



7 Tools for Creating Visual Presentations that Engage

by Tom Bunzel

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GoToTraining

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Objective: This eBook will provide a brief overview of powerful visual tools you can use to effectively maintain an audience's attention during an online presentation.

Introduction: Staying One Step Ahead of Your Audience

For better or worse, PowerPoint remains the staple for most presentations and forms the basis for much of the visual content delivered in online presentations and trainings. Since bandwidth improvements have also made it possible for presenters to add multimedia content to presentations, the subject matter frequently requires some kind of graphics support.

What makes this more important in an online setting is that distraction can be such a major issue. There is no guarantee that audience members are actually paying attention, even if they are shown as present in the online control console. Any lapse in interest can have attendees checking their email or worse, commenting on your presentation on Twitter as part of the “backchannel.” The backchannel is chatter via social networks about an event while it is in progress. Trainers are advised to be cognizant of this phenomenon and make it part of their program if at all possible, by taking control of the stream by issuing a hashtag and publishing their Twitter ID in their preparation for the event. In addition, having an associate monitor the backchannel and respond to questions and concerns can integrate this potential distraction into the event itself. More information on the backchannel is available in the Resources section—refer to material from Cliff Atkinson and Olivia Mitchell.

In the coming pages seven tools will be introduced so you can up level your presentations, either within PowerPoint or outside of it. These tools will enhance the delivery of your content and minimize distraction via multitasking or the backchannel.

Avoid “Death by PowerPoint”

Online presenters still rely mainly on PowerPoint slides to keep their audiences interested and present ideas effectively. But audiences can find slides only monotonous—leading to “Death by PowerPoint.”



Benefits of Visual Storytelling

Every presentation or training event is ultimately a story of some kind, often with a product as a solution to a problem (sales) or learning a process or technique as the resolution for a given situation (training).

Both live presenters and online presenters know that their message is best delivered through effective storytelling. But storytelling can be greatly enhanced by effective and novel visuals.

To the extent that more powerful and evocative visuals are used in an online presentation, particularly in ways that the audience has not seen before or to amplify a point in a more graphic way, attention will be maintained and the goal of the event—to have your audience digest your message—is more likely to be achieved.

Below are some scenarios and tools that can be used in conjunction with slides (PowerPoint) or as an alternative with any online training tool that supports broadcasting a shared desktop. These tools include Prezi, a PowerPoint alternative, diagrams and charts for more complex concepts, evocative stock images for metaphors and analogies, and refinements in PowerPoint to make your visuals more dynamic and interesting

1. Prezi

While a number of online tools have imitated PowerPoint (like SlideRocket and Google Presentations), Prezi is a new graphics presentation tool that builds on the PowerPoint slide metaphor but takes it further by physically zooming into concepts or ideas.

When an audience sees a Prezi, they see an entirely different look and feel from a standard slideshow; a Prezi moves like a video along the presentation that the creator designed. Imagine you created a big storyboard with all of the points of your presentation on it; then imagine a video camera moving from point to point with the ability to zoom, fast forward and rewind. That's Prezi.

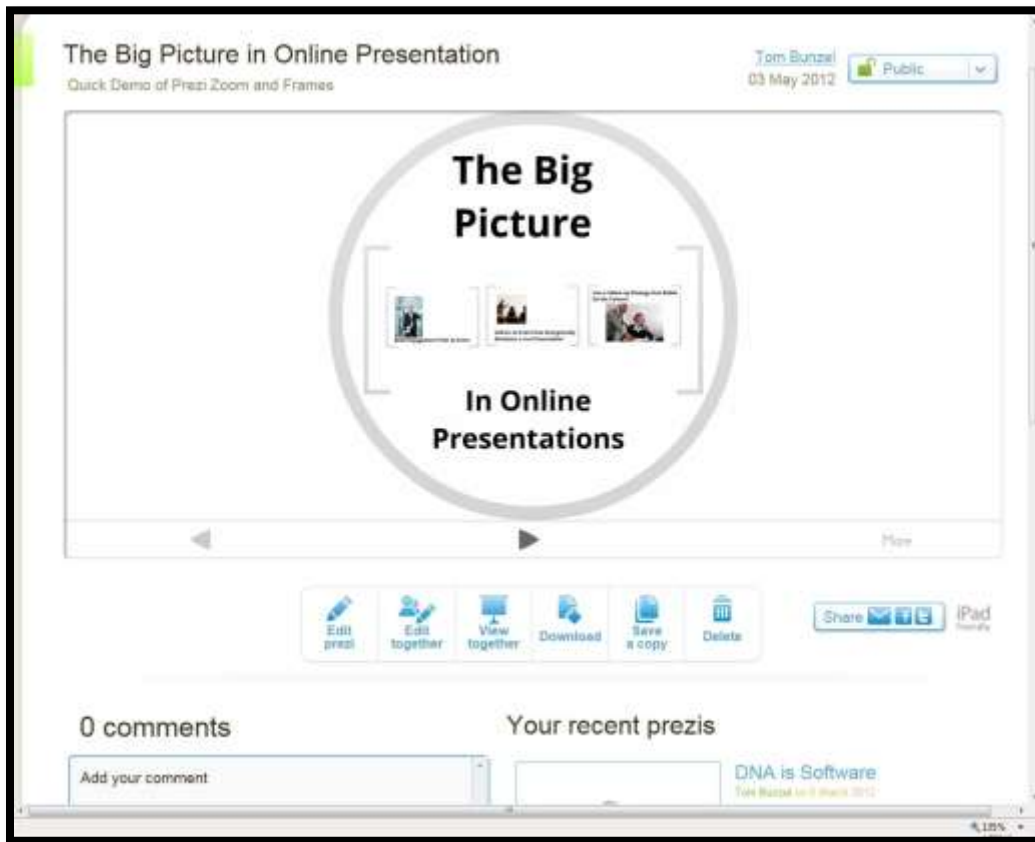
Presenters may choose to move the narrative along a screen in linear fashion, or achieve some eye-popping and attention grabbing results by using more dramatic transitions.

While the movement of Prezi is definitely eye-catching, there has been some criticism of Prezis that move too quickly or dramatically, causing a negative visceral reaction—but by using and not abusing the zoom (a Prezi best practice) a presenter can introduce a sequence of ideas engagingly and effectively. Savvy Prezi users use the zoom function to show specific relationships of equality or subordination by “drilling down.”

Prezi’s strength is its versatility in conveying both the main overall point of any narrative, and leaving the audience with a distinct overall impression, or big picture view. Then, within that structure, there is the ability to specifically address supporting information without the rigidity or staleness of a bullet. And the entire story can be grasped from the main screen.



Like any new tool, the task of learning Prezi may seem daunting, but the key to the program is the use of “frames.” Think of each frame like a slide, only these ones can be zoomed into and away from to help you demonstrate the big picture and smaller component of a concept. When working in Prezi, it’s easy to both introduce a big idea and then explain it in detail or introduce a new detail and demonstrate how it fits into the big picture.



Each of these “framed” concepts can be its own screen, no matter what its apparent dimensions are in the overall view. The “Big Picture” is the main and opening frame of the Prezi.

When a Prezi is saved it goes into your gallery of Prezis and can be shared or linked to using its unique URL, or it can also be embedded in a web page or shared across various social tools directly from the main screen.

Automatic playback is available from the main screen. Set your playback settings by clicking through the presentation frame by frame in the editing screen.

Presenters navigate through Prezis by clicking on individual frames and zooming into those ideas as she discusses them, or by clicking the arrow and going through the frames sequentially according to the “Path.” The path for the Prezi, is the order of information that Prezi will zoom to when finalized. Presenters set the path in the editing screen, and then simply click the arrow on the presentation screen to move through the Prezi, just like in PowerPoint, only with more movement and excitement in between each frame.

Clicking a Prezi share link like the one for [this Prezi](#) -- opens it in a web browser to be navigated by the presenter or viewed sequentially through the frames placed in the path.

Prezi presentations are generally hosted online and viewed in a web browser so any online training tool with screen sharing can deliver a Prezi. Prezis can also be linked to directly from within PowerPoint slides for seamless integration, or shared on social sites prior to an event to begin to build interest.

You can also integrate Prezi with PowerPoint by using hyperlinks to online Prezis, to provide a dynamic visual alternative to static slides and then return to them as part of your overall online presentation. Using PowerPoint as your main presentation tool also allows you to use Prezi to convey key training ideas with short stories or examples, and then continue with your narrative.

