

and now presenting...



Your kids now put full motion video, animation, sound and graphics into their school projects. This year's graduates will dress up their resumes with photos and web links. So isn't it time you started taking your presentations beyond those boring old text-only PowerPoint slide shows?

by Bob Connolly

At one time or another most of us have had to create some sort of presentation. These days even the e-mail resumé I receive aren't just plain text, but include attached PDFs which contain pictures and links to websites. Whether it's a simple resumé or a sell sheet, or a bid for a contract, or a full blown interactive DVD to land a big account, we need to present the best possible image to get a foot in the door.

It's not unusual for public school students to be given assignments that require the use of simple multimedia applications such as PowerPoint, or even video editing applications such as iMovie. Typing classes have evolved into word processing labs. Traditional art now involves computers, where presentations include interactive slide shows enhanced by animations.

Most of my corporate clients have had no formal training in digital presentation skills; many get stressed out when faced with the task of creating a simple presentation that only requires pushing a button while reciting a narrative along with bullet points that slide across a computer screen. No graphics, just sliding text! Heck, with a presentation like that, who wouldn't be stressed? That kind of slide show resembles a full screen cheat sheet—and it's guaranteed to put an audience to sleep.

If you want something special—something that will make your audience really sit up and take notice—try the following tips and tricks the next time you have a presentation to create.

RULE #1: USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

Can you believe people are still using slides and overhead projectors? That's because slide projectors are cheap, and data projectors are expensive. Come on, guys and gals—if you can't afford to go digital, go analog. Print your handouts on a color printer and give everyone a copy. At least that way you can leave something behind that your audience can take with them.

But once you've lugged out that slide projector and started to set it up, you're essentially saying that you (and your company) still live in the dark ages. An exception might be if your presentation requires high quality photography that can't be accurately displayed on a data projector. Or in certain situations it may be preferable to show slides when they're blown up to 24 feet wide—a travelogue presented in an auditorium is a good example. Even I enjoy a good travel slide show when it's presented by the person

who actually photographed the pictures.

But for a corporate presentation to shareholders on a profit and loss statement, you'd better come up with a way to make them think you know what you're doing. A poor quality presentation will make them think your company has a lousy marketing department—guilt by association.

RENT OR BUY THE RIGHT DATA PROJECTOR

At most companies where you'll be making presentations, they have their own projectors. If they don't, you'll have to rent or purchase one. The cost of renting a projector has become very affordable—in the range of \$100-\$350. Because a new good quality projector sells for about \$2,200 (and a used one can be had for \$500) you can justify the cost of buying one if you plan to make more than about ten presentations. But beware, the cost of replacement bulbs can set you back a fair bit—so do your homework.

The quality of projectors can vary drastically, depending on the screen size that you want to project. A rough rule of thumb is that the bigger and heavier the projector, the bigger and brighter the image. Compact briefcase projectors are perfect for boardroom presentations, whereas larger three-gun data/video projectors are better suited for auditoriums.

To be safe, create your presentations for 800x600 screen display. All projectors will be able to handle that aspect ratio.

Smaller briefcase projectors have dreadful sound, and the speakers in a PowerBook laptop computer have no bass response. If your presentation has music and narration, you'll want to buy a pair of speakers that can be carried with you, preferably ones that are battery powered.

RULE #2: PLAN AHEAD

You don't need to spend big dollars to create an impressive looking presentation. You don't even need to have any graphic skills. But you *do* need to devote time to collecting the material and getting help from a graphic designer. Plan ahead—don't start the night before or while you're on a plane going to your meeting.

Look at your presentation as if it was a storyboard for your next big motion picture. In the movie business, sketch artists are brought in to create renderings of what the director has visualized, and every scene is sketched on paper and stuck up on a wall for the crew to see.

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next big motion picture.**

In this case, you're the director and your artists are your staff—but instead of drawing the pictures, you can buy stock images, then capture, scan, digitize, render or animate them. Stay away from text bullets and bar charts—go digital. Get out that digital camera you got last Christmas and start shooting. Pictures are what your audience wants to see—think television. Rip out newspaper headlines and scan them. Go to Google and search the image section. Use CD-ROM image libraries.

And whatever you do, stay clear of cheesy clip art. Once you have the right “content”, you can then move on to assemble it as a proper presentation.

RULE #3: ONLY USE POWERPOINT IF YOU HAVE TO

Microsoft PowerPoint is, of course, the most widely used application for creating presentations, and that's what your audience is probably expecting to see. But you should try to give them the unexpected. If you're using a Mac to create your presentation, I highly recommend Keynote, Apple's new presentation software. For only US\$99 (~CDN\$150), you get not just PowerPoint, but much much more.

To get you started, Keynote provides professionally-designed themes and images. Fonts from your system create fully anti-aliased text, and the Quartz rendering engine displays these fonts with astonishing sharpness at any size or resolution.

To place graphics into Keynote, just drag them onto the layout—PDF, QuickTime, Flash, JPEG and even layered Photoshop files can be inserted. Resize an image by selecting it and dragging its bounding box as large or small as you need, and you will see your changes in real-time.

