Using Prezi as a Library Instruction Tool

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ABSTRACT

Prezi is a cloud-based presentation tool that is built with the help of many open source projects. Not only in Prezi free, but users also gain access to video tutorials, live online training sessions and webinars given by Prezi experts; and community forums where users can talk about problems, give tips, and learn from one another. Signing up for the "Edu Enjoy" account with an .edu email address provides additional benefits. This article will cover the features of Prezi, discuss pros and cons, and will conclude with ways to successfully incorporate Prezi into information literacy instruction sessions.

Introduction

Keeping students engaged during a library instruction session can be a difficult task to accomplish. With the media–driven, tech-savvy culture that exists in today's world, the old go–to PowerPoint slideshow might not make the cut. So, what tool does make the cut? Prezi.

Prezi is an intuitive, cloud–based presentation tool with features that blow PowerPoint out of the water. With Prezi, one can create dynamic concept maps that tell stories to students. Because Prezi uses an online environment to host its presentations, users have an endless canvas to create interactive presentations that break the ice and get class discussions started. Prezi allows users to incorporate as much creativity into presentations as you can handle. With just a few simple clicks, users can easily integrate a YouTube video or insert an image. The presentation "zebra" instrument in Prezi allows users to place, rearrange, zoom in and out, view, scale, and rotate objects within the presentation. The ability for the presenter to literally focus in and out of major points as the presentation progresses makes for a more dynamic classroom discussion.

Account Options

One of the greatest benefits of Prezi is that it is free. Anyone with an active email address can sign up for the Public version of Prezi. Sign up with any email address to receive 100 megabytes (MB) of cloud storage on prezi.com, or sign up with an

educator's email address (.edu) using the free Edu Enjoy account option to receive access to 500 MB of storage, the ability to create private presentations, the choice to remove the Prezi logo and include your own, and access to the offline player. Five hundred MB of cloud storage should allow a user to keep approximately 150 Prezis online at any given time (Whicker, Shields, & Caldwell, 2012). Of course, this varies depending on the length and depth of the presentations. The offline player allows the user to download presentation at any time, which ensures a successful presentation even if access to the Internet fails.

There are four main versions of Prezi that users can choose from: Public, Enjoy, Pro, and Team. Additionally, there are two educator options: Edu Enjoy and Edu Pro. Public and Edu Enjoy are both completely free and provide for online creation and collaboration options. When users create an account with either of the two free options (Edu Enjoy or Public) or the regular Enjoy account they will be able to download their Prezis for offline viewing and saving. Unfortunately, Prezis cannot be edited in the offline player. If you elect to sign up with the Pro, Team, or the Edu Pro version, offline editing is available. The regular Enjoy account is currently free for the first month and $4.92 for each additional month ($59 billed annually). The Pro account is free for the first month and $13.25 for each additional month ($159 annually). The Team account, which is a good option for organizations, is made available using volume-based pricing and is billed annually (Prezi, 2014).

Features

Because Prezi is web-based, in-progress and completed presentations are available for editing and viewing wherever a user has access to the Internet. This also means that there is no additional software to download. Once the user signs up on prezi. com, they are not bombarded with software to download and install; everything is done directly on the website. When the user begins creating their first Prezi, they will be asked to select a theme or start with a blank one. There are a handful of themed templates to choose from and designers are creating new ones every day. The themes come in a variety of colors and each allows for individual customization options. The presentation's look and feel can be altered with font and color options, and the theme wizard allows users to customize even further. Prezi can be as basic or as advanced as the user wants it to be. The user can choose a basic theme and add content, or, if they have technical expertise, expand and build on your designs using the Prezi CSS Editor (Sullivan & Willey, 2011). For more detailed information on how to control the Prezi CSS Editor to create original themes, the public manual can be viewed online at https://prezi.com/support/manual/css-editor-tutorial.

With Prezi, there is no confinement. Users are operating with an infinite canvas, where space is not an issue. Instead of slides, users can add frames to hold their content in a variety of shapes and sizes. The frames can be placed anywhere on

the canvas, and as users move through the presentation, Prezi will create smooth interaction between your frames. If the frames are placed closer together and made a similar size, they will have a shorter distance to travel and zoom, which can make for a more fluid, less jumpy show. At the same time, part of what makes Prezi so unique is that it allows for zooming in and out of frames based on frame size. This enables users to visually present hierarchical information.

Prezi is a media-driven presentation tool. Its intuitive, user-friendly interface means that adding a YouTube video is as simple as selecting *insert* and choosing *YouTube video* from the dropdown menu. Images are just as easily integrated. By selecting *insert* and choosing *image* from the dropdown menu, users have the option to browse and insert images saved on their computers or search the Google Image database directly from within Prezi. If users are concerned about usage rights, they can select the arrow next to the Google Image search bar and check the box to search only for images that are licensed for commercial use. Diagrams, background music, voice-overs, tables, and pre-created shapes and symbols can also be added using the *insert* tab.