Prezi Best Practices

Use the Zoom do not Abuse the Zoom—Only zoom to demonstrate that you are going to delve deeper into the topic

Size and arrange in proximity—Minimize extreme screen jerks and movement

Create a meaningful visual metaphor—Consider using an image that encompasses your Big Picture

Don't use every feature available—Stick to a format that enhances, not destroys your content delivery and remain consistent in your graphics

Use a measure of design thinking—create a flow that matches the overall screen layout

Learn and share – Get ideas from and share them with the Prezi Community

Using Prezis during a online training is particularly effective for one other reason: when you record a training presentation for archive you are also recording the “live” Prezi with narration as part of your video. If you download the video you can edit out the Prezi as its own clip and post it on YouTube or use it as part of a training or sales presentation strategy.

Bear in mind that the performance of Prezi is contingent on bandwidth. Practice and test your Prezi before delivery; during the presentation pace your transitions evenly and slowly, keep a close eye on attendee view, and keep your Prezis simple and to the point for online training to minimize the delay of transitions between screens (Prezi frames).

To get familiar with the tool, you can download some shared Prezis to deconstruct and reconstruct, and there are also basic Prezi templates that can help you get started on determining Prezi design and flow when you get started on a project.

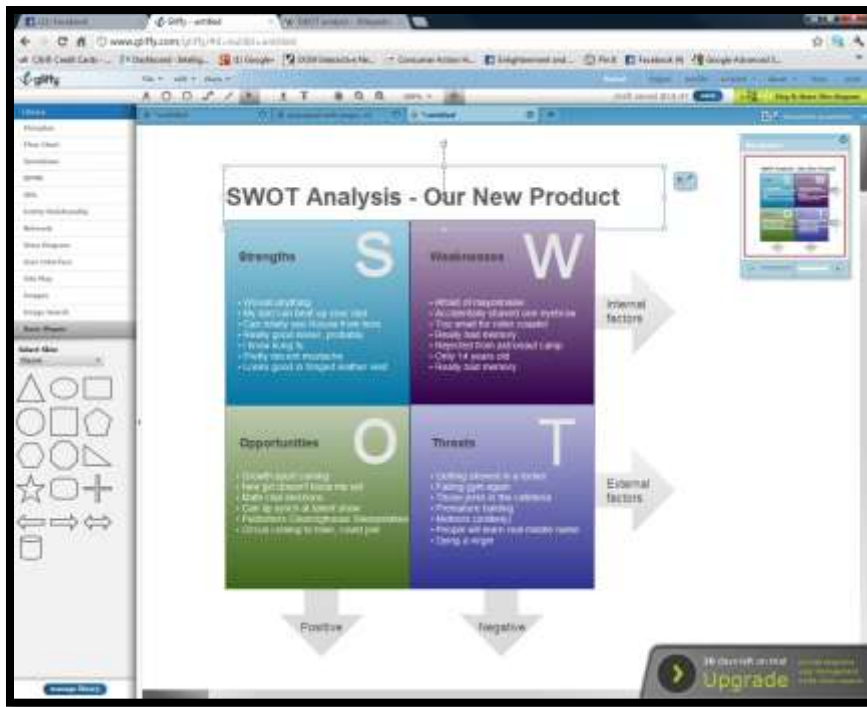
Sign up for an account and create, edit and share your Prezis on www.prezi.com

2. Diagrams that Convey Complex Ideas Visually

While PowerPoint has its own diagram tool (SmartArt), using complementary resources can give your presentation a more distinctive look and feel, and provide a different range of capabilities.

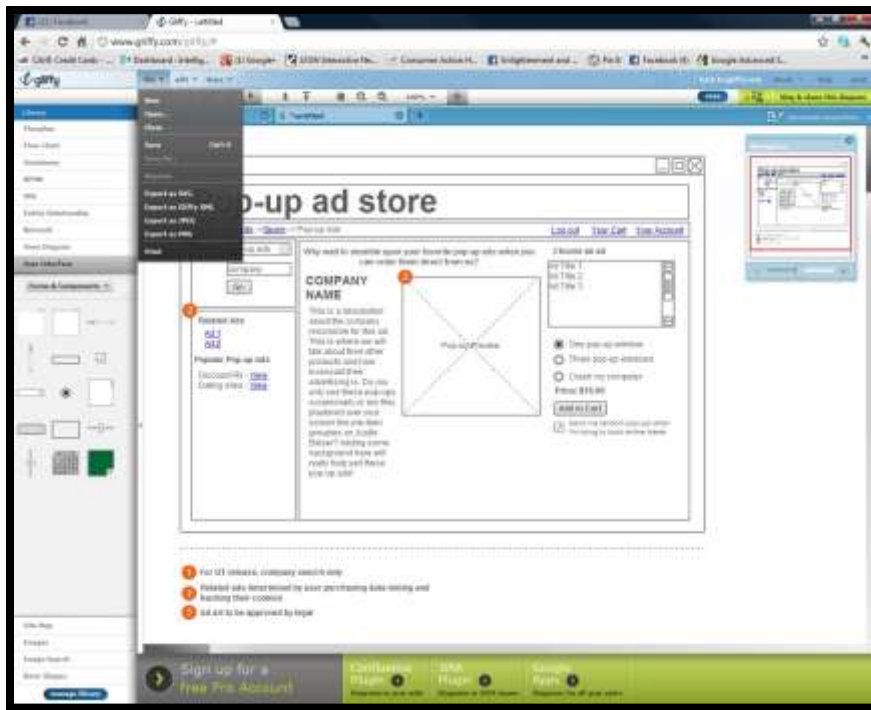
Gliffy

Gliffy is an online generator of diagrams, floor plans, flowcharts, technical drawings and more, and it offers an online diagramming tool that lets you work directly in your web browser, which makes it ideal for real time brainstorming in a training session. This tool will help you present technical information in a visual and digestible way.



Among the many template concepts available through Gliffy, are SWOT and SLOT analysis. SWOT/SLOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture.

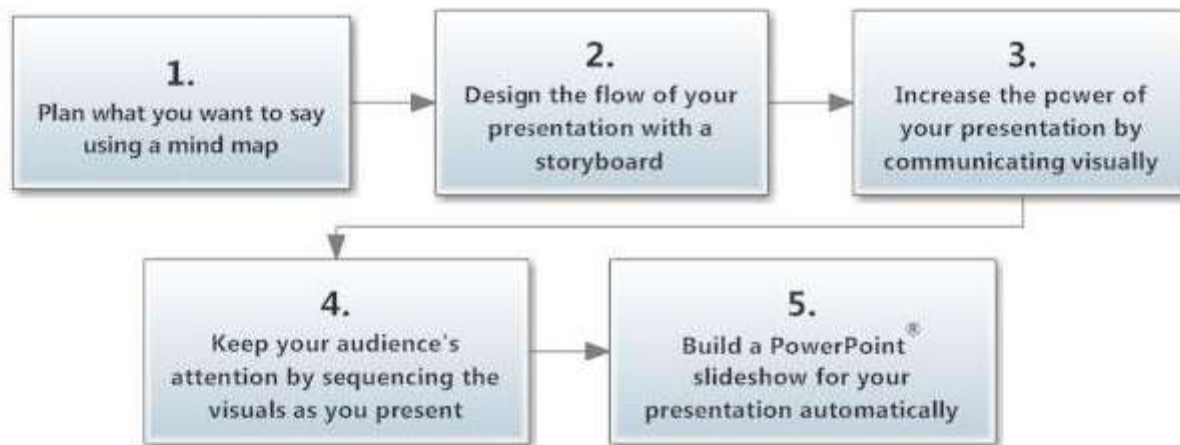
Other template categories currently include Website/Software User Interface design, Venn Diagrams, Org Charts, Flowchart, Network Diagrams, Software Design/UML, Floor Plan and Business Process; any of these can be great engagement tools for visually representing business ideas when presenting on a more technical topic.



