The Innovative Instructor

Center for Educational Resources

Technology Forum

Prezi
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What it is
Prezi is a free, cloud-based, presentation tool that allows users to place content on a screen in non-linear order. Prezi uses a Zooming User Interface (ZUI) to enable navigation and display of content. ZUI is a term used in computing to describe a graphical environment wherein users can change the size of a viewing area by enlarging or reducing it, navigate by panning across a surface, and zoom in and out of content.

Who produced it
Prezi was in 2008 created by three Hungarians: Péter Árvai, Szabolcs Somlai-Fischer, and Péter Halácsy. They wanted to provide an alternative to the linear, slide-based formats of PowerPoint and Keynote. The word prezi is the Hungarian short form of presentation.

The Prezi website describes the application as "…a virtual whiteboard that transforms presentations from monologues into conversations: enabling people to see, understand, and remember ideas."

Why it was made
Prezi takes a different approach to presentations. Instead of slides that advance in linear order, Prezi gives the user a blank canvas with flexibility in determining the order in which content is presented. Think of the canvas as a blank background waiting for content. Content is placed in bracket-style, rectangular or circular frames. The content can be placed on the canvas in any order. The user can then create a set path to allow for a planned progression through the material or focus on specific topics as desired. Overall, the interface for adding and customizing content is easy to understand and use. Because the content appears to float on the Prezi canvas, there is a sense of spatial perspective, or a three dimensional effect.

Why it matters
Prezi presentations are inherently dynamic and this feature can be used with advantage to keep audiences engaged.

Prezi

Prezi offers lots of options for design. You can choose a preset template, which in Prezi is used to refer to a background, or use a blank canvas. The templates include two different types of world maps, either of which would work for geographic content. Another template is a subway map-style schema that would be useful for demonstrating workflows or processes. With either the blank canvas or a template, you have a choice of about 20 themes you can use. Further customizations are possible, including uploading an image file to serve as your background and creating your own theme. For advanced users, there is a CSS editor. Like PowerPoint or Keynote, preset layouts are available for the framed content areas.

Images can be embedded and YouTube videos can be inserted in a Prezi. You can insert the following video file formats—FLV, MOV, WMV, F4V, MPG, MPEG, MP4, M4V, and 3GP. Other videos found online can be linked from the presentation. Sound can be an important component and Prezi supports voice-over narrations and music as a background track or applied to specific path steps. Supported audio files include: MP3, M4A, FLAC, WMA, WAV, OGG, AAC, MP4, and 3GP.

One of the best features of Prezi is the ability to zoom out to see the big picture—the layout of the entire canvas. This kind of visualization can be very powerful in a presentation.

Since Prezi is cloud-based, you can present from your browser, desktop, iPad, or iPhone and always have the latest version of your work at your fingertips. Create or edit on the go, then auto-synchronize across all your devices with ease.

How it can be used

Because Prezi is cloud-based, it is possible to have multiple users collaborate on a presentation. With Prezi, you can co-create in real time with up to ten other users. Each user must have a Prezi account. This feature allows students to work together on a class assignment. When using the free version of the application, presentations are public by default. Users should be aware of this when creating content and care should be taken when using material that may have rights protection. Due to the ability to move from big picture to small detail, Prezi presentations are particularly suited to assignments that allow student to explore and reflect.

If you would like to reuse existing content, it is possible to import PowerPoint slides to Prezi, one at a time or as an entire presen-tation, with or without a pre-determined path. You can save a Prezi as a PDF, print your Prezi, or export it as a portable Prezi if you need to present in a venue without Internet access.
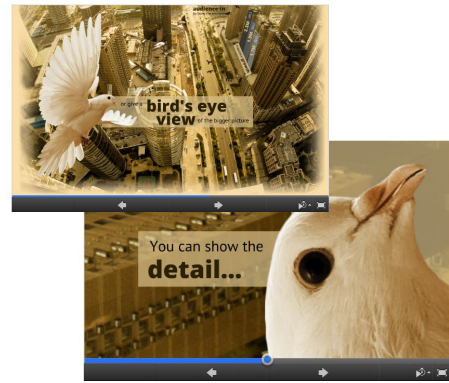
Where it is going

Prezi is always adding new features and improving existing ones. The application has its admirers and detractors. While it is unlikely to unseat PowerPoint or Keynote in popularity, it does have advantages for certain situations as mentioned above. Prezi should be seen as another tool to add to your teaching kit. The low learning curve makes it easy to get up and running, so experiment to see where it might meet your instructional objectives.

How to get started

To get started, create an account on the Prezi website at http://prezi.com. Watch a short introductory video or just plunge in by clicking the Get Started button. There is a Support page if you get stuck. https://prezi.com/support.

At the free end, all content that is created is public and users are given 100 MB of storage. For a small monthly fee, users have the option to keep presentations private and receive 500 MB of space. There is also a desktop version of the program available for an annual fee. This comes with additional editing features and unlimited storage space.

To get a better sense of what Prezi is and can do, take a look at some of the examples provided on the Prezi website.

Other Thoughts

Prezi was developed using Adobe Flash and as such, is not considered fully accessible by users with disabilities requiring the use of screen readers. Since July 2014 viewing Prezi is possible using only JavaScript. While this does not fully address accessibility, Prezi appears to be moving to correct these issues. Meanwhile, educators should be aware that Prezi is not ADA/508 compliant. An accessible PowerPoint version of the presentation can be provided for students requiring screen readers.

Some viewers find the ZUI to be distracting, even motion-sickness inducing. Careful use of the ZUI by the creator can minimize this consequence and turn it into an effective tool. With a little practice you will master the balance between dynamism and disruption.

Additional Resources

- Prezi offers a tutorial on transitions: http://prezi.com/wf7mxfwgec8n/official-prezi-transitions-tutorial
- No matter which presentation tool you use, thinking about best practices will be of benefit. Here are two good resources available in the JHU Sheridan Libraries catalog:
  - Duarte, Nancy. Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations. Beijing: O'Reilly Media, 2008.
  - Reynolds, Garr. Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery. 2nd Edition. Berkeley, CA: New Riders Publishing, 2012.

Author's Background

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Macie Hall (macie.hall@jhu.edu) has provided instructional technology support to JHU faculty since 1987. She edits and writes for the blog, *The Innovative Instructor* (http://ii.library.jhu.edu). In addition to working with faculty to implement best practices for teaching, she is interested in visual literacy and effective presentation techniques.