necessarily evil, but simply the way a lot of people tend to use it. In Slideology you show how to create slides look good and help audience understand the point the speaker is trying to make, but there are lot of speaking coaches or experts if you will, quote experts, who recommend no slides at all. A month ago, I recorded an interview with Nick Morgan ...

Nancy: I love him.

Roger: You ... him.

Nancy: Yeah.

Roger: He mostly, he doesn’t say never, never use PowerPoint, but I think he falls into the no slides or better camp and there are some folks who absolutely say, “Well, you should never use PowerPoint.” How do you feel? Are some kinds of presentations better without slides, even good slides?

Nancy: Yeah, when I wrote Slideology, I thought people go, they get their MBA, their engineering degree whatever they go to school for, yet they’re never taught how to visually communicate.

## **Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte**

That's kind of relegated over to the graphic design department. Yet when people go into business, they communicate visually through PowerPoint second only to E-mail, so they are constantly using a tool that requires that they use the visual display of information, yet they don't know the basics of how to do it.

I thought well I'll write a book about that and that will help people use presentations the right way and it did. It helped a lot, but then I'm like "Wow, I'm sitting through a lovely talk that's still stupid," and I realized that it just really ... the real problem really was the content which was hard for me, like it's hard for me to say to someone, "You know, you have a good idea there but how you're delivering it, or how you're constructing it isn't the best way to do that." Diving into story was important, but I also feel like visuals can amplify your message.

I agree with Dr. Morgan because he's a friend, and I admire his work that you shouldn't jump into PowerPoint and start making pictures just because that's what you're conditioned to do. You need to back up, work on the story, work on the structure, and then only display on the screen information that's beneficial to the audience that amplifies your message. So often a presenter will use their slides as their teleprompter. They'll just click through their slides to remember what to say, and then the audience is just reading what they're going to say anyway, so that's dumb.

If you're going to use it, you can actually use visuals as a moment I'll never forget, something that when you make a point and you punctuate it with a visual, it's just the cinematic experience where they're like, "Oh my God! I need to talk about this image I just saw" or "I need to explain this diagram that was just presented. Let me draw out this diagram I just saw in my last presentation." That's powerful, because then people can see what you're saying. They'll understand you. You have a shared graphic, a shared visual. I actually believe that the better way to present is an interplay between the words and the pictures because that will help amplify the meaning of what you're trying to say.

**[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley**

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

- Roger: I think that make a lot of sense. I use slides in all of my speeches and I try to use them to show the point visually so that if a particular technique caused a 75% lift versus another technique that caused only a 10% lift, if you can give people a very simple chart that shows that, it's a lot better than trying to visualize in your mind.
- Nancy: Right. Right and it is so easy to just flash up what you're talking about so they can see it because so much of what we say especially in business, it's interrelated or interconnected. If you could diagram how these things share a relationship, do they overlap, do they flow into each other, is it cyclical in nature, those are ways to get people to be like, "Oh, I see it. I get what you're trying to ask me to do because I can see it." I err on the side that it amplifies it to have the visuals, so anyway.
- Roger: In Slideology, you mention Lawrence Lessig who has a real unique approach. I had a chance to see him speak at South by Southwest, and he really does an amazing job of incorporating a massive number of slides into a single presentation.
- Nancy: I'd love that ...
- Roger: I think that's only a few people can pull off but how would one even try and do that. It seems like it depends very much on perfect timing. He's sometimes using 2 or 3 slides in the course of a sentence, seems like something to be very difficult to do well at least.
- Nancy: Yeah, he practices. You know what, a friend of mine, Garr Reynolds, if people don't look at his blog presentations and he's just really bright in the presentation space, and Garr calls that style the Lessig method. It's rapid, verbal, rapid visual piece. If you think about it, what he's really kind of doing is projecting his teleprompter. It's a little word, a little phrase, a picture, but instead of it being like a sentence on the slide, he breaks it down, so he click, click, click, click. He's actually teleprompting himself, but he is doing it in a way that breaks it into pictures and words and it's done very, very well.



## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

Instead of putting 5 bullet points up there, he may be will use 10 slides to make those 5 points. He's actually doing the same thing, but he's splitting it out really well. He's super bright. The things coming out of his mouth are fascinating. The things he chooses to project are fascinating. How he breaks up the words on the slide is also a message. I think he does a really good job. Not everyone can do it. I've seen it backfire too. He does a good job but it takes some rehearsal. It takes some commitment to do it well.

Roger: Yeah, I'm sure it does and probably bringing your own slide clicking equipment too. I've had some experience of bulky slide clickers where to try to that, there will be a slide behind where you'd click it once and would have ...

Nancy: Yeah, yeah. I've had some pretty bad clickers myself.

Roger: Nancy, it's common wisdom that you shouldn't put on a slide what you're saying, supposedly the audience member's brain is trying to both process the spoken word and the visual sentence at the same time and it ends up somehow getting confused or distracted. Again, some speaking experts do recommend amplifying key points by putting that point up in words on the screen. Where do you come down on that?

Nancy: Putting points up on the screen?

Roger: No, if you're making a point putting say, a similar sentence or a short sentence that underscores what you've just said.

Nancy: I think so. I think that if you are going to put words up on the screen that's totally fine, especially if the words are meaningful. What I recommend is if you're going to do a talk, you should have at least a few things in there that are crafted in a way that it becomes a tweetable moment. Now, some people will put a phrase up there and then they will put a little twitter bird up there like making it, like tweet this, right.

Roger: Little suggestion.

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

Nancy: That gets offensive to somebody who is in the audience. A lot of people who are influential on Twitter. They want to, they want to see the novelty, they want to hear it and feel like “Oh, I found this in this talk and tweeted it.” I do recommend that people put phrases up there because again, it’s repetition. If you look back to Aristotle, he believed that you should repeat yourself to create emphasis. You say it once. You say it a second time. You say it a third time. People will remember it. It creates emphasis. Verbally saying it and visually seeing it creates emphasis and makes it that phrase that you just said stand out.

Now I think if the phrase is Twitter worthy, it doesn’t hurt for you also to use a rhetorical device of pausing, say something, pause for a minute. When you pause, people reflect on what you did. They’re like, “Oh! They are pausing. What did they just say?” and they recall what you said. It’s also by adding a pause as punctuation. It gives people the time to tweet it too. It’s kind of a little trick.

Roger: Yeah, I find when I’m listening to somebody talk, half the time, I miss what the next thing the person said, because I’m tweeting the last remark that they said.

Nancy: Exactly, exactly.

Roger: It’s tough. Yeah I certainly agree that putting a please tweet this prompt or even something little bit more subtle than that is a bit heavy-handed. Even on blogs. I’ve seen some blogs where they’ll highlight a quote and have a little thing, next week, and just click to tweet it. To me that’s, I don’t know, a little bit too much. As you say, let people find ... key point, discover it themselves. I did find that when I incorporated those into my speeches, I did get more tweets in the right kind of audience. Some audiences just don’t tweet a lot, but in sort of a social media savvy audience. I picked up that suggestion from Dan Zarrella. He writes a lot about ...

Nancy: I love him.

Roger: Social media analysis. After I saw him talk I said, “Ah I’m going to do that.” I was speaking later at the same conference so I

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley



## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

incorporated some of those in and I'll be darned if he wasn't right.

Nancy: Yeah. He's good. He knows the stuff.

Roger: Let's talk about animations. I'm guessing you're not a big fan of bulleted points flying in from the left and right or may be checker board transitions, but what is the right way if there is one to use animation in your presentation?

Nancy: That's a great question because I have the same belief system about animation as I do visuals. The only thing you should use them for is if it amplifies your message. Having bullets fly in with a zippy sound, doesn't add meaning. It's just agitation. We did some really beautiful things that are cinematic in nature, like, if you're going to animate, you can use it to reveal something that was hidden or you could use it to layer on top of something from, put something on top of something that was behind. It shows hierarchy. When you're animating something you have to ask yourself, what does this mean? Am I adding and amplifying the meaning? If you're not, then it should stay static and just click through.