Rotation is also a matter of click-and-drag. Select the image or text, view it in the Inspector, and choose your degree of rotation. If you prefer to use keyboard commands, you can set an exact angle by holding down the Command key and dragging the image. Keynote also lets you add a soft drop shadow to any graphic element or text.

KEYNOTE EVEN HANDLES ALPHA CHANNEL COMPOSITES

I especially like the way Keynote handles layered graphics files, such as a multi-layered Photoshop PSD file. Transparencies and blends in PSD files will composite perfectly over your main background image or over any other image file such as a PDF—or even QuickTime video! As a test, I put a large QuickTime file at

the back of the stage. Then on top of it I placed a Photoshop file that had alpha channel blends. I was stunned—the video displayed perfectly through the semi-transparent areas of the PSD image and played without dropping a single frame. To push the boundaries even farther, I added text on top of the picture *and* the video—and it still played perfectly.

Then I took it another step. Keynote lets you add some pretty nifty transition effects. A slide can be “built” using real time dissolves, wipes, drops, pushes, etc., and each graphic appears or transitions on the stage when you click your mouse. What amazed me was that all this happened even when I had a video playing as a background—alpha channel images can dissolve and animate over top of the video while it's playing! My favorite transition between slides is the 3D cube roll with lighting reflections.

These graphic capabilities leverage a number of cutting-edge technologies in OS X—including hardware-accelerated Quartz Extreme, OpenGL, Aqua, QuickTime and PDF. This is where the Mac shines, because Apple has created software that talks directly to the hardware.

It's worth buying a PowerBook just to get Keynote, the software's that good. And PowerBooks provide robust support for DVI, ADV, VGA, S-video and composite video out, so you can connect to virtually any digital device: CRT monitor, flat-panel display, large screen TV or digital projector.

If you use the effects that I just mentioned and save your

presentations as QuickTime, PDF or PowerPoint, don't expect them to look anything like what you created. I exported my tests to PDF and PowerPoint to see how they would work, but I was disappointed. They become either big videos or simple slide shows without the cool 3D or transparent effects.

Now I understand why Apple is selling Keynote for less than a hundred bucks U.S. They want “switchers”.

Although Keynote is targeted at Microsoft's PowerPoint customers, it could also become competition for Adobe InDesign and Acrobat. Maybe that's why Keynote isn't being heavily promoted—Apple doesn't want to upset its neighbors. But Apple also knows that Keynote will let PowerBook users blow away any PC laptop running a PowerPoint presentation.

Everyone in graphic arts knows Acrobat for its PDF creation capabilities. Quark users now routinely use Acrobat Distiller to distill their jobs and send them to printers as high res PDFs. However, the next version of Acrobat, due in May, will also have the capability to embed rich media such as Flash SWF or Quick-

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Time as full screen interactive presentations.

But Acrobat 6 still lacks the tools to design the show. To create the artwork, you need a layout program like QuarkXPress—or InDesign, which does a great job with text, graphics and exporting to PDF. Then in Acrobat you make the presentation interactive through the addition of navigation, slide transitions, sound and video.

The InDesign/Acrobat alternative looks to me like the best solution out there, especially for CD-ROM or Internet distribution. For simple presentation purposes it may seem a little costly, although for US\$999 (~CDN\$1,500), the Adobe Design Collection gives you not just InDesign and Acrobat but also Photoshop and Illustrator. And Adobe's free Reader is now installed on most computers, so that in addition to printed handouts, you can e-mail your presentation to anyone who requests it.

GET SERIOUS — GO DVD

Nothing impresses an audience more than full screen full motion video presentations with sound. And you don't need to be a video camera operator to get video for your presentation. There are lots of companies selling stock video footage or motion image backgrounds on CD and DVD.

Apple's iMovie and iDVD are great tools for producing full screen full motion DVD. You can use iMovie to make your slides, and then use iDVD to make it interactive.

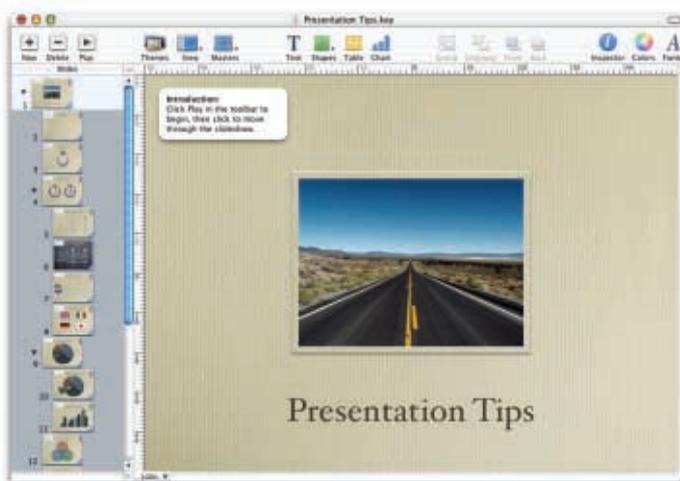
The process goes like this.

1. Create your slides in Photoshop at 720x540. For "builds", add text and graphics as layers and export each composited layer as a flattened PICT image.

