Chapter 8

Using Microsites as Live Presentation Platforms (with Three Embedded Real–World Cases)

Shalin Hai-Jew
Kansas State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Live presentations in academic conferences often link to online resources for preview or post-view. Microsites may enhance live and real-time presentations. To examine the human factors and software challenges involved, this chapter offers three real-world partial solutions for interactive microsites that serve multiple purposes. This article focuses on the use of SoftChalk as a core authoring tool to create microsites for live presentations. Three real-world and unique cases (all from 2012) are showcased here: “Using Tableau Public for (Spatial and Trendline) Data Visualization (An Early Exploration and ‘TMI’ Musing on Data)” at https://softchalkcloud.com/lesson/rtNYCj1K80eI9v; “Building and Analyzing Node-Link Diagrams to Understand Social Networks” at https://softchalkcloud.com/lesson/c4d8tSWMCwm39n; and “Building Effective Study Guides for Online Learning and Assessment” at https://softchalkcloud.com/lesson/rFnD0AQX3xRVTa.

INTRODUCTION

In academia and professional contexts, there are requirements for creating live presentations to share information with colleagues. Most live presentations involve some digital residuals, such as links to websites, videos from the presentation, or downloadable slideshows. A new approach involves the uses of microsites (small and targeted-purpose websites) for the lead-up period to a presentation (to raise interest), during the presentation (to offer interactive and rich information), and after the presentation (as post-event reference and as a general resource developed via Web and Internet). These sites may be similar to “digital poster sessions” except that they are designed also for live use, not just for the automated presentation of information without human facilitation (as if often the case with digital poster sessions).
THE CHALLENGES OF LIVE PRESENTATIONS AND STRETCHING TIME

The challenges of this professional organization and its membership are similar to others who host live conferences with synchronous events held. The participants of the conference may want to attend multiple synchronous events and are forced to wrangle other ways to benefit from multiple real-time events. For presenters to build presentational microsites that are used in both the F2F presentations and in enriched archived format, they may enable conference-goers to benefit by learning from multiple presenters by using “off-time” to review the presentational multimedia materials. Going beyond the limits of a slideshow means that the conference goers may experience a closer-to-the-live and full-sensory experience than reviewing static or non-interactive traditional presentation materials.

The Rationales for a Microsite

There are a number of straightforward rationales for using a presentational microsite instead of a traditional slideshow or more traditional method of presentation. Critics have long pointed out short-comings of various slideshow tools, which are said to force users to “separate content and analysis” and reduce “concepts to meaningless bullets” and force “strict, unneeded hierarchies”; further, data resolution and visual reasoning are impoverished because information is distributed over time “instead of adjacently over space” (Lanir, Booth, & Findlater, 2008, p. 696). Microsites may be used to mitigate some of these concerns because the work space is not the size of a slide—but of sequential web pages—with a range of non-linear presentation methods and interactive functions. If there is sufficient information and multimedia resources, a microsite could be used to encapsulate and present that complexity.

Depth and Variety of Digital Information: The amount of content that may be presented using a microsite is much greater than what may be placed inside a slideshow. A microsite itself may contain multiple slideshows, for example. Information may be presented in a range of ways. Iframes, inline keyframes in interframe HTML compression, may enable the encapsulating of live websites within the presentation; this capability enables the integration of real-time updates to capture the ephemerality of the WWW and Internet. Various multimedia—video, audio, photos and images, diagrams, simulations, and interactive games—may be integrated into a microsite. Web 2.0 technologies like wikis and blogs may be linked into a microsite. Microsites offer a much larger canvas than a slideshow. Alternate non-linear presentation structures may be used, such as image maps or hyperlinked spatial mapping outlines or interactive interfaces. Further, all these elements may be brought together in a coherent and packaged way, with sequencing and navigation. Those who want to be more sophisticated may draw data from live sensors or databases—as part of the presentation. Counterpoint: In live presentations, people may use a variety of contents from various sites and offline from their computers. The presenter could create coherence between the objects through their presentation. However, after the presentation, there is no packaged coherent site to visit. There may have been a video or audio capture of the event.

Ease of Build: Modern-day authoring tools are relatively easy to use to create a microsite. Those who regularly build digital contents as part of their daily work may find this just a regular part of a work day. The culture of the WWW and Internet also promotes less formal uses of these spaces as needed. There does not have to be a sense of occasion to the creation of microsites.

Increased Digital Object Lifespan and Reusability: For some conferences, the organizers will publish papers in a related journal, or they will submit vetted papers for archival in repositories. However, for smaller host organizations and colleges, there are no resources for such publishing. Or the repositories
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