

Prezi v Powerpoint – A Personal View

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A large part of our time as information professionals is taken with training, of which making presentations forms a sizeable element. Speaking personally, this has meant using the ubiquitous Microsoft Powerpoint, as it is freely available to me on my work computer and is (relatively) simple to use. Of course, because it is the most obvious does not necessarily make it the best, as there are limitations to its use. Which is why, having first been made aware of it through Imperial College Library's Learning Development Group, and then seeing it in action at the most recent Libraries for Nursing Study Day, I decided to give Prezi a go.

Prezi – A Little Background

Unlike some other web-based applications, which tend to be for file sharing rather than active creation, Prezi is a genuine web-based presentation application that can be used to create and edit active presentations from scratch. Prezi was developed by Adam Somlai-Fischer and Peter Halacsy as a means of

escaping what they saw as the "limitations of using slides" in traditional presentation tools. With funding from Magyar Telekom, the duo formed prezi.com in 2008 (AppAppeal, 2008), and launched the product in April 2009. (Lindqvist, 2009) Rather than using traditional "slides", Prezi uses what it calls a single "canvas" to create the presentation, which can then be put into a non-linear format. This is compared with an application like Powerpoint where numbered slides display the order of information successively.

Prezi and Powerpoint

The most obvious initial benefit of using Prezi is that it is web-based. The presentation is saved under your own login on the prezi.com website, and so can be worked on anywhere that has a web connection. Furthermore, the presentation, together with all of its uploaded content, can be delivered using any web connected computer. This is certainly of use to anyone that has written a Powerpoint presentation to be delivered on a computer that your organisation does not have control of, where you have to ensure that it is emailed to a contact, or at least saved to a mobile device such as a USB, at the same time as making sure that the presentation can be viewed using the version of Powerpoint on the computer to be used.

In addition, Prezi being web-based also ensures that any audio-visual elements that you have put into the presentation can be viewed. With Powerpoint, if you add A/V elements (sound or video files), then the application must be able to access these

from a specified drive folder, which means that every folder would need to be saved on a USB containing the presentation. I certainly find the use of audio-visual elements useful and effective in retaining the attention of the audience, so the fact that Prezi can provide this capability without worrying if the relevant A/V files are accessible is good. However, at present Prezi does not support audio files on their own – while it is possible to load video files, as it is in Powerpoint, if you wish to install a sound file on its own it needs to be converted first to a video format (prezi.com recommends either FLV or SWF). This is a limitation, as while having a piece of video available is useful, there may be times that you seek to make a point where using just the audio is more useful. Additionally, audio can be more easily tailored using freely downloadable software (such as Audacity) that enables you to cut and customise an audio track.

Additionally, Prezi does not have the range of animations available to Powerpoint. Powerpoint allows the user to animate the presentation in various ways, allowing words, shapes and images to appear and disappear. In my presentations, I tend to use a specific character as a teaching aid, both as a means of retaining the attention of the audience, but also as a way of articulating the questions I want the participants to be thinking about, based on what I am telling them. In order to do this, I make use of the speech bubble shapes available in Powerpoint popping in and out. Further to this, I also make use of Powerpoint's other animation features to put in shapes that flash in order to put emphasis on certain elements. None of

these aspects is available in Prezi, which again is a limitation in its use, at least for me. A further aspect is that Prezi automatically zooms in and out so that the object, whether text or image, fills the screen. Although this can take the place of a flashing shape to create emphasis (by having the next words or phrase significantly smaller, which then causes a rapid zoom in for it to be read), it means that any images must have a very high resolution to avoid appearing pixellated, which is not a factor in Powerpoint.

So which is better?

It would be unfair to say that one application is better than the other, because each has benefits that the other lacks. Powerpoint has significant functionality in what it can do in terms of animating the presentation, but is limited by being machine (or at least profile) specific. If you have written a presentation with a lot of external content, you will need to make sure that your file locations match up, or it won't work properly. With a presentation on Prezi being web-based, this is not an issue. However, with Prezi not having Powerpoint's level of functionality, the presentation may end up lacking emphasis. Of course, this is a personal view; if you generally do not use lots of animation in a presentation, then Prezi may be ideal. What I would look for is the best of both worlds – Powerpoint's functionality in a web-based application.

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