Pictured is the user interface of the Prezi online editor.

CRAVING A CHANGE FROM POWERPOINT?

Prezi offers an alternative.

By Christine Clapp, DTM

Microsoft PowerPoint has been the go-to presentation software since the early 1990s. Some estimate that 500 million people use it. But now there is worthy competition: Prezi (**prezi.com**).

In March, Prezi hit 20 million users, and this year it is on pace to add 1.5 million users each month, according to Peter Arvai, CEO and co-founder of Prezi. Its market share may be small, but Prezi's growth shows it is an increasingly popular alternative to PowerPoint.

Launched in 2009, Prezi is favored by many TED-style speakers, who are known for presenting bold ideas with compelling stories in a dynamic delivery style. Angelie Agarwal, the founder and head trainer at Learn Prezi (**learnprezi.com**), recommends Prezi for people who are craving a change and want to do presentations in a drastically different way from what is possible with PowerPoint or Keynote, the PowerPoint-like software offered by Apple.

According to the Prezi website, the cloud-based presentation software has a "zoomable canvas [that] makes it fun to explore ideas and the connections between them."

Christina Hoyer, a Copenhagen-based presentation-skills trainer and the co-founder of Imprezzing (**imprezzing.com**), points out that zooming makes Prezi special. She explains, "Prezi is fun to work with and you can make beautiful designs with a few simple text elements and basic images," she says. "Prezi encourages you to do things in a simple and elegant way, but not necessarily a linear way."

As with any new technology, there is a debate about the utility of Prezi. Let's explore the advantages and disadvantages of this new presentation software. While no software is right for every speaker and situation, knowing more about Prezi will help you make the best decision the next time you are considering using such presentation tools.

Advantages

1 Showing ideas, connections and the big picture. Among presentation software, Prezi is most conducive to showing the relative importance of ideas and the relationships between them. Unlike PowerPoint and Keynote, where each slide is the same size and advances one after the next, Prezi allows you to change the size of frames on a *canvas*, much like a whiteboard, and nest smaller frames within larger frames.

David Oliveira, a freelance Prezi designer who has designed presentations for TED-level speakers, emphasizes the ability of Prezi to show listeners a hierarchy in content. "In Prezi, you can enlarge a key frame but still can zoom into the less important ideas around it," he explains. "This shows a relationship: This idea is more important than these others."

Prezi is unique in the way it enables you to show how details are connected without losing sight of the larger context. "In PowerPoint, they [the listeners] never get the big picture," says Agarwal, the trainer.

2 Easy integration of images and video. Prezi makes it easy to incorporate images and videos from the Internet or your own files. And because the software is web-based, speakers need not worry about the file size of their presentation. (However, there is a way to export a Portable Prezi that does not require an Internet connection when one is unavailable.)

3 More creativity and flexibility. Each presentation in Prezi has a canvas from which the presenter zooms into smaller frames that are connected by paths. Prezi does have canvas templates—which surely will become overused as more speakers adopt the software—but it also allows presenters to add frames and visuals to a blank canvas, or to edit existing templates.

Savvy users have created impressive visual displays using Prezi, many of which can be viewed at **prezi.com/explore**. Admittedly, these are a sampling of the most dynamic Prezi presentations, but they show a level of design sophistication and uniqueness that would be difficult to find in PowerPoint presentations.

4 Compatible across computers. Ever pull up slides on a computer you are using to give a presentation, only to find that it runs an older or newer version of the presentation software? If so, you know the incompatibility can cause glitches or formatting inconsistencies within your slides, making them look less polished and professional.

Because Prezi is web-based, you avoid compatibility issues. And you can easily collaborate with colleagues by granting them access to edit a presentation online. This prevents the problem of having multiple versions of a presentation floating around and the confusion that comes with different people working on different versions of the presentation.

Disadvantages

1 Difficult to manipulate initially. It can be frustrating to get the hang of Prezi editing tools. If you struggle with new technology or have to create a presentation in a short time frame, you likely will be better served sticking to PowerPoint.

But after you craft a few Prezi presentations, using the software will become more intuitive. And Hoyer boasts that the sky is the limit for advanced users.

2 Zooming can be disorienting. Prezi's hallmark zooming function can make some audience members dizzy or feel seasick. This problem is more common with inexperienced users.

Hoyer recommends presenters avoid the sudden and long zoom and

that they use horizontal and lateral movements for the same effect. Also, avoid changing paths frequently. Spend at least 30 seconds explaining an idea before zooming to another point, Hoyer suggests.

3 Not easy to make handouts. If you are doing a technical training session that requires printed handouts, think twice about using Prezi. Unlike PowerPoint and Keynote, where listeners can follow the advance of a slide on the screen with the slides on their handout, Prezi's visual components are not necessarily linear and, as a result, are more difficult to capture in a printed format. Handouts of Prezi presentations lose the value of zooming into ideas and details from the big-picture perspective of the canvas, which is why Prezi is best suited for audiences who listen as opposed to take notes.

4 Subscription required for private presentations. Prezi has a public license plan that is free for anyone who subscribes to the service. While this is a real advantage over paying for Microsoft Office or Apple iWork, it comes with the drawback that presentations made under this license are searchable and viewable to anyone on the Internet. To create Prezi presentations that are private, subscribers must upgrade to a license with an annual cost.

Any new technology has drawbacks. But there certainly are compelling reasons for speakers to consider Prezi before automatically turning to PowerPoint for presentations. Will you be one of the 1.5 million people who are expected to try Prezi this month? ⓣ

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