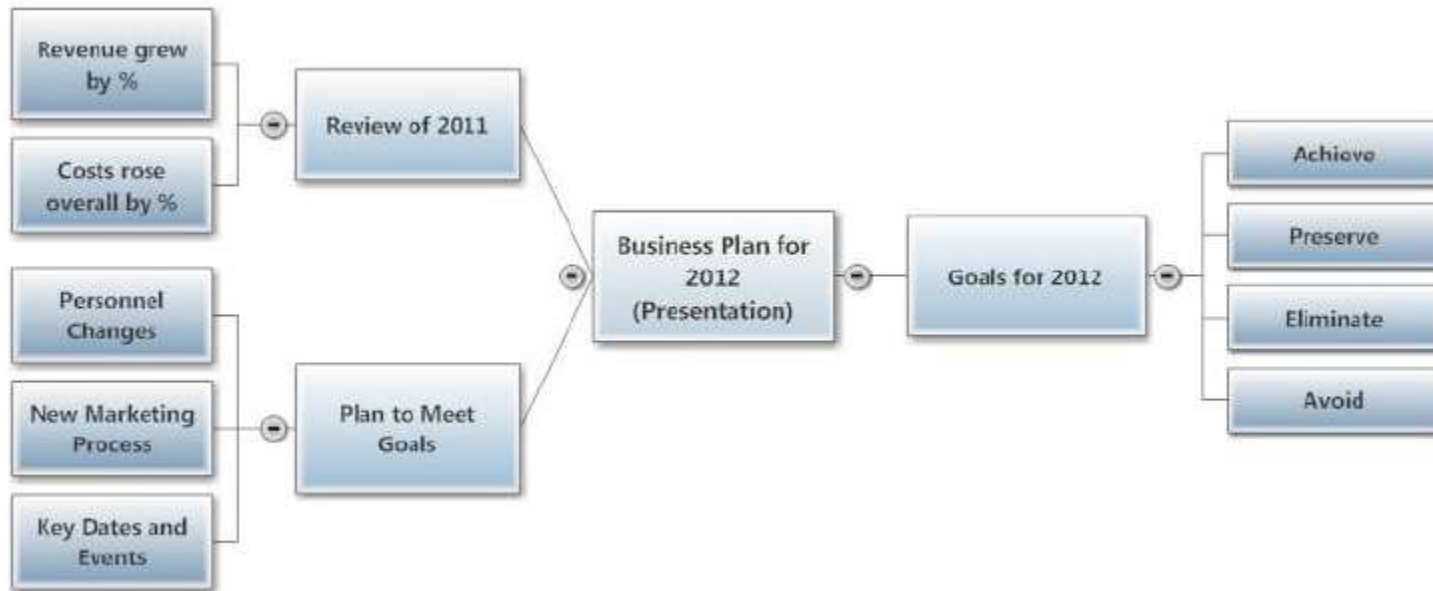
Gliffy files can be saved online and also be exported in the usual file formats to post online, on social sites, or to include in standard PowerPoint or other slide shows.

SmartDraw

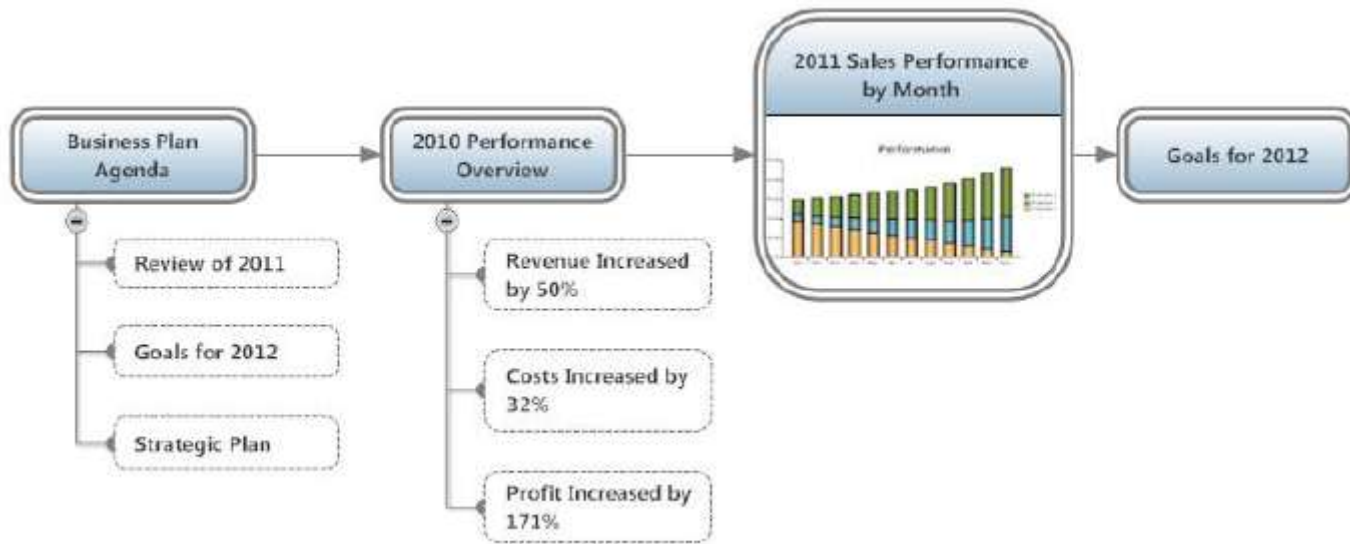
SmartDraw is a software package that combines excellent diagramming features with the ability to brainstorm a concept and generate visuals or even PowerPoint slides. There is a five-step process that you can use in SmartDraw to fine tune your content:



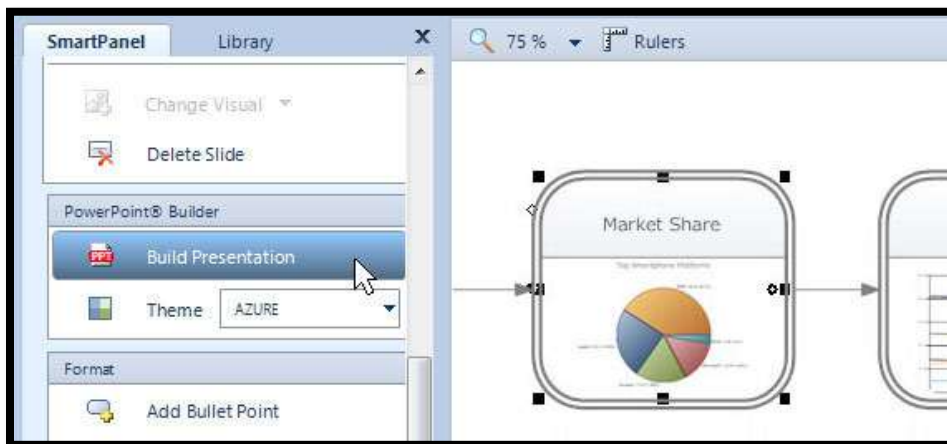
You can use SmartDraw to create evocative visuals, plan a presentation effectively, or actually brainstorm in real time using a “MindMap.” This is another storytelling tool that lets you build your message around chunks of information.



When planning an online presentation you may also organize the elements into a storyboard in SmartDraw:

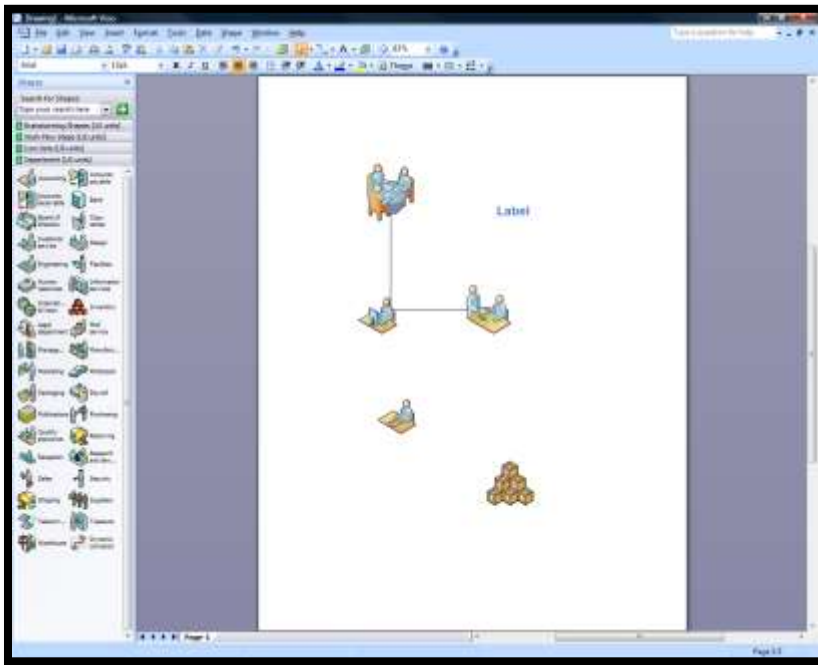


You can also use SmartDraw's PowerPoint builder feature to actually generate a PowerPoint file from your SmartDraw drawing.



Visio

A cousin of the Microsoft Office suite is Visio, an advanced diagramming tool that comes with a set of templates and stencils with objects that you can drag and drop onto a diagram. The feature that sets Visio apart from other diagramming tools is its ability to work in it in real time during an event. Depending on the purpose and tone of your online event, you may choose to start building a diagram in a live event to promote interactivity and respond to comments and ideas put forward to the group. For example, if your presentation is about a technology that can help speed up project cycles, you may ask the audience what tools and tips do they use to make sure project cycles stay on track. Using Visio you can demonstrate proposed project flows from the audience suggestions.



You can also place parts of a drawing on different “Layers” and use a button to Hide and then Show different portions of the diagram.

