Visual Presentations: Alternatives to Powerpoint

Keynote. Keynote is the Apple alternative to Powerpoint, and is a better product. It uses the same basic approach as Powerpoint, but prepackages a very wide range of templates for every aspect of the presentation. This makes it very easy to use, even for the most sophisticated effects. It also has some functions that are specifically useful to art historians. However, like Powerpoint, Keynote is basically geared to commerce and administration, so many things that an art historian would like to be able to do are not possible.

Prezi. Prezi is a true alternative to powerpoint—much more flexible, with zooming capability. However, it too is basically geared to commerce and administration, and its basic templates are not especially well adapted to art historical work.

HyperImage. HyperImage is split between Editor (including a light table) and Reader modes. One uses the Editor mode to do research and prepare presentations, which one then exports to the Reader mode in order to make presentations. At the moment, there are many problems with the export function, which will need to be corrected before HyperImage can be widely adopted. That said, it is already possible to use HyperImage, and in one seminar I (Jonathan Hay) have taught it was used by almost all the students for quite complex presentations.

Here are some of the current problems:

- “Objects with no images (e.g. an auction house record with a description of the lot but no image) do not appear after export to Reader. I circumvented this by using a ClipArt bowl as a stand-in image, but even then, I had to take repeated screen shots of the same ClipArt bowl, because I was not allowed to use the same image twice in Editor! I know it’s just text, one can make a text object, as I did for my bibliography, but to get an object to appear with its data formatted in the same way as all the other objects, just without an image, is currently impossible without executing an inelegant brute force workaround. (Grace Chuang)
- It would be nice if it were easier to access additional views of the same object in Reader. Currently it takes several clicks, and you can’t have the main image up at the same time. It would be nice if thumbnails of the additional views could appear under the main view, and get larger when moused over, or something like that. (Grace Chuang)
- If one wants to rearrange the order of the groups in the Reader presentation, it would be nice if one could just do it in Editor instead of having to do it again during the export process. In other words, it would be nice if any rearrangement of the order of groups done in Editor would be automatically reflected in the next export. (Grace Chuang)
- I just opened my latest export to Reader, and all the titles of the text objects, groups, and light tables have disappeared, to be replaced by their four-digit ID (and “Untitled” in the case of the light tables). This despite not having changed anything in the last two weeks. This points to a broader observation on HyperImage in its current state: it’s full of instances where it induces in the user a perception that X results in Y most of the time, but not always, which doesn’t exactly lead the user to trust it. (Grace Chuang)

- when opening a particular image it would be less distracting (since one would not need to repeatedly go to the group view) if the other views of an object were available under a side tab (where it says “annotations” etc, kind of how one can see thumbnails of other pages on the sidebar of a PDF file) (Alexandra Dubodel)
- it would be good to be able to turn menu options (in the menu that comes up when you “right click”) into English would be helpful as well (although I’m sure this will certainly happen as the program becomes more popular) (Alexandra Dubodel)

News just in (11/30/2012) ..... The HyperImage developers are apparently going to do a complete rewrite of the code to the latest standards. What this means is that the Editor-Reader division, which has been so problematic, will disappear. Instead everything will be in html5 and javascript. They apparently already have a demo of a new light table (still “endless”) where one can zoom in and out, which wasn’t possible before. According to one of the collaborators, the light table will now be able to contain not only single works, but also group folders and texts. It will also have the capability to display relations between objects

Artstor Offline Image Viewer.

Omeka. Treats images as illustrations to texts, and texts as commentaries on images. A digital form of an old-fashioned cataloguing and file card approach.