

Prezi – New Features

Phillip Barlow

Senior Library Assistant

NHS Support

Chelsea & Westminster Campus Library

Imperial College London

p.barlow@imperial.ac.uk

Over the last two years, I have been steadily increasing my use of Prezi, the web based presentation tool, as an alternative to Microsoft PowerPoint. Over the course of the same period, Prezi have been slowly increasing the features and functionality of the software to improve the user experience. The aim here is to provide an idea of how Prezi has improved, what new features are available, and what more you can do with it.

Importing slides

A little over a year ago, Prezi introduced the capability of importing slides directly from PowerPoint, to enable all of the content of a PowerPoint presentation to be dumped into the Prezi canvas. It is still the case, as it was then, that any animation features you may have in PowerPoint will be lost in Prezi as they are separate systems. Because each element of content is now individual however (with the slide becoming a frame on the canvas) it is possible to re-insert emphasis by adding elements to the path of the Prezi, a feature that remains unchanged.

Additional content

Prezi has brought in additional standard content that can be added to the presentation, which is accessed by three buttons on the toolbar:

- Frames & Arrows
- Insert
- Themes

The first button provides what it explicitly describes, in that it gives access to the four individual types of frame (Prezi's equivalent of a slide), as well as arrows and lines. However, a further tool is 'highlighter', which again speaks for itself as it allows you to highlight elements that you want to emphasise in the presentation without adding them to the path.

The Insert tool allows you to import content both from within Prezi itself, in the form of its standard library, or from external sources. Prezi has introduced a library of symbols and shapes in a variety of styles to suit your own presentation that can be used alongside any images you upload from external sources. Themes allows you to alter the appearance of the presentation's background, using either fairly simple colour changes, or more adventurous 2D and 3D imagery.

Audio and Video

It has always been possible to embed a video into a Prezi presentation, either directly from Youtube, or using a video file. To begin with, Prezi was set up to access only .flv or .swf formatted videos, with the consequence that you either had to find a way of converting your file, or else upload it to Youtube first. Now they have increased the range of file formats,

meaning it is now possible to embed video directly from a camera into your Prezi, or to edit a video using editing software without worrying about changing the file format. Additionally to this, it is now possible to have audio only files in the Prezi, which can either be as a background track, or as individual tracks attached to steps in the path, which can serve as a running commentary.

Animations

The level of animation available remains limited, although the means of setting the path through the presentation to zoom in and out, and rotate 360°, provides a degree of interest here. However, a fade-in feature has also been introduced that allows objects and/or text to be hidden and appear on the click, similar to PowerPoint, allowing a retention of emphasis of a point, or alternatively a linking together of two points, without the need for extending the Prezi path.

PC requirements

However, as a note of caution, it should be pointed out that because Prezi is a cloud-based application, and open to constant update, you will need to ensure that your computer has the necessary updated software to allow it to run, both on the one you use to write the presentation, and the one upon which it is to be presented from; while Prezi will run happily on most existing current browsers, it does have a specific requirement for the version of Adobe Flash it uses – since November 2012, it has required version 11.1, and will not run on a computer that does not have this installed.

The Next Step

The range of features available to Prezi users is slowly increasing towards the stage where it can match PowerPoint. Prezi has also introduced standalone versions of its application that can be downloaded onto a PC or Mac, allowing the user to save and present even when there is no online access, as well as apps for iPad, which allows both editing and presenting whether online or not, and iPhone, which allows you to present, neither of which PowerPoint can do without collaboration with another application (such as Slideshare). The new and increasing range of features Prezi offers suggests that it is on the way to becoming a serious alternative to PowerPoint when it comes to producing new presentations, or even amending existing ones. However, it would certainly be prudent to have a back-up copy of your presentation in PowerPoint, just in case you find yourself using a computer without Adobe Flash 11.1. As I have found out.

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