Full Diagram

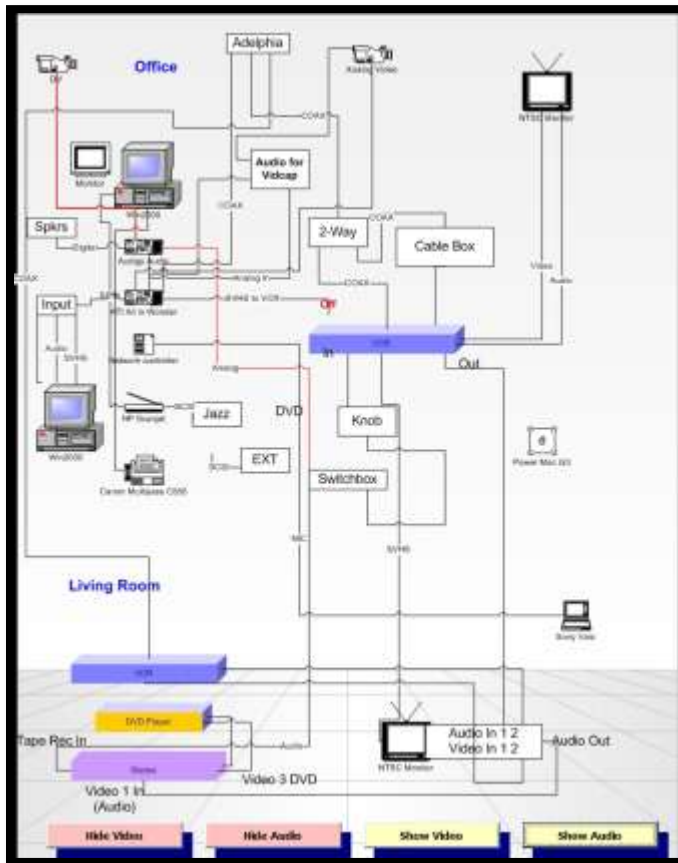
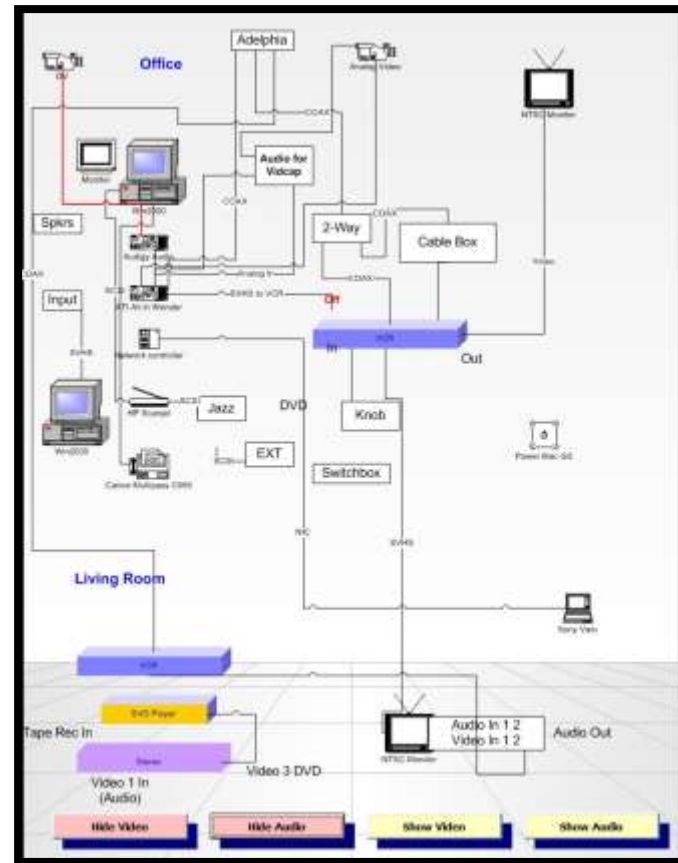
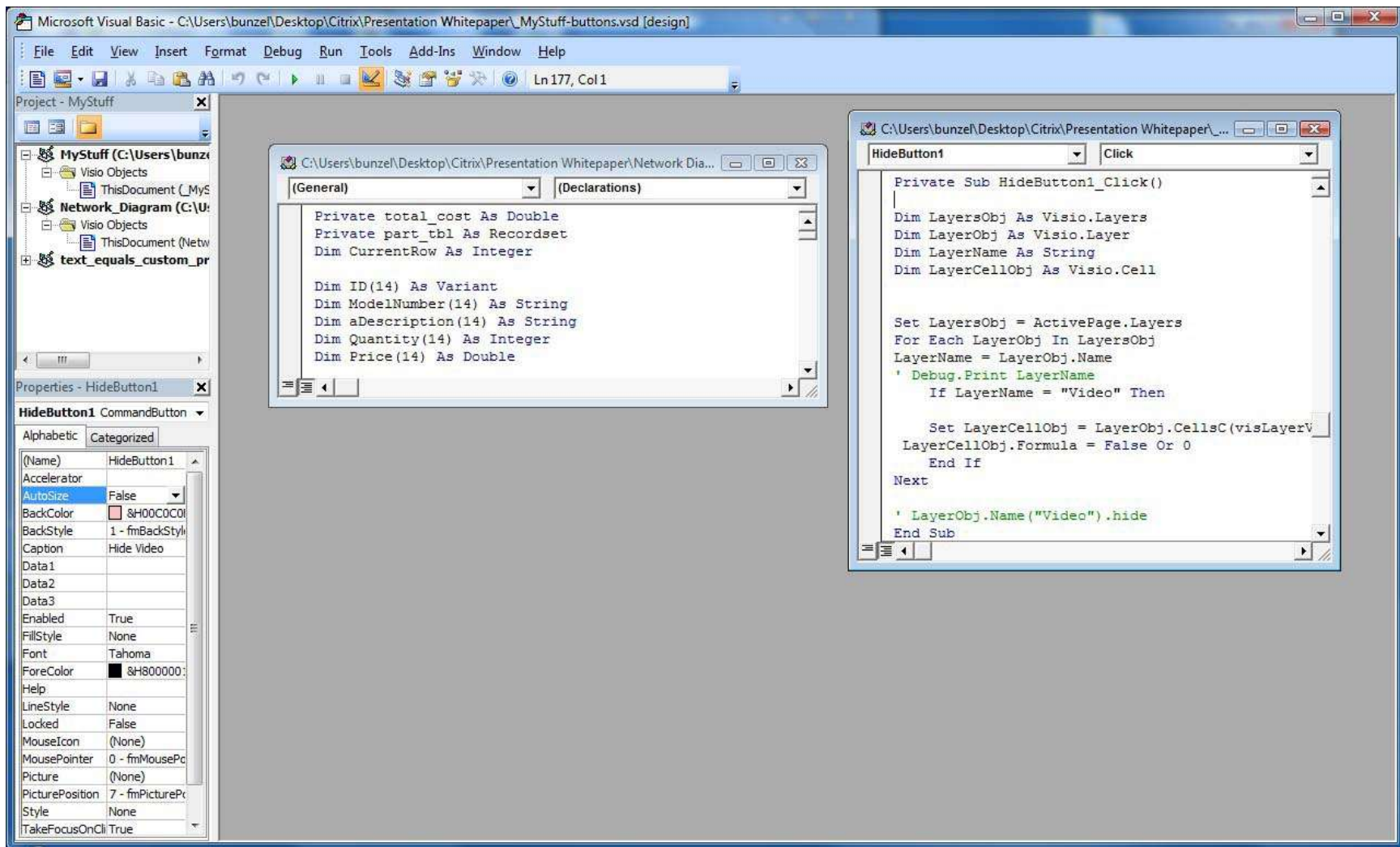


Diagram with Elements Hidden by Buttons



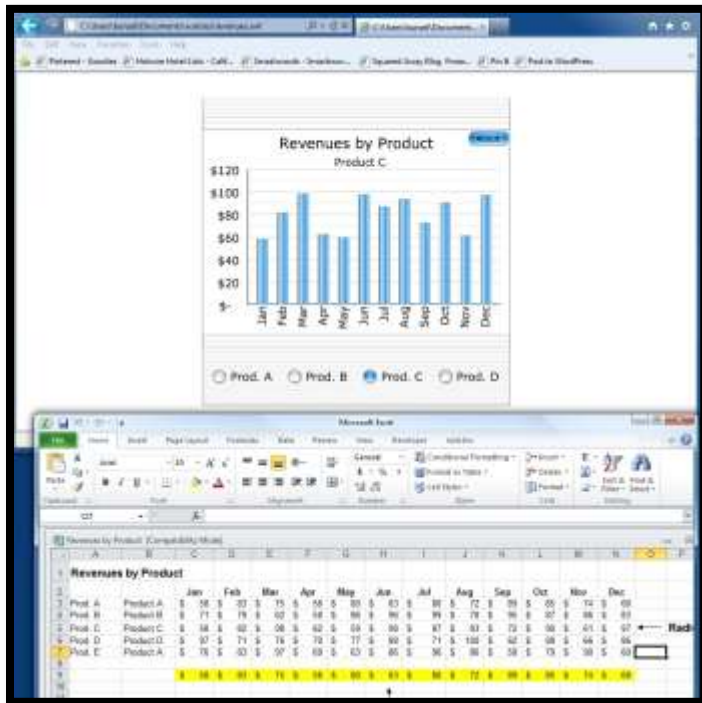


Background code for Hide/Show Buttons reveals or hides objects on Layers.