One of the most exciting features of Prezi is that it allows for real-time collaboration. If users are working with a group or team, one person can initiate the Prezi and invite up to ten other Prezi users to be editors. The presentation can be viewed by up to 30 individuals simultaneously. This feature can be a great tool if librarians are working with other librarians and information professionals on a shared project or a conference panel presentation. If you visit map.prezi.com, you will be able to see a real-time map showing the number and location of collaborators who are currently using the software all over the world (Sullivan & Willey, 2011).

Prezi also works well with Microsoft's PowerPoint. If users feel apprehensive about trying Prezi out for the first time and they have a PowerPoint presentation that they have already created, they can easily convert the PowerPoint to a Prezi. Simply start a new Prezi template, select *insert*, and choose *PowerPoint* from the dropdown menu. They can then browse to upload a saved PowerPoint presentation. Prezi will take the PowerPoint content (including images, charts, videos, etc.) that they already have and format it into a Prezi. This will allow the user to spend some time exploring the different Prezi features without having to recreate all of the content. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this transfer only works one way; the user cannot create a Prezi and then export it into a PowerPoint format.

Interested in turning your Prezi into a video? Simply use screencast software such as Screencast-O-Matic, Camtasia, or one of the many other software options available to record a screencast of your presentation and easily upload it to YouTube or place it on your webpage. This can be a great way to create modern, interesting video tutorials for students.

Prezi for Information Literacy

All of these features come together to make a unique tool that can benefit students in information literacy courses. Using these features to create interactive, dynamic presentations helps to keep students engaged during class sessions. Jennifer Resor Whicker, Kathy Shields and Amy Chadwell (2012) write about how Prezi brings library instruction to life. They point out that they started to use Prezi in their library instruction sessions because "it offers a natural and memorable way to present information. It also allows for one to be more creative" (Whicker et al., 2012). They also point out that students pay better attention when they are taught from a Prezi and note that a Prezi catches students' attention better than LibGuides (Whicker et al., 2012). In library instruction, we often want to tell students a story, as well as draw attention to specific details. Prezi is best at doing just that (Beecroft, 2012). One example of how these features work together to create dynamic library instruction sessions is given by Claire Beecroft (2012). She points out that if library instructors are teaching students about Google Scholar, they could easily embed a screenshot of a search results page. The library instructor could then zoom in and out of the different parts of the citation to help bring attention to important details, such as "times cited" (Beecroft, 2012). Doing this helps make the content more engaging and applicable to students. She also found that Prezi has made a real impact on catching students' attention in ways that regular slideshow presentations have not (Beecroft, 2012).

Other institutions have used Prezi for instruction by creating concept maps and decision trees for library concepts. Librarians at the Luise V. Hanson Library at Waldorf College in northern Iowa used Prezi for creating mind maps (Kiscaden, 2014) They found that Prezi is an excellent option for demonstrating concept mapping to undergraduate students in a more animated way (Kiscaden, 2014). They found that many other users have also used Prezi for concept mapping and they discovered that the Prezi archive of user-generated content "nets 1,000 concept maps created using the software, encompassing everything from maps of classic novels to biodiversity" (Kiscaden, 2014). When librarians at Waldorf College found that they were having problems getting students in the English department to clearly understand citations for the sources that they were using in their research papers, the librarians collaborated and created a decision tree using Prezi. The decision tree aids in taking students through a variety of citation scenarios and then, it provides different solution options for each of these scenarios (Kiscaden, 2014). The Prezi was also later added to their English 100 and 101 library guides on their website (Kiscaden, 2014).

Caveats

As with every tech tool, there are pros and cons. A few of the issues that some have experienced with Prezi include a dizzying effect from the zooming display and the inability to revert from a Prezi to a PowerPoint. One of the issues that people used to complain about with Prezi was its lack of a spell–check feature (Whicker et al., 2012). However, Prezi has since added spell–check, which makes using Prezi more desirable. The dizzying effect people sometimes complain about can be addressed simply by creating a solid color background, placing the frames close together, and making frames a similar size and shape. Doing so will ensure that the Prezi does not jump as far from frame to frame, providing a more calming experience.

Conclusions

The benefits of Prezi far outweigh the concerns mentioned above. As with any new tool, there is a learning curve. However, Prezi is intuitive and user-friendly, so getting familiar with it should not be too time consuming. Prezi's dynamic features make it the perfect candidate for the next information literacy instruction presentation or library tutorial. Prezi grabs the attention of students and allows users to create a visual hierarchy of information that can be creatively displayed and easily integrated in the classroom. If a user is still unsure about using Prezi, they can start by uploading an already created and focus on learning about the many features that can expand your content into a presentation that will engage students and help them to learn and remember the content. ✚

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