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NON-LINEAR PRESENTATIONS WITH SOZI AND PREZI

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ABSTRACT

In both business and educational environments, there is interest in using non-linear presentations for their effectiveness and ability to engage the audience. Non-linear presentations are laid out as a large poster or map, and are particularly appropriate in situations where presentation content can be laid out as a concept map. Two popular software applications for this use are *Prezi*, a commercial product that emphasizes ease-of-use, and *Sozi*, a free, open-source application.

LINEAR PRESENTATIONS

Slide shows are a visual aid that commonly accompany extension presentations. Often these slide shows are composed in Microsoft *PowerPoint* (Microsoft, 2014a), LibreOffice *Impress* (LibreOffice, 2014), Apple *Keynote* (Apple, 2014), Google *Slides* (Google, 2014), or similar software.

PowerPoint has the advantage of its near-ubiquity in business and educational settings, while *Keynote* is familiar to Apple users. *Impress* has the advantage of being free and cross-platform software, and *Slides* boasts its conduciveness for collaboration.

At the time of writing, Microsoft is previewing new presentation software, called *Sway*, which promises ease of use, the ability to use resources from social media, and the storage of presentations on the cloud (Bort, 2014; Microsoft, 2014b).

The style of these presentations is sometimes termed *linear*. That is, their basic approach is to lay out a presentation of slides that follow linearly one after another. These presentations are typically not interactive except for minor animations or effects, or when the presenter jumps to, for example, videos or other software.

NON-LINEAR PRESENTATIONS

In both business and educational environments, there is interest in using non-linear presentations. This interest has developed both from considering the effectiveness of presentations, but also from the idea that linear presentations have become unengaging or trite (Orlando, 2010; Rowling, 2014).

With non-linear presentations:

Presentations are often designed as a large poster or graphical layout in which the presenter zooms in and out of areas, or moves around the layout latterly.

This allows for the conceptual mapping of topics in the presentation.

These presentations may be more visually appealing than linear presentations.

Software allows for certain types of interactions, such as zooming into any area at any time or sliding around the canvas, effectively allowing the presenter to jump to any topic area at any time.

PREZI

Prezi (Prezi, 2014b) has largely become the commercial standard for this style of non-linear presentation. For example, Bort (2013) noted that *Prezi* had over 30 million users in 2013, and Bort (2014) noted its popularity among younger presenters.

ADVANTAGES

Prezi emphasizes ease-of-use, with presentation templates, drag-and-drop-interface, and built in clip-art.

PLANS AND COSTS

At the time of writing, free plans require that presentations are edited and presented online, so that an internet connection would be necessary during delivery. However, a plan for educators allows the editing of presentations online with the ability to download the final product for presentation without being online (Prezi, 2014a). Paid plans allow for offline editing and presentation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

At the time of writing, the online storage limit was 100 MB for free plans and 500 MB for educational plans. Paid plans have greater limits.

Free plans include the *Prezi* logo, while paid and educational plans allow this logo to be replaced with a custom logo.

Prezi presentations use Adobe *Flash* (Adobe Systems, 2014a). Downloaded presentations in a Windows environment are .exe files.

EXAMPLES

Examples of *Prezi* presentations can be found at prezi.com/explore/staff-picks/ (Prezi, 2014c). Navigation is performed using onscreen navigation buttons, arrow keys, and mouse controls.

SOZI

Sozi is free, cross-platform, open source software that allows users to create non-linear interactive presentations (Sozi, 2014b).

THE USABILITY OF SOZI IS IMPROVING

Previous versions of *Sozi* were installed as an extension for *Inkscape*, a free vector graphics editing application (Inkscape, 2014). This arrangement made installation of the software somewhat difficult and the creation of presentation slides fairly unintuitive.

At the time of writing, however, the newest *Sozi* test release (v. 14) is a free-standing version that does not reside as an *Inkscape* extension. This new format makes both installation and slide creation much easier.

ADVANTAGES

The format of a *Sozi* presentation is either .svg (v. < 14), or .html (v. = 14). These formats are understandable by common desktop and mobile web browsers.

This allows presentations to be accessible on the internet without special software, or used on a computer without an internet connection. They should operate across operating platforms.

PLANS AND COSTS

Sozi is free.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Using *Sozi* is not an integrated process, in that typically the full poster or graphical layout is designed first, as a vector graphic .svg file with one software application, and then the areas which will be used as slides are defined using *Sozi* in a second step.

Not all users may be familiar with designing and working with vector graphics. Software such as *Inkscape* or Adobe *Illustrator* (Adobe Systems, 2014b) may be used. Other options include using more general design software such as Microsoft *Office* or LibreOffice suite to design the graphical layout, saving it as a .pdf, and then using *Inkscape* or *Illustrator* to convert the .pdf file to .svg.

EXAMPLES

Examples of *Sozi* presentations can be found at sozi.wikidot.com/presentations (Sozi, 2014d). To navigate in the presentations, use arrow keys, +, -, or mouse buttons and wheel. Additional presentation controls can be found at Sozi (2014c).

CONCLUSIONS

Non-linear presentations can be attractive and engaging, and may be superior to linear presentations in situations where presentation content can be laid out as a concept map.

Because of its ease-of-use, Prezi may be the most accessible software for people wishing to explore non-linear presentations. Extension educators eligible for the free plan for educators may find this option particularly appealing.

Sozi, on the other hand, may be ideal for those who wish to not rely on commercial software, and to have full control over the storage and editing of their files.

Caution should be exercised when designing non-linear presentation to not over-emphasize the visual effects at the expense of the substantive elements like effective communication and the presentation of information (Berkun, 2013). Also, caution should be used with the motion and the rotation of the presentation canvas so as not to produce a potentially nauseating effect for the audience.

Adding written scripts to these presentations—as is commonly done in extension education—may prove difficult.

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