For those that are more technologically savvy, Visio supports the Visual Basic for Applications programming code that you can use to manipulate objects in diagrams

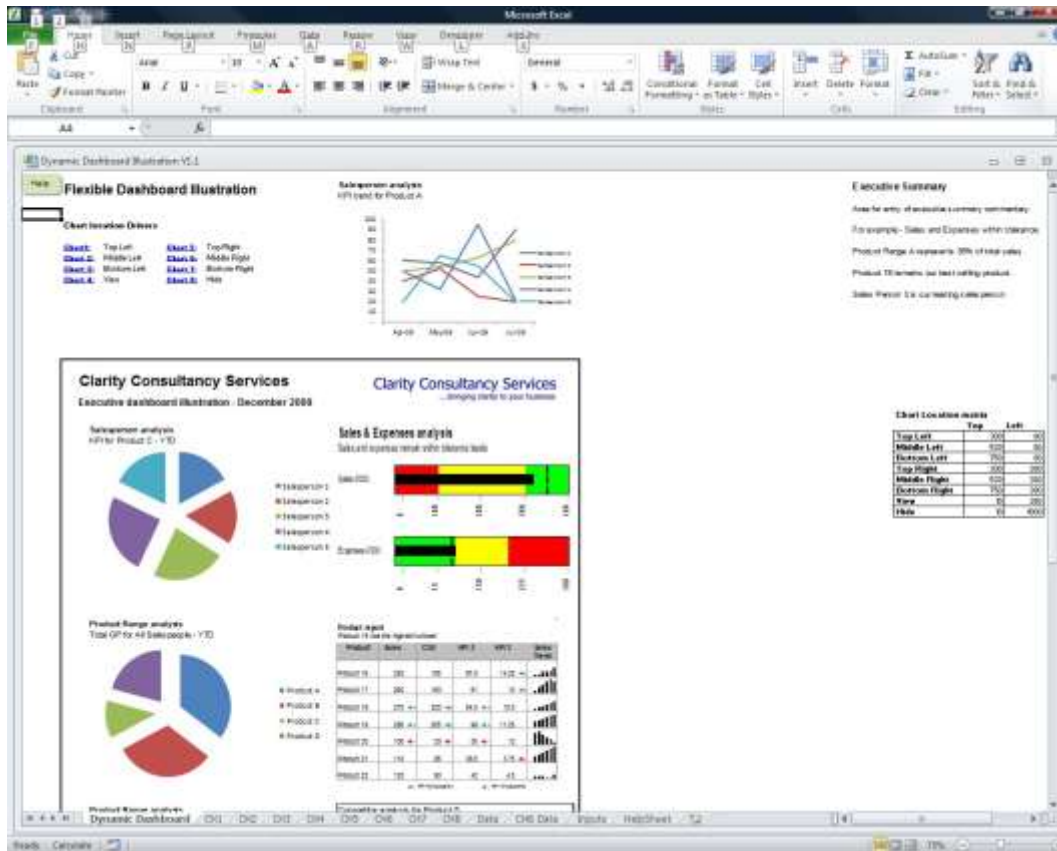
3. Using Dashboards to Interact with Data

Dashboards visually demonstrate the relationships and consequences of your data in what-if scenarios using graphics like dials, widgets, and meters. Presenters are wise to use dashboards to translate complex data into digestible and comprehensible visuals. Rather than writing out statistics on a PowerPoint slide, you can demonstrate business data via an understandable dashboard Crystal Dashboard Design from SAP (formerly Xcelsius) is a premier dashboard tool for crafting widgets that help up-level online presentations.



[SAP Crystal Dashboard Design 2008](#), Personal Edition is great Flash tool that can export an interactive dashboard into a web page or works in PowerPoint; the tool is robust and crafty, but it also is costly at a whopping \$895.

For those whose budgets don't accommodate such a tool as Crystal Dashboard Design, other dashboard-like web tools are available. These tools take data from Excel spreadsheets and display it with interactive widgets and charts. [Chandoo.org](#) is one online resource for creating dashboards from spreadsheet data. Chandoo offers [dashboard templates](#) to help get you started.



ExcelDashboards.org offers a similar tool that produces interactive charts and dials.

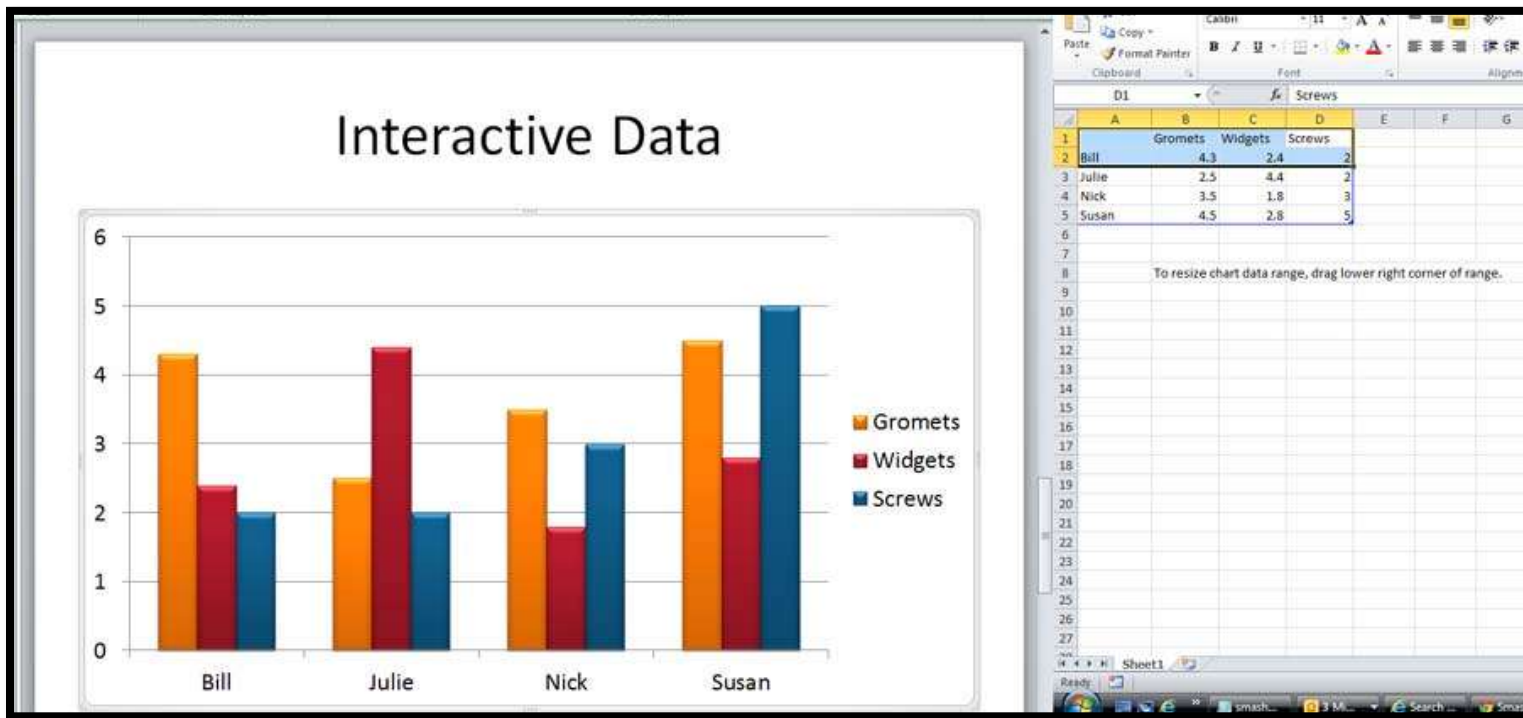


[iDashboards](#) is focused on helping companies manage and understand their business insights and therefore be able to make thoughtful business decisions faster. Like the other dashboard tools, iDashboards conveys data in a visual format, but this tool is often used to demonstrate data differences between industries or verticals.