The interesting thing is the human brain will jump to and process anything that moves. It's part of fight or flight instinct. It moves we look, it moves we look. Having things build over time, or having layers fall in over time, is smart because our brain will re-engage. Oh, that slide moved, we'll look and process it and come back to with oh, it moved again, something moved again, something moved again. Having things sit there and buzz like a buzzing fly or those things are agitations. If you can layer your information in a way that you can build it more like how Lessig does, split it out over time so that things are changing, it will keep the audience more alert.

Lot of the grief about PowerPoint is you get this long diatribe and one slide stays up there for 5 minutes. People get tired. They want to see things change up. the more you can break into pieces and change things up, yeah possibly animate it but having things just checkerboard in, like, so we actually have

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

banned specific transformation. Specific transitions like checkerboard. It's funny you'd say that boomerang. As long as it's going to boomerang, it needs to boomerang for a purpose. We have the certain things where we've not liked checkerboard. We have not found a reason why in all of time, anyone needs any content to checkerboard.

Yeah, maybe there's something out there, but we just do not know how that would amplify any sort of information. It is interesting. You just need to really understand the meaning of that motion. We also looked a lot at screenwriting. An interesting thing about directing, movie directing, a lot of times the protagonist walks in from the left and the antagonist walks in from the right because we as a culture read from left to right and that's comfortable. Right to left is just less natural, less comfortable to us so that's how they will amplify more foreboding entrance will be by them entering from the right.

Roger: Interesting.

Nancy: There's things like that that you can understand about cinema and movies and why things animate the way they do and the meaning they have and amplify the meaning. Use that to your benefit.

Roger: I saw on your site the Long Island presentation. Of course that wasn't meant to be accompanied by a speech. That's a standalone presentation but there you used animation motion to get advantage. Even that was pretty much all words and very simple visuals, but the animation really added a lot of interest there.

Nancy: Yeah. That one's interesting because that one was used before the presentation started. It was an attention grabber so the people in the audience would ... We called it the scare reel, the red reel because we wanted people to be like, 'Oh, this presentation is about to start and it's going to solve all these terrible problems that we have' so that's why it was ...

Roger: Oh okay, that makes a lot of sense because at the end of it, I felt that it was while it was very nice visual experience, it

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

seemed like the answers to a problem were lacking but understanding that sort of an intro that presumably will then get into some of the stuff you're talking about and resonate as far as problems and the solutions. Then that makes a lot more sense.

Nancy: Yeah, it, yeah. Thanks.

Roger: Something that I talk about a lot is the power of stories and in particular the evidence from neuroscience for how powerful stories are. I think that people have known about stories for years in a sales context and other contexts. Your book *Resonate* talks about visual stories. What do you mean by visual stories? Explain a little bit about how that works.

Nancy: Yeah, it's a methodology we actually came up with where we combine the words and the pictures for a more powerful experience. We were talking about like it's not like I have a writer go often write and a designer go often design, the power of them coming together as the writer is trying to visualize things. The visualizer is trying to help write things. It's a little bit more integrated, so after writing and producing presentations, we actually have like a story methodology that's very visual and then once we're done with the very visual kind of storytelling, then a designer comes and visualizes it in a way it amplifies it.

The methodology is actually part of what we used to execute on our own clients' work. We combined it. We looked at what we were doing and then we turned that into training. People come to us and can either write and produce their visual story or they can come into our shop. Right now, we have a workshop going on today where they're coming in and learning the skills for themselves so that they can write and produce their own visual stories because what happens today, some people are like oh I can make my own story. I'm a subject matter expert. Well, they might be a subject matter expert in chemistry or who better to work on your talk than a subject matter expert in story.

We are subject matter experts in story, story constructs and storytelling. A lot of times people will be like, "Oh! I know. I want

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

to tell a story about my partnership.” They’ll Google the word global partnership and what will come up in Google images is a handshake in front of a globe. Can you not use a handshake in front of a globe to talk about a partnership? That’s just so cliché. Whatever you Google search, all your competitors are Google searching too, so can you come up with a better metaphor? For us, we may say, “Wow, your partnership is a lot like salt and pepper,” 2 very contrasting things come together to make this industry more savory. That’s such a different description of a partnership than a handshake in front of the globe.

