

# Family History Slide Show Presentations

## Introduction

For my sins, my occupation involves me making sales presentations using the ever popular MS PowerPoint application. As many of you are aware, this allows the creation of slide show presentations which can be shown on or projected from a Personal Computer. This has lead me to experiment with this medium as a means of producing presentations for family history and I have found that this has many benefits. For example, with a little knowledge it is possible to add not only text to slides but images, sounds and video. This can create atmosphere and can be a great deal of fun. This is of particular interest to younger members of the family, I have found that my nieces and nephews will sit spellbound watching a slide show whereas pedigree and other charts just don't hold their interest. There are other situations where this method of presentation is beneficial eg. for those who lecture on family history or may wish to present their family tree at a Society meeting or some sort of family gathering. What's more, using PowerPoint (and similar packages) it is quite easy to produce a pleasing and consistent look and feel.

I should say up front that I intend to use PowerPoint as the basis for this article but for those wanting a free alternative, you would do well to consider Open Office. This package is an open source application packed full of Office utilities (spreadsheet, presentation, drawing and document editors) and can be freely downloaded from [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org). The presentation maker will allow you to create slide show presentations and will handle text, images, sound and video clips. I haven't used this myself but it would seem to offer a very suitable alternative.

I do not intend to make this article too technical but rather to draw attention to the main features of PowerPoint that I have found to be useful. So I will assume that readers are familiar with the basics such as creating new presentations, adding slides, adding text etc. I will also comment on the structure of my own presentations, items I have found it useful to include and perhaps some of the more creative and fun elements of this process.

## Choosing a suitable Design

The first thing you should consider is the template you may wish to use for your presentation. This is an important part of setting the tone for your presentation. By template I mean a slide 'Design' - the overall arrangement of titles, text with any borders, colours and logos. PowerPoint offers an array of predefined Designs ranging in styles from business-like to party-like. You can even define your own or modify an existing template (and of course many organisations go to great lengths to define their own corporate look and feel). The choice is yours, however, one template that I think is very suitable is the



predefined STRATGIC.POT. This is not supplied with all versions of MS Office so you may have to download it from the Microsoft Web Site ([www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)) if it is not amongst your Design choices. This is how the title page appears once my own titles have been added:

You can change the Design by choosing *Format -> Apply Design* from the menus. You should note that you are not stuck with the colour scheme that the Design provides. You can change this using *Format -> Slide Colour Scheme*. And if you wish to change the Design in some way you can do that using *View -> Master -> Slide Master*.

## Adding text, images and sound

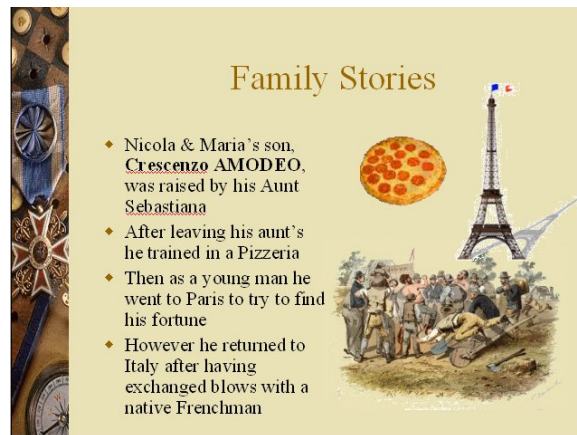
It should now be a reasonably simple matter to add content to the slides. Notice that you can control the slide layout to determine the layout of each individual slide (*Format -> Slide Layout*) i.e. you can change the appearance to suit your arrangement of text (one column or two), whether this is a title slide or is to contain tables etc. So with this framework in place you can now start to add content to your slides. Pictures, Movies and Sounds can all be added from the *Insert* menu. If you wish to include photos from your tree then it would be enormously useful to have access to a scanner (or digital camera



for contemporary photos). And of course, this is where you can allow your creativity to flourish. In my own family presentation I have found it fun to begin by introducing my wife and I using photos of ourselves as children. I have chosen to make this into a kind of quiz for the children and so I have used animation to delay the showing of the answers. I have also added sound, eg. The arrival of the pedal car coincides with the roar of a racing car (one of the default PowerPoint sounds). The audience is then brought up to date with some more recent photos and the theme of candles and cars is continued (with a picture of myself in a more recent car). Other sound effects I have