Interactive Excel

If you already have Microsoft Office, and you're looking for a basic way to demonstrate data in a meaningful and interactive way, consider using PowerPoint and Excel together. Since PowerPoint now uses Excel as the datasheet, you can actually create a dashboard with PowerPoint and Excel by keeping both the spreadsheet and the slide open. Once you've entered the data into the Excel spreadsheet and correlated that to the graph in PowerPoint you can manipulate the data in Excel to demonstrate different scenarios. As the data changes and you refresh the chart, it will update as well.



Don't forget that Excel also has features like Conditional Formatting that let you make data stand out according to its properties directly within the spreadsheet.

4. Evocative Images for Metaphors and Analogies

Dramatizing a concept or idea through evocative images is a great way to engage your audience in the topic. And, the good news is that with the Internet comes many photo sharing sites, so that finding the appropriate images for your presentations has never been easier.

Stock Photo Sites

Sites with images available for purchase and sometimes royalty free include Getty, iStockphoto, and many others and their key features include comprehensive search capability through key words attached to the various images they offer. [Wikimedia Commons](#) (affiliated with the Wikipedia reference site) is another great resource for royalty free content; you can check out their sections of [Featured pictures](#), [Quality images](#) or [Valued images](#). Also, many Flickr users have chosen to offer their work under a Creative Commons license, and you can browse or search through content under each type of license in [Flickr's creative commons section](#)

Using the search features creatively and resources fully allows you to craft a message by appealing to emotions and creating a memorable image in the audience's mind. For example, even a boring IT presentation that deals with bandwidth issues can use an image like this to conjure a familiar analogy:

Network Gridlock



It's a good idea to get creative in your search terms in order to gather the best set of photographic assets that pertain to your topic. For example, if you wanted a photo of an outdated technology to advocate updating technologies or processes, rather than searching "outdated technologies," you might search for "rotary phone," "pager," "8-track," or "record player." Once you find your images, you can maintain a set of images within the Lightbox feature of many stock image sites, or download and save the images on your computer.

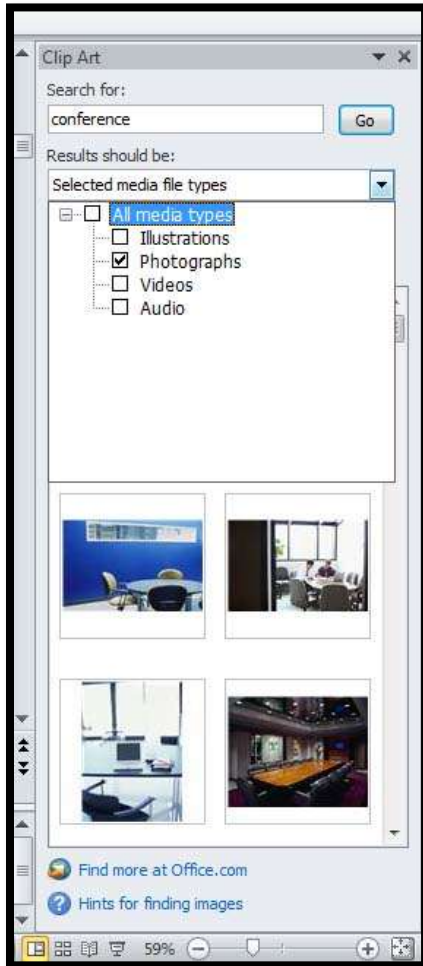
Additionally, in a program like GoToTraining with an online Content Library, these images can be aggregated for future events and used among a team of trainers.



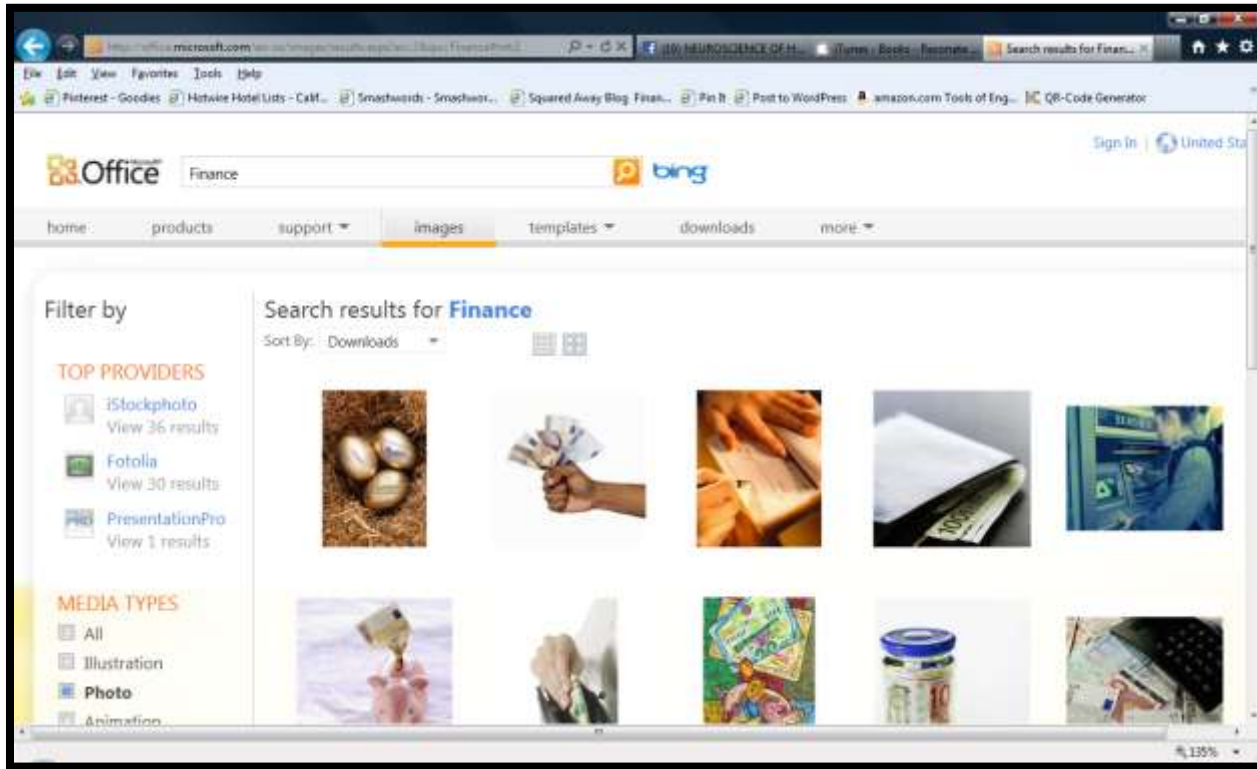
Lightboxes are a common stock photo feature that let you maintain a library of images according to categories and display them at different resolutions and price points for purchase.

Microsoft Office Online

Microsoft makes a set of free stock images available through its online library. You can click Insert > ClipArt from any Office program and you are no longer limited to corny illustrations—you can choose to select photographs from the drop down menu:



You can quickly get access to Office Online directly from PowerPoint, or access it [online](#).



5. Chatting and Polling within GoToTraining

Besides providing a shared desktop on which to convey messages visually, effective online training tools also facilitate immediate communication and response with the audience.

It's always a good idea to have a moderator involved in an online event who can respond quickly to questions or issues using Q&A panels or chat.



Asking questions of your audience and evaluating their responses, and adjusting your presentation according to the results, is a great way to get buy-in and engagement.

For example, in a session on how to combat being always “plugged-in,” a presenter may ask the participants a question that will begin to resonate with the topic for them, like, “Do you have constant access to email?”



The image shows a screenshot of a web browser window titled "QuickPoll". The main content area has a light blue background and contains the following text:

QUICKPOLL

Do you have constant access to email?