Can you come up with a metaphor that really sticks, that creates meaning and also tightens up the partnership because it feels so much more valuable. Those are the kinds of things where we’ll brainstorm ideas out of the box ways to describe things and really come to a place that may be the person couldn’t have come to on their own.

Roger: That makes a lot of sense. Probably good advice for websites too. I see a lot websites that incorporate that same kind of imagery, the shaking hands, the multicultural business people sitting around a table, a young woman with headset and so on.

Nancy: Right.

Roger: You’re trying to convey a little bit different sense will get people’s attention in a lot more productive way. A lot of presentations are really meant to be informational rather than persuasive for them tell a story evidenced as a primary focus. When you go to a conference, people expect a bunch of takeaways that they can apply in their own business and so on. How does a speaker who’s primarily trying to provide information to the audience that they can use, incorporate some of the story concepts or to make it more interesting rather than recitation of techniques.

Nancy: Yeah. That’s a great question. I think what happens is when you have information it’s harder to tell one single story. If you had to talk and you’re just talking about one single protagonist

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

who went on this journey that's amazing. There's not very many opportunities like that because in business, we also have a heck of a lot of information we're supposed to be conveying at the same time. That's why I felt like this discovery I made with this persuasive story pattern was so important because you could ... it's information that's laced with story. Creating that sense of tension and release that story does, is important to keep people interested. It's a form of contrast, build tension release it, build tension release it. It will keep people riveted.

One of the ways that you can create that tension and release it is that tension between what is, what could be, what is, what could be. It creates a sense of tension and resolve. Even though there's a lot of information you convey, the structure that you use can create a sense of story tension that'll be interesting to the audience and keep them engaged.

Roger: If you're talking about a web design technique for example, you might start with "On this website 73% of the visitors to the home page, immediately click the back button and bounced," and then provide the solution for that. That would be the sort of thing you are talking about?

Nancy: Yeah. There you just stated a fact which is what is, here's what it is.

Roger: Which is a problem to ...

Nancy: Which is a problem yeah and then you can say, and in the future, we're going to have it function like this or whatever. Yeah. That's perfect.

Roger: Let's talk about your new book, Nancy, which is actually a free download again for listeners. That's at [Duarte.com/slidedocs](http://Duarte.com/slidedocs). We will have that linked in our show notes along with any other sites or things that we mention here in the podcast. Tell us about Slidedocs. Is it really okay now to cram a bunch of information on the slides. Are you giving us permission to do that?

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

Nancy: Yeah, absolutely. What's interesting is once Slideology came out, it was all about simplifying, simplifying. I was watching people in meetings be mad at the engineer because they put too complex of a process on there. I was like wow, engineer, financial people, scientists. The process is very complex that they are trying to solve. It's like, wait, wait, wait a minute. I wasn't saying all PowerPoint is evil that has more than 50 words. What I did is I kind of named the enemy. This is supposedly dense slides and now they're enemy and I was like, wait a minute, wait a minute.

Three out of 4 slides you see are actually dense. They're clearly serving a business need. What's happened is like text docs. They all use to be embedded into this big dense documents. Technical documents are now done in PowerPoint. We don't do really a lot of collateral anymore. Collateral is not only online but collateral is now in PowerPoint because it's a great way to take one topic and support that one topic with words and pictures. I was watching all these people get beat up and like I can't. This process in engineering is very complex.

I can't simplify it. I was like we need to make a case for people creating their documents in PowerPoint. There's these features in PowerPoint, not a lot of people in there were there. You can create a 3-column layout where your text will continue to flow across 3 columns that makes your PowerPoint have the opportunity to look a lot like a newsletter and/or magazine actually is by a better metaphor. I realized that what's happening is there's this weird in between size. It's not really a document and it's not really a slide and those are bad. What I'm saying is go to the 2 extremes. Do either really simple slides or do very dense slides but don't project your dense slides.

You need to circulate them. If your slides can circulate through your organization and be understood without the help of a presenter you've really made a slidedoc. Take that slidedoc, add enough information to make it super clear so there's no guess work and then distribute that. Say before a meeting, you might be out to distribute a slidedoc, everyone will read it, takes maybe 6 minutes. For someone to actually present that in



## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

permission would take may be an hour. You're saving people time because people read a lot faster than you present. You're saving time and then you may have 40 minutes left over in the meeting time to discuss the findings or to discuss people's resistance or to discuss a better way to do this or whatever. You're giving people back time and using the meeting time more productively.