2. Import your images into iMovie and drag each image one after the other into the timeline. Then add transitions such as dissolves and wipes between each slide.

3. If you have a testimonial video or other footage, you can also incorporate it into the same timeline or use it in another separate movie. If you want to interact with your audience, it's best to make several small movies that you can control via the DVD controller.

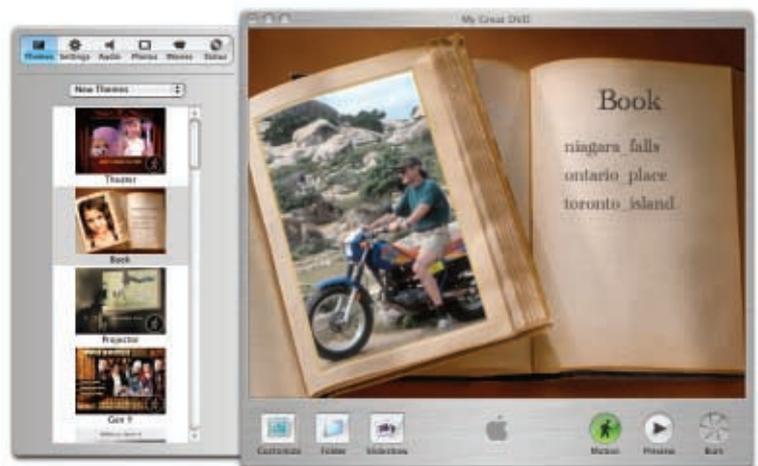
4. Sound is important. This is one of the best features in iMovie because it's easy to add music or narration in sync to the slide show. There are loads of royalty-free libraries of sound effects



One of the best things about Apple's Keynote presentation software is that you just DRAG-AND-DROP data onto the stage.



Using Keynote's BUILD FUNCTION, you can transition pictures onto the stage in several different ways.



iDVD supplies prebuilt MOTION MENU backgrounds to get you started.

or music, but if you don't want to spend much, you can just call up an audio studio and buy some songs from their library. They'll give you a copy of your selection on CD to import into your production.

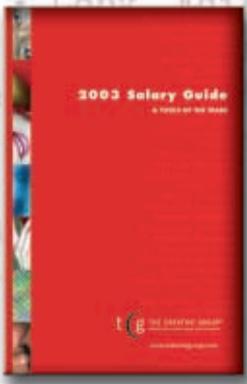
5. Save the video segments to QuickTime in the DV format.

6. Using iDVD, select a background from the iDVD library or import a still image that you've created for your presentation. The nice part about the iDVD image library is that the backgrounds have motion, but you can also enhance these motion backgrounds with your still images.

7. Drag-and-drop the rendered iMovie DV video onto the iDVD motion menu and add your text. You can make several submenus for different segments of your production and add more still images and text for a slide show effect, but you won't be able to add any transition effects—just straight cuts.

8. Link the movies and slide shows together in a way that you

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can control your presentation. Remember—what's driving the show is your personal touch, the live narrative. And you control the interactivity, so don't forget that you might need to create breaks to answer questions.

9. Export the entire presentation to DVD-R/Video.

The best part about a DVD presentation is that it can run from a computer that's equipped with a DVD drive or played on a DVD set top box. The format also allows you to make duplicates of your presentation for your clients to view on their own computers or DVD players. Looping DVDs are also perfect for situations like trade shows where quality and ease of use are important.

PRESENT YOUR BEST FACE: KEYNOTE, IDVD—OR ACROBAT 6

If you have a PowerBook and you're just getting started with creating presentations, it's really not much of a decision—Keynote is the definite winner. It exports to PowerPoint, so you can load it up on a PC if a client demands it. Just remember the advanced functionality will not work—it will just be plain ol' PowerPoint.

But if you want a full-blown knock-'em-dead show, go iDVD.

And if you really want to cover all the bases, I highly suggest that you go with Acrobat 6.

In a recently published interview, Karl De Abrew of www.planetpdf.com asked Adobe co-founder John Warnock, "Acrobat and PDF are now used in so many industries and in so many ways, do you see new areas that haven't perhaps been tapped much yet?"

Warnock replied, "I think the imaging model upon which Acrobat is based can be used much more effectively on the web. As we all know, simple things like printing are not easy or reliable in web-based applications. Using Acrobat technology can solve this problem and make everyone's Internet experience much more enjoyable.

"I also think PDF could be a much more flexible format for carrying all kinds of multimedia content. If, for instance, you look at the DVD spec, you will find one of the worst format designs on the planet. A PDF-based spec could do a much better and more universal job.

"I hope that over the years, people will develop a mental model of what it is and what it is good for."

If all the new multimedia features in Acrobat 6 work as promised, I believe that we will see a brand new type of media taking shape, one that will be targeted to high speed Internet subscribers. And since graphic designers in the print industry have been using Acrobat for several years, they should have a head start on web designers.

As John Warnock concludes, "Acrobat and PDF-based technologies are very general and hard to understand. Once a user has used Acrobat extensively, then they finally get it." ☺

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