Select one of the following:

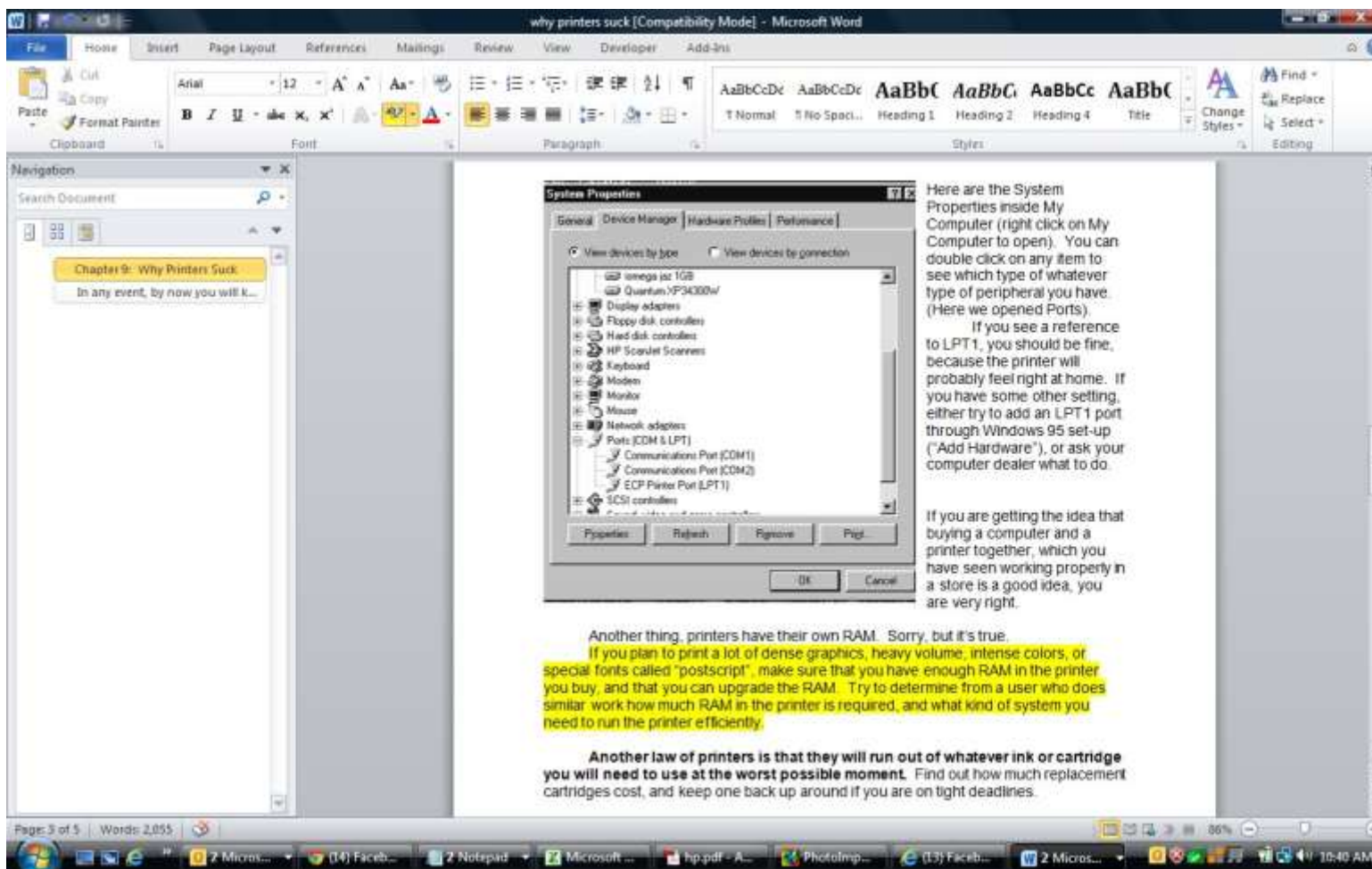
- Yes
- No

At the bottom of the poll area, there is a red text message: "Poll in progress for attendees only." and a "Submit" button.

Asking questions pulls the audience into the topic. Make sure your questions are relevant and easy to answer. If you want to pose a more open ended question, the Q&A panel in GoToTraining is great place to submit questions to the audience. The Q&A panel is also a great place to look for conversation suggestions. When participants submit questions, you have the opportunity to talk about them in real time. Not only will this increase engagement when the audience realizes your presentation is adaptable, but it also allows you to get to know you audiences’ needs and interests better. Having topical visuals on hand is a great way to segment from the conversation back to the presentation.

6. Using Native Programs – Beyond Microsoft Word

One of the great advantages of the shared desktop feature of many online training solutions is the ability to use files in their original programs rather than bringing them into PowerPoint, where they may need to be adjusted or reformatted to fit into your slides.



For example, opening a Word document directly lets you present and cover the necessary material in depth and to call attention to relevant portions you can use the highlighter or other annotation tools on the presenter panel of GoToTraining.

7. Maximizing PowerPoint

PowerPoint presentations don't have to be stuffy and boring. Forget the days of stringing together a bunch of bullet-laden slides. In fact experts like Cliff Atkinson, author of [*Beyond Bullet Points*](#), suggest moving your text mainly or completely into the Slide Notes panel of your slides, and maximizing the screens themselves with rich imagery in the form of metaphors and analogies.

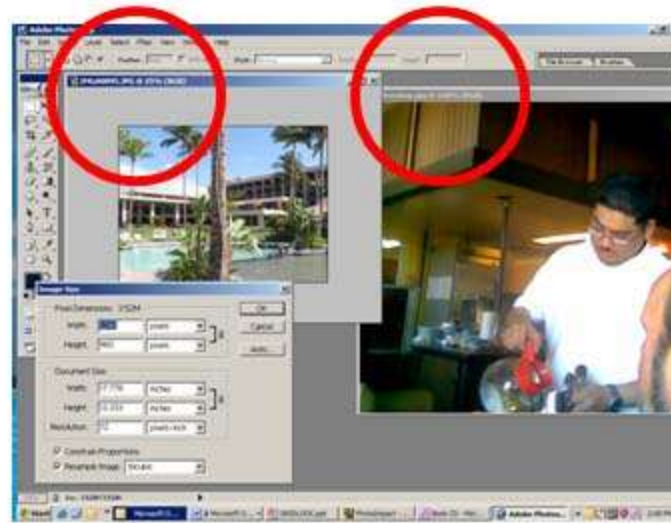
Animating Static Images

Inserting shapes into your PowerPoint slides and adding an Entrance effect to make them appear as you tell your story can add a visual impact to static images.

Below, a pair of circles has been inserted on top of the image with No Fill Color but a nice, thick border. Using the Animation panel in PowerPoint lets you time their appearance on top of the image, like actors coming on stage in a play.

Acquiring and Editing Pictures

- o Megapixels matter
- o DPI doesn't really matter - 72 is fine for screen
- o Don't Be Fooled by %
- o These are previews
- o Check actual image dimensions



Using images as part of visual storytelling is effective. Be sure to create a clean and consistent design in your slides to help maintain attention. PowerPoint has a number of features that can let you quickly insert and customize pictures.

