

cd-rom

Project Preparation Stage

This PDF file contains some brief guidelines and ideas to consider before talking to the designer of your CD-ROM project. Whether you need a presentation for a business conference, a brochure for your products or an educational/training CD-ROM you will need to think about the shape and structure of your information.

Mapping a CD-ROM

Creating a map is the first stage of any CD-ROM. Going through the process of creating a map for the design will clarify how you set out your company message and will inform the layout and presentation of that message. Preparing material for a message on disc requires quite a different set of parameters than a similar project going to print.

The process of mapping a CD-ROM will not only set out the physical map that a user will follow when viewing and listening to the disc, but will also focus the order of different graphics and text, whether that text be voiced or on screen.

The first stage to decide is whether you are going to have a main presentation and what form that will take. This is followed by deciding on a number of static pages and a main menu from which the viewer can navigate the complete disc. The main presentation can run for as little as a few seconds up to thirty or forty minutes. The length is dependent on the quality of the graphics and the quality of the audio if it is voiced. Opening presentations normally last between one and six minutes. If the opening presentation is overly long you may lose the attention of the viewer. It is best to think of the opening as the film trailer. It is good if it is punchy, precise and not over detailed. Essentially it is an introduction and overview of your company and its main products.

Using Audio and Graphics or just Graphics

A CD-ROM presentation using audio voice-over and graphics has the most natural feel. It is also possible to have a presentation with the text on screen and incorporated into the graphics. This can be useful for viewers who have no soundcard fitted in their computers. The design in each form is very different. Usually with added audio voice-over there is not so much text used on screen. In this case the graphics used need to add to the sense of the narrative and hold the attention of the viewer, while not distracting the focus from the voice-over message.

A good start point for the voiced version is to begin by scripting the voice-over. It rarely works to set out the graphics first and then to write a script. It is best to think of it as a news bulletin with inserts [e.g. soundbytes from employees/clients] and a general graphical overlay of switching or dissolving graphics. It is important that any changes in screen text and photos come at a time that will enhance the voiced message.

When writing the early drafts of the script keep it direct and keep the voice in mind, thus ensuring that there is a natural flow of thought, just as one would use in presenting a concept at a meeting. The earliest script can be in rough form and refined as we go along. Fine tuning often happens at a later stage when the first or second of the early proofs are viewed as one gets a better sense of how the whole feel of the presentation is working.

Keep the script light, particularly at the beginning. If too much detail is introduced too soon it may be that the listener is bombarded and will not remember the finer detail at this stage anyway. It sometimes helps to write a script incorporating natural sounds from the company's environment. A phone ringing and a voice answering the name of the company can help the viewer feel a sense of welcome. This can then be overtaken by the main voice-over with some practical information about the company and its purpose. The recordings of such planned action scenes can use employees or be voiced professionally by agreement. These would typically be made once initial agreement of the script is clarified.



Preparation Stage

contd.....

It often helps to establish the history of the company early on in either photos or voice-over and this also helps give the listener an assurance that they are starting from a safe place. Establish the main message of the CD-ROM early on, even if only briefly. This will stop the listener/viewer being distracted by second guessing the purpose of the disc. It pays off to write a few scripts in slightly differing styles to see what is likely to work. I can advise on style for voice-over as we produce a number of different proofs to get a feel of how the product can shape. It is amazing how subtle changes of graphics and audio can totally change the feel of a presentation and in my experience it is well worth exploring this during both the writing and early proofing of the material.

If using graphics only, it pays to use short sentences on the screen at any one time. If you want the presentation to flow from beginning to end without intervention from the viewer then we have to take screen reading speed into account. Long and detailed text is more suited to static pages where the viewer can take things in at their own pace using scrollable text rather than clicking across many different pages to get at the information. Clicks are fine, but if the click ratio is higher than either the visual stimulation or information gathered then people sometimes lose focus and switch off.

