UTILIZATION OF PRESENTATION SOFTWARE FOR INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

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ABSTRACT

The abundance of information that needs to be disseminated to students about events in space exploration and the theories and technology utilized may be overwhelming to the beginning teacher or lecturer. The utilization of a presentation package with computer and projection system can make it easier and more organized even for the novice. A presentation package, though there are many to consider, all have basic features of interest. The fact that they are organized to be nothing more than electronic slide shows make them attractive by providing a comfort zone to start with based on a familiar use. From the basic design to present text and or visual information there exists an expanded series of features that provide special effects. These effects can range from the manner in which the frame changes to the events that occur as the electronic slide is presented.

This article provides an overview of the various major packages used in our classrooms and the features that are available. The relative price, ease of use, and formats are also explored. Finally, the next generation capability is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Educators are constantly faced with the problem of the most effective and efficient methods for disseminating information to their students. In trying to adhere to the curriculum guidelines and provide innovative approaches, one area to investigate is presentation software. With the simplest of presentation software one can present colorful slides that provide the information or data in a captivating way. As the level of complexity increases, the effects that may be added are escalated from sound bits to full motion to many other special effects. Just as transparencies evolved from basic words on a screen to those with color and polarized motion, the special effects of presentation software enhance the delivery.

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No matter the age of the learner, one must consider the exposure individuals have had to television, motion pictures, and virtual reality. The need to compete with these stimulating approaches appear to dictate the consideration of use of more sophisticated approaches to the disbursement of information than that provided by the traditional uses of lecture and reading assignments. Larry Keeley (1997) points out that we are experiencing a shift from learning as work to learning as entertainment. The use of multimedia presentations should help with the evolution to package intense experiences with the correct or best balance of technology and pedagogy. The appeal to learners of all ages to select their own best learning style can capitalize on the natural collaborative system necessary to construct a network of presentations.

Software may be found that enables the user to produce a finished presentation with just a few clicks of the buttons to select the style and then typing in the text. The other extreme would require that you write the protocols that develops an original and individually designed presentation. Generally, the first is usually referred to as presentation software while the later is termed authoring software. There are packages that fall in between and permit you options to create sophisticated presentations with relative ease. One popular, easy to use package is PowerPoint®. A program for authoring is called ToolBook®, and one in between is HyperStudio®.

> According to Hanke, The static slide show is the most common approach and involves optimizing slide-shows built with PowerPoint®, Freelance Graphics®, or other presentation-graphics programs for Web delivery. Keep in mind that builds, sound effects, and other multimedia slide show components won't translate directly to the Web. If you want to deliver slides with motion, you will need to enlist the help of your service bureau. (1998, p. 50)

"Once portfolio-based teaching and learning becomes the norm, evidence of cumulative learning will be more reliable," says Bazillion and Braun (1998). Presentation software which permits the importing of visuals and sound, has special effects, and allows for creative development of the finished product has been adopted as the tools to use for constructing portfolios. These high level electronic resumes provide a means of tracking the accomplishments of a student and displaying in a compact form an overview of the totality of experiences which occurred during the learning process. Video clips can show interactions in student teaching, still pictures can illustrate the text, interactive design can increase interest, and color and sound can deepen the impact. The same presentation packages which permit the versatility necessary for portfolios are those used for instructional purposes.

From a click and go approach which capitalizes on templates, to selection of blank slides which call for maximum input, the creator may complete a presentation that incorporates multimedia with appeal. If you are using part of an office suite, you may link to other parts and create more impact with such additions as 3-D graphics for tables and data display, insert customized artwork and link to Internet sites. Potentials and pitfalls are discussed in *The Easiest Way to Present*

on the Web. Depending on the amount you wish to invest, you may move from a basic presentation on the Web which requires the viewer to manually advance to the next screen to one that incorporates an on-line presentation with several clients or locations and that coordinates the exact pace of the visuals. In moving from a basic investment of a couple of thousand dollars to one of $50,000 or more, you get a more controlled presentation. The more expensive package may also mean you will need the services of a professional company to help achieve the desired effect. The justification of this type expenditure is viable when you consider the total cost for travel, lodging, and other expenses required to bring a variety of participants together from different locations. The total costs involved in an on-site conference may well amount to more than the cost of the Web conference. When you consider that the presentation package investment may preclude multiple onsite meetings, it becomes even more economically desirable. (Hanke, 1998)

Noting the expense of presenting on-line helps explain why educators rely on less elaborate means and tend to do face-to-face presentations. Though it is desirable to know about this approach and be advised of the availability, the practicality of its use is in question at the moment. As with distance learning, until there is corporate cooperation there will be little done in this venue without a positive commitment from school administration and adequate budgets for both training and equipment.

ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS

One of the driving forces that demands presentation software be used is the development of electronic portfolios. In essence, these devices can be either versions of a cumulative evaluation tool which permits students the opportunity to input information in the form of a presentation to reflect the individual's achievements and thus provide materials for study to determine progress, improvement in skills, and increase in acquired knowledge or it may be an elaborate resume, easily presented for viewing by a prospective employer.

> Once portfolio-based teaching and learning becomes the norm, evidence of cumulative learning will be more reliable, It appears that learning results form effective presentations are based upon the level of each of the following: active learning, individualization, cooperative learning, critical thinking, contextual learning, and learning to learn. (Bazillion and Braun, 1998)

Presentation software which permits the importing of visuals and sound, as well as, special effects, and allows for creative development of the finished product has been adopted as the tools for constructing portfolios. These high level electronic resumes provide a means of tracking the accomplishments of a student and displaying in a compact form an overview of the totality of experiences which occurred during the learning process. Video clips can show interactions in student teaching, still pictures can illustrate the text, interactive design can increase interest, and color and sound can deepen the impact. The same pres-

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PRESENTATION SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE

The top grade was given to Microsoft PowerPoint 97® for both presentation mode and the Web. It uses a click and go approach which capitalizes on templates. Another option permits the selection of blank slides to allow for maximum input from the creator including a presentation that may incorporate multimedia. PowerPoint® also links smoothly to other applications in the Microsoft Office Suite®. On the budget end is SPC ActivePresenter® which is reported to be fast and simple to use. In any case, presentation software can be used to do most of the work for you. (A-List: Software. 1998)

Macromedia Authorware4® is advertised as having Quickstart® templates and reusable course structures (learning engines) that make it easier to create interactive courses that promote high levels of understanding and retention. This, paired with Shockwave® prepares your multimedia presentation for use on the Web. (Keely, 1997)

One of the more reasonably priced programs, HyperStudio®, was developed by a science teacher, Roger Wagner. The program allows for those elements, sound and sight, which are so necessary for student involvement in the multimedia experience. You can access laser disks, include QuickTime® movie clips, import sounds, and in general be as creative as your storage space allows. Although this package is not the only one of its kind, it appears to be one that is most often selected, most likely as a result of considerations of budget and the available upgrades. The immediate upgrades are available free of charge and there is a home use option for school that is very reasonable. You also have several options for the purchase for classroom, by size of bundle and how you equip your classroom with CD support, instruction manual, etc.

A report on the use of HyperStudio 7 points out the process used to have students research, design and produce a multimedia presentation which was transferred to video tape for showing.

> This project did more than just help students learn how technology can help them in academic and daily life. It helped them learn to work together and showed them that every class member has something valuable to contribute. (Silvas and Hall, 1997)

To compliment the visuals you have created, you may wish to import music or sound effects. By calling 1-888-449-2970, or accessing http://www.commdataservices.com, you can contact a company that will provide a CD of presentation music. It has over 100 tracks with multiple styles in 5 - 60 second segments. This will provide a diversity of music to add audio interest to your presentations. The CD is both MAC and PC compatible. (*Presentation,* 1998)

According to McMakin (1998), parallel-port encoders are the easiest way to put video into presentations. The cost range is about $400 which, for this type of input is considered reasonable. In McMakin's article, several devices are

reviewed which provide motion clips in MPEG format. Most Pentium® based computers are configured to encode MPEG files without additional hardware which makes these clips easy to import.

CONCLUSION

As the use of multimedia software for the development of instructional materials increases, we must be vigilant of the legal ramifications of the use of resources in the process.

> Ethical standards apply to computer-related behavior as well as to all other aspects of human interaction and communication. Ethical questions related to multimedia development concern two basic aspects of the activity; the behavior of the developer and the production, and the contents of the production. (Tannenbaum, 1998)

In the United States, access to public domain materials from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration makes it possible for teachers to have high quality illustrations without a problem of legal complications from copyright violation. It is always wise to use original illustrations if the product is considered for publication or production.

The easy approach to the use of presentation software is to use a storyboard for planning. This can be as simple as jotting each frame idea on a 3" x 5" card. After the storyboard is developed, transfer the frame content to the created frames on the electronic storyboard. Next, go in and add your visuals and/or sound effects. Other effects, such as builds and transitions can be included before you declare the work completed. Most effects may be changed as your content is updated or audience response indicates the need for a change. Should you create effects than cannot be changed, try inserting a complimentary frame with the desired information and then delete the one that needed an update. Being creative in your problem-solving will make any software work better for you. Of course, as with all technology, do not begin to think that nothing can go wrong, or it will! Technology is the master and we utilize its protective features to help us achieve our goals. Experiment with the various software offerings, find the one you respond to best, and use it wisely. Happy creating!

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MORE INFORMATION

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