A Multimedia Storyboard Tool

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Abstract: Up to now storyboards for multimedia learning environments consist mostly of copyed templates filled in by hand. The poster presents a software tool to generate storyboards using MS Powerpoint. Advantages of the tool are: ease of use, prototype-like presentation, inclusion of a database for the assets, revisability and recording of revisions.

A common way of communicating the design of an e-learning site to clients and programmers is through the use of storyboards. Although storyboards are used by people with (for the most part) a high level of computer literacy, there are almost no computer-based tools available. Typically, a design and development team decides for a photocopied template representing place for a sketch of the screen design and slots for information such as the name of the program, number of the screen, author, date, and directions for color, links, interaction, audio and video files to be integrated, etc. (e.g. Alessi & Trollip, 2001: p. 514 f.). These templates are normally filled in by hand.

The disadvantages of this procedure are obvious. Templates filled in by hand often require additional explanation for clients and other target groups, and cannot be easily presented to a group of people, e.g. using a beamer. Pictures, videos, and other assets cannot be integrated, and must be presented separately. Thus, there is an obvious demand for a computer-based tool for creating multimedia storyboards, similar to the well-proven tools for film scripts. Important criteria for the development of such a tool include:

Figure 1: Mask to assess information
- ease of use
- possibility of presenting the storyboard both digitally and on paper (printout)
- prototype-like presentation
- inclusion of a database for the assets
- revisability
- recording of revisions (date, time)

Instead of programming new software, we discovered some of the features already realized in a common software product, Microsoft’s PowerPoint. We therefore decided to use the features already available and supplement them by programming an add-in using VBA for PowerPoint. The main idea is to use the PowerPoint screens for sketching the web pages, and the notes fields to assess and represent all information and directions for the programmers.

To assess this information, we programmed a mask to be filled in for every slide (Figure 1). The content of these masks is automatically copied into the notes field. In this way, any printout of the slides with the notes fields represents one page of a storyboard, consisting of the screen on the upper half of the page and the necessary information below (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Printout of a page of the storyboard (A4 format)](image)

Furthermore, we recommend the use of the yellow comment fields in the screen sketch. They are especially useful for conveying directions concerning the color of objects, branching information, etc.

The storyboard tool has been in use for several months now, in the context of two projects involving the development of multimedia learning environments for higher education in the fields of communication studies, electrical engineering, and medical informatics.

**References**