Roger: That's a great. I'm kind of nervous that you're telling people about things like 3-column layouts and visualize going into the next conferences, starting to see some 3-column slide presentations.

Nancy: Oh, no, no, please, please. Help me fight that battle.

Roger: That makes a lot of sense and I guess one keeping is making sure that the people who are attending the meeting actually read the slidedoc before they attend as opposed to ... showing them or prepare to ...

Nancy: Exactly. What they would do is the process of creating a slidedoc, it's like all your dense research. All your dense project, everything that's in there, this is the container for that. That process is analytical in nature. It's research like. You don't stand up and verbally present research as a dense document. You need to distance yourself and say, "Okay, what I created is an amazing body of work. Now, I need to verbally articulate that in a story form." That's a different creative process than making a slidedoc itself. People don't take that extra step. They're like, "Okay, I'm done. Bam, I'm going to go speak" instead of taking and translating it and extruding it into a story form.

Roger: How do you see that evolving in the future? Do you see new tools or techniques developing, specifically for slidedocs?

Nancy: I do. I think they're getting more and more interactive, so we're looking at people. We're building them so you can jump all around. They become almost like a small website with tabulated systems and navigable devices. We're also seeing people move their collateral into slidedocs like I was saying some had already done it. Now what's cool about that is let's

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

## Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte

say you're a sales guy. If you had a bank of 200 or 300 pages of a slidedoc, and you just spoke to a client, and you had this bank to go to where you could customize their collateral of 200 pages. I'm going to pick page 22, 77, 63, blah, blah, blah.

You package it up into a 5-page document for this client and it specifically meets the need of that client. How cool is that? Like you can't do that now if you only have an 8-page brochure about routers, you're asking your client to read 8 pages. Instead, you can put together thoughts and ideas quickly and run it by them, and then they're like, "Yes that's it" and then send them the deeper, the deeper set of information.

Roger: Yep, that makes a huge amount of sense Nancy. I know that it's a free download, it's an E-book right now. Is there a print version available or will there be a ...

Nancy: We've wrestled with that, so we may print it in the future. What I did is I felt like it would be hypocritical for me to write a book about how you can do dense documents in PowerPoint and then me not do my book in PowerPoint. It felt like, well if I'm saying you could do it, I should use the medium as the message itself. There is no way to monetize PowerPoint so I put it up there for free because I really, and then I'm protecting the word slidedocs with a trademark only so that I can put it in the public domain. Because I really want it to become a dictionary term.

I would love that for it to be, "Hey, I'm opening PowerPoint?" Am I making a slide or a slidedoc? It becomes this dividing line where they understand the difference. I'm trying to polarize the use of the tool itself by donating this term into the public domain.

Roger: Right. Probably shouldn't wait for the audio version.

Nancy: Yeah.

Roger: Nancy, we're just about out of time so let me remind our audience, we've been talking to Nancy Duarte. She is the CEO of Duarte Design and the author of some really great books

[The Brainfluence Podcast](#) with Roger Dooley

## **Ep #16: Presentation Persuasion with Nancy Duarte**

about, mostly about presentation, visual communication, Slideology, Resonate, and the HPR guide to Persuasive Presentations, and as we've just been talking about her new download E-book is Slidedocs. Nancy, what's the best way for listeners to find your stuff online and connect with you?

Nancy: Yeah, so Duarte.com is obviously a great choice. I'm also on Twitter @Nancy Duarte. We Twitter from @duarte but I also connect to anyone who connects to me on LinkedIn, so those are all ways I do try to get through even on my LinkedIn E-mail. That's how you reach me.

Roger: Great. Thanks so much for being on the show Nancy.

Nancy: Hey, thanks for having me Roger.

Roger: Great. Just to remind everybody, this has been the Brainfluence podcast and thank you for listening. We will see you next week.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at [RogerDooley.com](http://RogerDooley.com).