PREZI:
A Different Way to Present

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For many years now, Microsoft PowerPoint has been so dominant in the field of presentation software that its name has become all but synonymous with the generic concept. Professors often assume students have access to PowerPoint to create their own student presentations (or, at a minimum, to display and print the instructors' slides for use as notes or handouts, particularly since Microsoft offers a free viewer for download for anyone who lacks the full software). Even Macintosh users can reliably be assumed to have the ability to create and view PPT files, even though native Mac applications like Keynote promise enhanced design possibilities.

The explosion of browser-based software alternatives recently has led to challengers in many fields, among them the category of presentation software. There are now several completely-free cloud-ware applications that offer similar fundamental tools to PowerPoint (and in many cases, they intentionally reproduce the same look and feel of PP), such as SlideRocket, Impress by OpenOffice, and Presentations by Google Docs. Newer and even smaller challengers are still more likely to mimic the design and feel of PowerPoint, including 280 Slides, BrinkPad, PreZentIt, ThinkFree Show, and Zoho Show. While such free alternatives may present an economic challenge to Microsoft's software, their mimicry of the functionality and layout limits their utility for professors seeking an alternative to the ubiquitous PowerPoint. Those seeking familiar tools but from a company that is "anyone but Microsoft" would be satisfied, but anyone looks for ground-breaking ideas for presentations should look to still other vendors.

Taking a completely different approach to the entire concept of software for presentations, Prezi stands alone as a unique and wholly viable competitor to PowerPoint. With a "prezi", users display words, images, and videos without using "slides" at all. Instead, individual pieces of the presentation are digitally deposited on a single oversized canvas, and the creator has the option to zoom in (or out) surprisingly far, so that elements of the presentation remain hidden until it becomes time for them to come into focus on screen. After all elements are in place, the creator establishes a click-path, so that when the presentation is finally run for an audience, the "camera" whisks around the canvas, panning as needed, zooming in and out, and even swirling around in spirals when moving from one waypoint to the next. The transitions are smooth, mesmerizing, and infinitely more interesting than the transitions and animations available in PowerPoint and similar products.

Best of all, because Prezi eschews slides in favor of a single canvas, creators are encouraged to think in terms of groupings and hierarchies. The presentation becomes a visual [concept] map of the content, with the layout also reflecting the relationships between items within the presentation. More important categories can be boldly proclaimed using large font (or large images), while sub-groupings within that category can be clustered nearby, or perhaps initially reduced in size so as to be invisible when viewing the entire canvas, but they zoom to fill the screen when the "camera" comes to that waypoint. Because the content is ordered by size and grouping, creators make connections explicit that might otherwise have been less obvious in a standard slideshow presentation.

It is possible to embed clickable hyperlinks within the prezi, but the software reserves its most useful trick for when the URL leads to a YouTube video: the movie is hyperlinked automatically and appears as a movie rather than a link directly on the prezi (it will be a screen capture image until this waypoint is reached, at which point the video starts playing).

Because of the relational nature of the elements in the prezi, grouped by category and assigned larger (or smaller) sizes as necessary for the internal logic of the content, presentations created on prezi appear to audiences as more comprehensible, more dynamic, and more visually interesting than analogous PowerPoint presentations. With slide-driven presentations, instructors are likely to fall into a routine characterized by thinking in terms of bullet points, often little more than fragmented sub-topics of a larger issue. The other common mistake – supplying nothing but text and imbuing the slideshow with too much information – may be equally tempting for a professor using PowerPoint. But with prezi, neither mistake is likely to occur. The blank canvas beckons for images, charts, and graphs more than words, and the ability to zoom closer is more likely to suggest keywords rather than complete passages of text... or even lists of bullet points. The very nature of prezi argues instead for audience-friendly images and Takahashi-style keywords (Presentation Zen, 2005).

Prezi represents the first step toward other visual tools that are not, strictly speaking, and presentations at all, but may yet find uses in classrooms. Browser-based programs that allow for concept mapping and brainstorming (sometimes with drawing and even inter-user chat functionality) approximate some of prezi's best features yet stand on their own as organizing tools that provide inspiration for the users. Examples include bubble.us, Thinkature, Mindmeister, and GraphicOrganizer.

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Presentation Zen. *Living large: "Takahashi Method" uses king-sized text as a visual*. September 13, 2005. Accessed 2010/07/08. "http://presentationzen.blogs.com/presentationzen/2005/09/living_large_ta.html Online.

Links
- **280 Slides-**http://280slides.com
- **Bubble.us—**http://www.bubbl.us/index
- **Graphic Organizers-**http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer
- **Impress (Open Office)-**http://www.openoffice.org/product/impress.html
- **Mindmeister-**http://www.mindmeister.com
- **Presentations (Google Docs) -** http://www.google.com/google-d-s/presentations
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