used are farm yard and bird sounds as the backdrop to a piece on an ancestor who was an agricultural labourer, tram sounds to introduce a tram track labourer and digereedoo noises to introduce a branch of the family who emigrated to Australia. It can be particularly poignant if you can make use of a song which has special meaning to a couple. My parent-in-laws' special song 'That's Amore' brought a tear to their eyes as I used it to introduce their marriage and the story of how they met. PowerPoint allows you to add sound files to individual slides, your local public library may contain CDs with sound effects and there are various utilities around which can convert CD tracks to .wav sound files (do make sure that you are not in breach of any copyright laws).

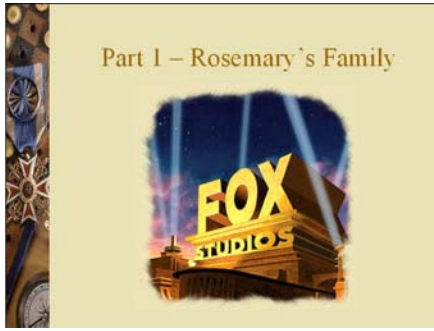
Images can of course be very powerful in telling any kind of story and slide shows represent a very visual medium. As well as photographs of family members, other images can be used to set the scene and reconstruct the past. Consider, for example, the following slide. No photos of this Italian ancestor exist but I have used some clipart to reconstruct a family tale involving some kind of fracas.



I think it is worth a brief technical note pointing out the animation options. Animation can be used to determine how images and text are introduced, whether they woosh in from the left or crawl from the right. Animation can also pause the slide for a set duration or until a mouse button is clicked (useful whilst waiting for answers to questions). This can all be manipulated from the Slide Show -> Custom Animation menu. You can set the sequence in which slide objects appear, what effects are used as they appear and any timing information.

### Content and Structure

You will ultimately determine your own content, my experience has shown that the following have worked well in slide format: quizzes (guess who is in the photo), family stories, earliest known ancestor, where our ancestors lived (with maps), pedigree charts (not too detailed) and pleas for further help. It is important not to overlook each slide by cramming too much material onto it. Ideally each slide should have its own particular message or story. I have split my family presentation into two parts, one describing my wife's family and one describing my side of the family. I have tried to keep a balance between supplying enough interesting detail and yet not boring the audience with endless unnecessary slides (the phrase 'death by PowerPoint' does exist in presentation circles). I think you cannot hope to cover as much detail in slide presentations as you can in charts, books and other traditional media. If you are giving this presentation in a lecture style then you can always fill in more details orally. My family presentation comprises just under 50 slides which is more than enough. I have



a few instructional presentations that I have put together which are much shorter and more focused (10-20 slides each). It all depends upon your audience and what you are trying to achieve

#### **Sharing with others**

You can present your slideshow in a formal setting where you introduce each slide and talk through it. Depending on the setting, another option would be to allow the presentation to run with automatic slide advancement (useful as a background activity at some kind of family gathering). If you do decide to share your .presentation file with others then be aware that

by adding pictures and sound it can grow to sizeable proportions. In this event, it is probably best shared on CDs rather than on web sites or through email. Note that if you save the presentation as PowerPoint Show (.pps) rather than Presentation (.ppt) then the recipient needn't have PowerPoint installed on their own PC to run the show

If you intend to show to a larger audience, then you might consider hooking your PC up to your TV screen or better still seeing if a PC projector can be borrowed or hired. And of course, it is quite easy to produce handouts from your presentation if you have a printer.

#### **Summary**

The use of multimedia to tell a story can make it very different and exciting, it adds a further dimension to the traditional book or article. I have seen the fun and enthusiasm that can be generated by watching a family history slide show, I have seen the younger generation get hooked on this and for that alone I would suggest that you experiment with this approach. In more formal settings, visual impact is of equal importance and using a slide show presentation can help bring clarity to your message. Why not give it a try?

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