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Use of Prezi Software to Support and Expand Extension Outreach and Education

Abstract

Working with innovative technologies helps Extension professionals promote, enhance, and expand outreach. Innovative software, for example, can support educators in creating presentations that better accommodate various types of learners and appeal to new audiences. This article highlights one such technology: Prezi. Prezi is a free software system Extension professionals can use to develop fresh and effective presentations. Prezi allows for the delivery of information in an easy-to-understand and eye-catching format and is appropriate for use in both traditional in-person and online Extension programming.

Keywords: [technology](#), [presentation](#), [PowerPoint](#), [Prezi](#)

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Keeping up to date with technological tools is imperative for Cooperative Extension professionals. Developing messages and disseminating information in a variety of formats for audiences with different learning and information-seeking styles is essential to our success as community-based educators. Moreover, multimedia-based educational tools appeal to adult learners, who require attention-grabbing experiences that engage multiple senses in the learning process (Parker, Powell, Hermann, Phelps, & Brown, 2011). Additionally, technology affords Extension professionals the opportunity to expand outreach by attracting consumers who are otherwise too busy to attend classes and provides an online platform for Extension educators to "reach people where they are."

One useful technological tool is Prezi, a web-based presentation software that allows the educator to present information using a storytelling method. Compared to the traditional slide-by-slide format of programs such as PowerPoint, Prezi enables the presenter to work from a single blank canvas and lay out information in a manner that is dynamic and captivating yet still organized and logical. Prezi allows for the use of pop-ups, zooming, moving elements, voice-over narration, and interactivity that is unlike most other presentation software (see

Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Use of Prezi as a Platform for Community Brainstorming Sessions



By putting concepts in context and telling a story, a Prezi user can illustrate information in a clear way that may be easier for audiences to comprehend. In particular, the flexibility of Prezi allows participants who have different learning styles to grasp the message and learn more effectively. Moreover, Prezi can be used in both face-to-face and online educational settings.

However, in spite of having these benefits and appealing to over 85 million users (Prezi, n.d.), Prezi is underused in Extension. When measuring the prevalence and effectiveness of technology use among Extension family and consumer science educators, researchers found that only 10% of respondents used Prezi (Toelle & Harris, 2014). This article provides information that may motivate more Extension educators to use Prezi in their programming.

Reaching Various Types of Learners

Generally, there are three styles of learners: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Barbe, Swassing, & Milone, 1979). Visual learners prefer to see things, like to envision concepts, and respond well to diagrams, pictures, and maps; auditory learners prefer hearing spoken concepts and learn through listening; and kinesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing things that support the purpose of the learning experience (Kharb, Samanta, Jindal, & Singh, 2013). Using Prezi, educators can accommodate each type of learner with one presentation (Lenz, McCallister, Luks, Le, & Fessler, 2015):

- Prezi offers a wide range of visual aids that can help participants see how ideas come together and how concepts relate to one another.
- Prezi offers a voice-over feature that allows the presenter to record a script for each frame.
- By using an interactive whiteboard when making a Prezi presentation, a Prezi user can allow kinesthetic

learners to interact with the software and learn by moving through the presentation and zooming in and out of concepts.

Reaching In-Person and Online Audiences

The use of the Internet as a platform for delivering Extension education continues to expand. To effectively reach tech-savvy consumers, Extension educators must create innovative presentations that accommodate clientele needs. However, some educators remain concerned that adopting technology may lead to their losing traditional clientele or to a diminishing of the educator's presence. These concerns keep many Extension professionals from using online technology such as YouTube or other tools. However, Prezi may appeal to such educators because the educator can offer presentations both in-person and online. An Extension professional may create a Prezi presentation to include at a traditional in-person meeting but then also embed the presentation in websites, emails, social media, and blogs for more exposure.

Prezi's effectiveness in face-to-face contexts can be demonstrated by its use with communities. For example, Prezi can be helpful when conducting concept mapping projects, such as community needs assessments or brainstorming sessions. Having audience members take part in progressing through a presentation is a great way to interact with participants and keep them engaged.

In an online scenario, Prezi's structure promotes individualized learning. For example, learners may listen to the audio for each frame of a presentation as many times as they would like and move between frames at their own pace.

Additional Considerations

One important benefit of Prezi is that it is free to educators with an email address ending in *.edu*. Some Extension professionals have suggested use of tools such as Articulate or Adobe Captivate for online module creation (Ferrell & Fishel, 2007; Young, Hirnyck, Agenbroad, & Bechinski, 2015), but these software programs are expensive, with the cheapest starting at around \$300. High costs related to the development of online modules have been a major limitation for Extension e-learning programs as well (Dromgoole & Boleman, 2006; Williamson & Smoak, 2005). Using Prezi provides educators with the ability to create online, self-paced modules to be distributed to the public at no cost.

An additional benefit of using Prezi is the cloud-based nature of the software. This web-based platform allows the presenter to work on a presentation from anywhere. Additionally, all presentations created through Prezi are stored in the Prezi cloud, meaning that automatic backup of data occurs and a presentation is accessible regardless of hardware failures.

A drawback to using Prezi is its steep learning curve. Prezi differs from many presentation software formats as it allows presenters to visually emphasize "big picture" concepts along with their supporting ideas (Potter, 2013). This format is unlike the linear slide-by-slide nature of PowerPoint and may require additional time during preparation of presentations until familiarity with the software and structure is achieved. Other limitations are that with online use of Prezi, the end user must have Internet access and that unfamiliarity with this new presentation format may reduce audience participation rates.

Conclusion

Prezi offers an extensive scope of benefits that can help Extension professionals disseminate research-based knowledge to the public more broadly and improve outreach at no cost. The Prezi format eliminates the restrictions of linear presentations. It allows for the clustering of ideas to create concepts, the creation of timelines that are interactive and intuitive, and the ability to create a more audience-led presentation. Most importantly, Prezi allows Extension professionals to present concepts in a creative and instructional way that takes into consideration different learning styles.

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