

Presentation Software for any Budget

By

Michael R. Arkfeld

Classic multimedia studies reveal that using visuals along with a verbal presentation increases the listeners' retention of the information by over 40%! Another study reflected that generation Xer's are receiving well over 50% of their daily information from sources other than newspapers. It is also said that the average American watches TV over 6 hours a day. With TV and now the multimedia features of the Internet information is continually being presented to consumers (and fact finders) in a multimedia format. Just as we had to transition from a horseless carriage to an automobile now we need to transition from verbal presentations to multimedia presentations.

Multimedia presentations can include text, images, graphics, audio, and/or video. Combining these different formats can have a substantial impact upon the listener in memory retention as well as controlling the focus and attention of factfinders. It adds immediacy and realism to dry exhibits. It increases a factfinders understanding by simplifying complex issues. It enables you to control the flow of your case without wasting time and saves money by expediting the proceedings.

With several new entries into the presentation software arena the user has several options to choose from when selecting a multimedia presentation software package. There are generally two categories of presentation software - generic presentation software and legal specific software. Generic presentation software has some limited built in presentation features that may fulfill your presentation needs. Most common of the presentation graphical programs are the ones that enable one to create bullet slides, bar graphs, pie charts, timelines, organization charts and a host of other graphical depictions which provides the viewer with a visual impression by pictures and data. Generic presentation software would include PowerPoint (www.microsoft.com), Lotus Freelance Graphics (www.lotus.com) and Corel Presentations (www.corel.com).

This type of presentation software is easy to use out of the box and provides a number of user friendly features including tutorials, predefined graphic templates, and clip art. They offer a basic set of drawing and annotation tools. They generally come with a "screenshow" feature that enables one to arrange the created slides in whatever order is best suited for the presentation as well as hyperlinks that enable you to move to any part of the presentation immediately. These programs also enable one to create multimedia presentations using graphics, sound, text, animations and even live video inserted as OLE objects. These programs permit the user to output the presentation to paper for trial blowups, overhead transparencies, 35mm slides or for display through an LCD projector or monitors.

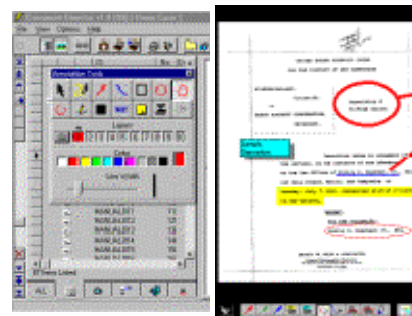
Often, special "niche" graphics software can provide valuable assistance in your cases. Two such niche packages are VISIO (www.visio.com) and ABC FlowCharter (www.micrografx.com/flowcharter/). These graphics programs enable the user to create specific relationship "type" charts that can then easily be used with a general generic or special legal presentation program. The programs provide numerous stencils to assist in depicting "relationships" important in your cases.

There are several presentation software programs that were developed specifically for the needs of the legal profession and are able to display exhibits, animations, graphics, sound, video and any other type of information that has been digitized. These presentation packages include Sanction, TrialDirector, Visionary, TrialPro and Anix.

It is important that when you present a case to a legal audience that the digitized evidence can be highlighted, annotated or displayed in a way to assist in persuading the factfinder of your client's position. For this reason, it is important to focus upon the available features of presentation software. The features vary depending on the software package but questions to ask in selecting a package should include the following:

Retrieval of document images, pictures or graphics – Does the software enable the user to print out bar code labels and then retrieve the images by swiping a bar code reader over the bar code? Can one type in the name of the exhibit filename to retrieve the image? Does the software permit a touch screen affect to retrieve the image? You would essentially touch the computer screen on a particular menu choice and the image would appear. Does the software permit you to pull up an exhibit menu and select the exhibit by clicking on a mouse?

Drawing on Exhibit - One of the most powerful ways of focusing a factfinder on the important parts of your evidence is to draw on the critical parts of the document or exhibit. This can be done by using a pen based drawing instrument such as a light pen that connects into your computer, a mouse or if you are using a touch screen, your finger. It generally permits you to draw on the exhibit in a variety of colors and block portions of the exhibit for highlighting in different colors. Also, arrows, circles and other highlighting features are generally available.



Database Integration – Does the software have its own database capability and/or does it integrate with popular database programs such as Summation and Concordance?

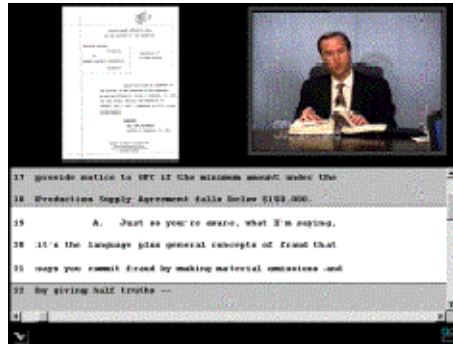
Exhibit Manipulation Features – Does the software permit you to manipulate the size of an exhibit and place two or more exhibits together on the same screen? Once your exhibit is on the screen you can use a mouse, pen based system or touch screen to mark off the portion that you want enlarged and do it instantly. Does the software allow one to place two documents side-by-side or top and bottom display? One effective presentation technique is to bring up two different exhibits side-by-side or one on the top and one on the bottom. This would be done to show the inconsistencies in the two documents or how they both are supportive of the same point.

Video - Does the software permit editing and displaying video depositions or other video segments? Some software systems enable you to split screens to show video, synchronized text, exhibits and sound at the same time. Annotations can be made real-time to the video and other digitized content and then saved to a computer file. Searching for text then synchronized with video.

Other Presentation Software Features – Other features include note searching, video review and editing capability, scanning capability, organization of documents by witness folders and cases, and scripting or layering capability with markup save features, saving annotations for later use by the jury or appellate courts.

The main modules of a presentation software program are the presentation, database (built in and/or integration with popular database software products, and a video deposition module. Additional modules are available in some presentation modules. Below is a minimum comparison of some trial presentation software packages. It is suggested that before buying that one contact the company to discuss your needs and any particular questions you have regarding the software.

Sanction (www.verdictsystems.com). This recently released software package contains all three primary modules – presentation, database and depositions – as well as the capability to time stamp your own video with the text for subsequent synchronized playback. It is offered for \$395 for a single user license.



Visionary (www.digitalpractice.com) Combines the three main modules for a cost of \$1295 for a single users license while TrialPro (www.trialpro.com) costs \$795 for single computer license.

TrialDirector (www.indatacorp.com), formerly TrialLink, is the granddaddy of trial presentation systems containing all three modules for \$1295, \$895 for TrialDirector and Document Director without the deposition director and ½ price for briefcase to install on your laptop.

Anix is unique from the other programs because it is an add-on to the PowerPoint presentation program with added features for the legal profession. This new software tool that runs with PowerPoint® enhances presentations with 'on the fly' editing, zoom feature and annotation of images, photos and documents, and one can create moving visual aids such as maps and design diagrams.

There are a number of graphic, image and animation service bureaus that will prepare your images and graphics for presentation and if you need to assist you in the courtroom. Some service bureaus to consider are inData (www.indatacorp.com), Verdict Systems (www.verdictsystems.com), Lex Solutio (www.digitalpractice.com), TrialPro (www.trialpro.com), and Doar Communications (www.doar.com).

Multimedia presentations should be the norm in our cases for many reasons. The rest of the world expects presentations that provide multi-sensory stimulus to learn and decide the merits of products and services, why not disputes?