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Presentations in the Digital Age

BY SARAH CRESPI

Google offers more than email. Gmail comes equipped with document storage and sharing.

The topic this month is in honor of the ASBMB annual meeting and is dedicated to one of the perils of communicating science in person: the slide presentation. In this column we will focus on some possible solutions to those familiar issues that have come about since slide presentations first went digital.
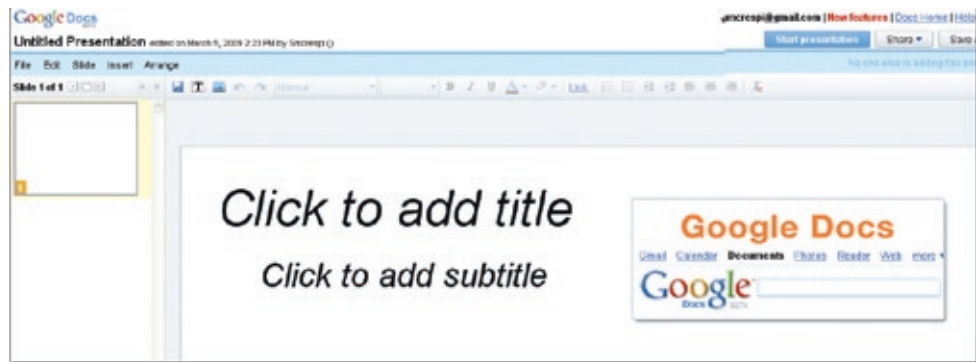
On the PC side, the latest version of PowerPoint (2007) outputs files denoted ".pptx," which are not always compatible with older versions of the software. One way around this is to save the presentation in compatibility mode (as a .ppt) to reduce the risk of error messages or worse when loading the presentation onto a different machine. To save a presentation in the older, more ubiquitous format, choose "Save As" and select "PowerPoint 1997-2003." However, you cannot show PowerPoint presentations on Apple computers in general.

If you created your presentation on a Mac and are presenting on a PC or don't know if your MacBook will be compatible with an on-site projector, you might want to have an online, platform-agnostic version at the ready. Google Documents now offers a nice back-up that might help take your mind off these incompatibility worries. This is also a good move for PC users in cases where your thumb drive becomes uncooperative.

If you already have a Gmail account, simply go to the "Documents" tab located at the top of your browser window when you log in. If not, sign up and you'll find a great place to store and edit documents, presentations, and spreadsheets. Google allows users to upload many types of files (Word docs, Excel spreadsheets, OpenOffice docs, and PowerPoint slides). Users can then log in and download the files onto any computer or open them right in the browser. For example, a PowerPoint slide presentation (.ppt not .pptx) can be imported into Google Documents at home and then opened from any computer, Mac or PC, in the browser window. Alternatively, the project can be downloaded as a PDF document or text-only for printing.

But alas, nothing is perfect. One major drawback to the Google Docs presentation is that video in uploaded slideshows does not work. If you want to display video in an online Google Docs presentation, you must load the video into YouTube (also conveniently owned by Google) and then embed it into the presentation using the edit feature. The editing function works well if you are importing a presentation from your desktop or creating the presentation from scratch using the Google editor. Be sure to check over your slides once they are imported because some shifting during travel may occur.

Want to learn more about PowerPoint 2007? *ASBMB Today* published an introduction in May 2008. Go there now: www.asbmbtoday-digital.com/asbmb-today/200805/

Sarah Crespi is a Multimedia Communications Specialist at ASBMB. She can be reached at screspi@asbmb.org.