Proofs and Progress

The process of putting a CD-ROM together is both a practical and creative endeavour. Since the client cannot be sitting in front of my screen for the duration of the project I offer the service of providing proofs at all stages of development. This ensures that the design is shaping transparently through these stages using both the input of the client and the added advice of the designer. Not unlike a film, a CD-ROM starts on paper and develops through its stages to disc. Regular proofing and viewing of its progress helps unite the vision of the client and designer.

Graphics, Logos and Photos

The types of graphics and photos will vary depending whether a voiced presentation is used and the number can also vary depending on the nature of the business. For a presentation lasting approx. 2 minutes around 40 graphics/photos are needed. Graphics can be anything from stylized text and logos to photos treated with differing tints and cropping. It is possible also to use different versions of the same photo by using alternative cropping and tints and typefaces overlaid in differing ways.

We can approach the project in a number of ways as far as the design of the graphics and photos are concerned:

1. The client can map out which photos and graphics appear in what size, order and cropping.

or

2. The designer can work a number of designs from scratch using the supplied graphics files until a final design is agreed with the client.

I am happy to work either way or a combination of both.



Preparation Stage

contd.....

The sizing and cropping of graphics or photos is done by me for the project. It is best to provide graphics/photos in a neutral state. This then ensures that I have greater control of colour matching throughout the project particularly where a tinted photo needs to match a typeface or background colour on screen.

Photos should be provided in jpeg format and on disc. Logos and other graphics are acceptable in many formats though .png , .jpeg or .gif are preferred. In certain cases I can also digitally photograph for the client if not enough photos are available at the company. This service is available at an added cost. An alternative is for the client to use a photo library service. If needed I can recommend some.

On-screen Text

Text, whether for static pages or for headings in presentations should be provided either in Word format or as part of an e-mail. If there are any preferences for particular typefaces these should be specified at the outset of the project. Changes can be made further into the project, but it usually helps matters if the fonts are in order early on, as the fonts used affect sizing and positioning of other graphics and photos.

Main Menu & Static Pages

Once the main presentation has played through, the viewer then automatically lands on a main menu page. This is designed highlighting the companys logo and main message and uses graphical buttons, not unlike those found on a web site. Buttons can be designed in almost any style with changing graphics when the viewer places the mouse cursor over them while exploring the page. The main menu can be designed such that the viewer comes back to it automatically after each static page or pages visited. It can also be designed such that a viewer also gets a sub menu on each page visited allowing quicker navigation between sections. The main menu page can also be designed to give a short piece of text about each section.

A CD-ROM can also use a short transition sequence in graphics or audio as each static page or section opens. This makes the experience much richer than a web site where the page changes are straight cuts. However, one has to be careful not to over use certain effects of page or section changes. If these are repeated too often they can become tiresome. These transitions can be as simple as having certain graphics fade in or slide on to the page or even zoom in from a distance. The design of these aspects are crucial to the overall feel of the CD-ROM, just as for example, the design of the buttons and page colours inform the overall design and reflect the company style. The design of buttons and page layout and colours is discussed at an early stage of proofing as later changes in these takes up much design time.

Another form of transition is to use an extra page as a transition so that the viewer is taken through a graphic and short voice over or sound effect and then to a page that mostly contains text. Pages can be designed with small amounts of text, using forward buttons to take the viewer on to the next page. They can also be designed using scrollable text. Sometimes a combination of these methods works to great effect, as it both keeps the pages alive graphically and also uses sections of dense text which can be scrolled and read at leisure.



Preparation Stage

contd.....

Finally

Hopefully these notes will prove useful in preparing for the first stage of a CD-ROM project. Every project is very different in nature and so the types of questions asked are often very unique to the project in hand. If the project you are planning raises questions not covered in these notes please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss. I am available for these questions and discussions before and particularly during the duration of a project. As I say every one is different and thus needs very individual attention.

Contact

E-Mail: info@pete-townsend.com

Web: www.pete-townsend.com