Picture Placeholders



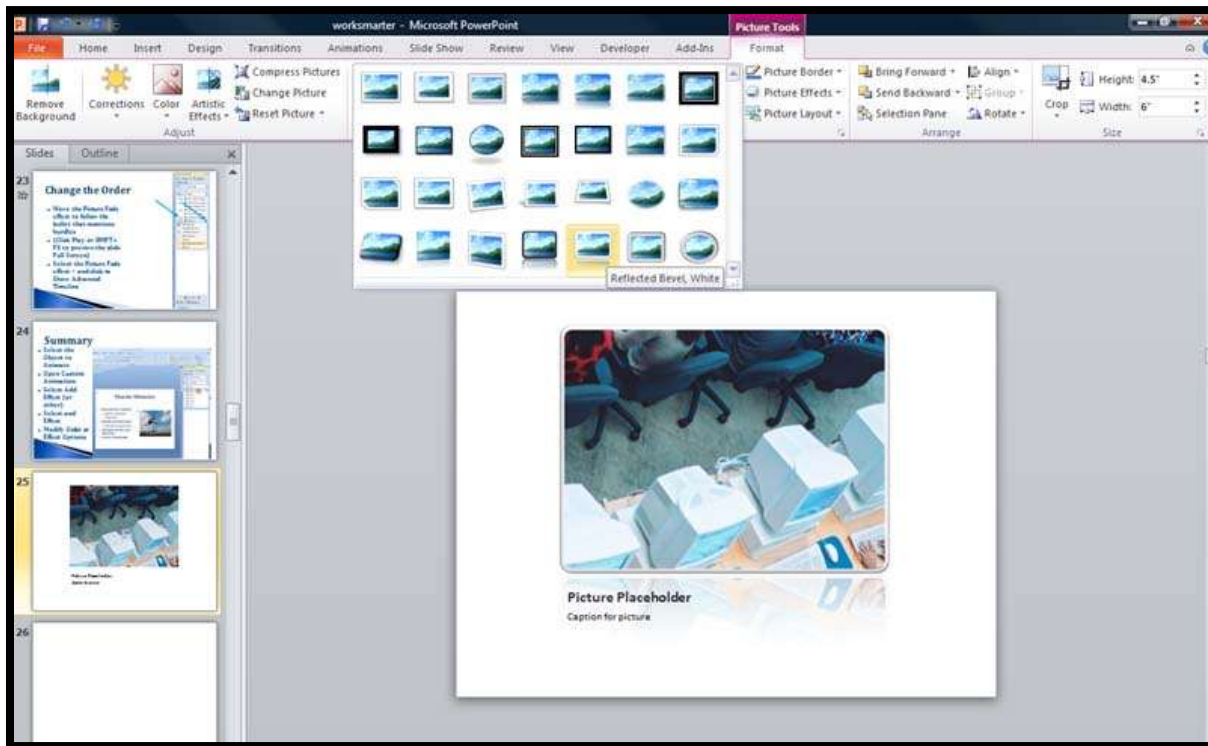
Picture Placeholder

Caption for picture

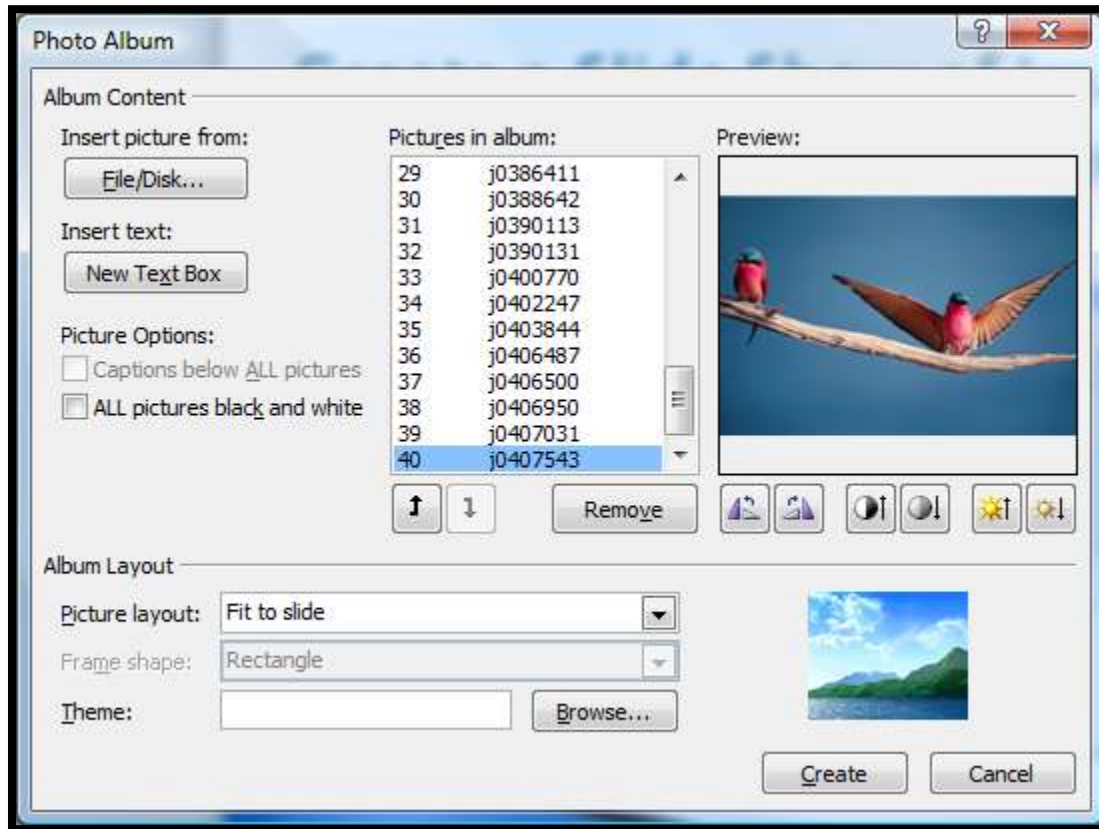
Using a Picture Placeholder Layout in PowerPoint gives you the option of quickly replacing the picture or creating a consistent look and feel for your images. You can also customize these layouts using the Slide Master feature of PowerPoint.

Using Image Effects and PhotoAlbum

The image effects in PowerPoint now let you add shadows, reflections and other highlights to your images without going to third party programs like PhotoShop



Clicking "Insert New PhotoAlbum" in PowerPoint lets you instantly create a new slideshow from an entire folder of images:



Third Party Programs for PowerPoint Visuals

[Crystal Graphics](#) has new 3D animated characters that play directly in your slides, and [PowerFrameworks](#) has animated diagrams that can also help you tell your story directly within PowerPoint. Both allow you to simply revise sample slides for your own purposes.

Closing Summary

Online presentations have grown in popularity for many institutions as a way to connect with customers, clients, students and associates without the need to travel to another location. But as these programs have developed over time, the same conventional visual tools—mainly PowerPoint slides—have been used to deliver content to supplement the speaker’s message.

With audiences getting more accustomed to the online presentation format, it behooves presenters to integrate new visual tools into their toolkit to tell their story more effectively, convey their message visually and keep the audience engaged—especially as distractions like the backchannel proliferate and attention becomes a more precious commodity.

Fortunately new tools are coming on the scene. With an emphasis on visual storytelling, Prezi can provide dynamic graphics delivered through a web browser or the shared desktop of online presentation programs.

To supplement the message of PowerPoint slides, different types of diagramming tools like Gliffy and SmartDraw can provide structure to complex concepts and spark discussion and interaction online.

The storytelling elements of analogy and metaphor can be effectively implemented by using the search and organizational capabilities of online stock image sites, including the gallery at Microsoft Office Online.

Real time interactivity in the form of brainstorming and engagement can be furthered in data intense fields by taking advantage of programs like Visio, with its drag and drop stencils, or using Dashboards to display and manipulate spreadsheet information from Excel; and Excel itself can be used interactively as the datasheet for charts displayed back in PowerPoint.

Finally PowerPoint has tricks up its sleeve that presenters can use to good advantage, including the use of shapes to animate static images, PhotoAlbums and Picture Placeholders to streamline production and Image Effects that can create more engaging visuals without the need for third party tools like PhotoShop.

Online trainings shouldn't be stale or dull. With a bit of creativity and some effective tools you can keep your audience glued to the screen and attentively listening to your dialog.

Additional Resources and References

Cliff Atkinson – *Beyond Bullet Points* - www.backchannelbook.com

Dr. Carmen Taran, Better Beginnings, How to capture your audience in 30 seconds, principal, Rexi Media – www.reximedia.com

Geetesh Bajaj, Indezine Presentation web site and blog, <http://www.indezine.com>

Nancy Duarte, *Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations*, O'Reilly (2008)

Terrence Gargiulo, et al, *Building Business Acumen for Trainers*, Pfeiffer (2006)

Particia Fripp - www.fripp.com

Robert Pike - www.bobpikegroup.com

ShareUrVision, @StaceySoleil, Principal, specializing in branding for startups and entertainment industry - <http://www.shareurvision.com/>

Glen Millar – PowerPoint Graphics Expert - <http://www.pptworkbench.com/>

Julie Terberg – PowerPoint Graphics Expert - <http://terbergdesign.com/>

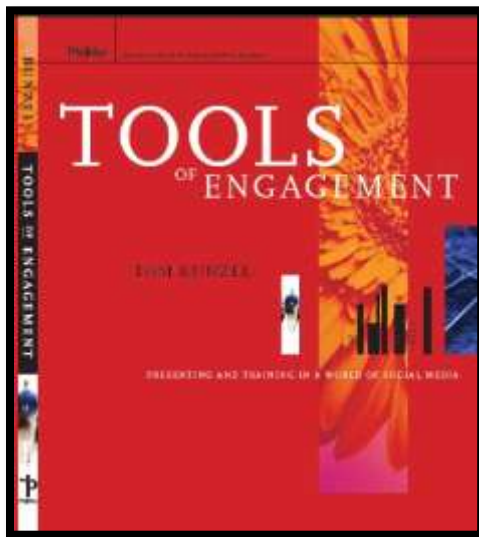
The Presentation Summit – Conference for Presentation Professionals - <http://www.betterpresenting.com/summit/>



About the Author

Tom Bunzel specializes in knowing what presenters need and how to make technology work. He has appeared on Tech TV's Call for Help and spoken at InfoComm and PowerPoint LIVE. He was a "technology coach" for Iomega, MTA Films, Nurses in Partnership and the Neuroscience Education Institute. He has taught regularly at Learning Tree International, West LA College Extension and does presentation and video consulting in Southern California.

Among his books was "Master Visually Microsoft Office 2007," and he wrote a weekly column as the Office Reference Guide for InformIT.com. Published in 2006, "Solving the PowerPoint Predicament: Using Digital Media for Effective Communication" is a detailed, project-oriented approach to creating effective multimedia presentations. His eBook, "Do Your Own Thing: A Step-By-Step Guide to Launching an Effective Social Network," is available through his Web site: www.professorppt.com. "[Tools of Engagement: Presenting and Training in a World of Social Media](#)" is now available.



About GoToTraining

GoToTraining

Online Training Made Easy™

Citrix GoToTraining is an easy-to-use online training service that allows you to move your live instructor-led training programs online for more efficient customer and employee training. Hold unlimited online training sessions with up to 200 attendees from around the world right from your Mac or PC. Reach more learners, collect real-time feedback, record and store your training sessions and more – all while slashing travel costs.