

Getting Started With QuickTime Digital Storytelling

Virginia Macintosh Users Group

<http://www.vmug.org>

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Phil Shapiro

pshapiro@his.com

<http://mytvstation.blogspot.com>

pshapiro101 on dotmac.info

All human beings yearn to tell stories. Either you yourself have stories you want to tell, or you know people who have stories to tell. This presentation will help you tell those stories in digital form using low-cost and no-cost software tools. This presentation will show how to use QuickTime Pro, AppleWorks, Audacity, PowerPoint and Keynote for digital storytelling. If you have questions about any of this, you can send an email to the VMUG Discuss email list (discuss@vmug.org) or an email to me directly. (Kindly include the word VMUG in your email subject line so I give the message high priority.) One of the advantages of doing digital storytelling with QuickTime Pro is that you can upload your stories to the web and people with dial-up will be able to access them. No cost dialup (the first 10 hours are no-cost) is available from <http://www.access4all.com>

Brief QuickTime History and Background

The first version of QuickTime came out in 1991, at the same times as Mac OS 7. Each year QuickTime has gotten better and better. QuickTime 7 is due out in a few months, in early 2005. The basic version of QuickTime is free for Macintosh and Windows. (A version for Linux may be coming out sometime.) For \$30 you can purchase from Apple a registration key to unlock the capabilities of QuickTime Pro. You enter this registration key into the QuickTime Control Panel (System Preference.) The next time you start the QuickTime Player, the capabilities of QuickTime Pro will be visible on the menus. Most of the capabilities of QuickTime Pro can be found on the File menu of the QuickTime Player. QuickTime Pro is a useful tool for people who create QuickTime files. Some of the capabilities of iMovie overlap with QuickTime Pro. QuickTime Pro runs fine on older Macs that are not able to use iMovie.

If you're thinking of buying a registration key for QuickTime, you might want to wait until QuickTime 7 comes out in early 2005. If you spend \$30 buying a registration key for QuickTime 6 now, Apple will ask you spend another \$30 to purchase a registration key for QuickTime 7. I consider QuickTime Pro an excellent value for the money.

In today's presentation we'll be learning how to "marry" a graphics created in the AppleWorks draw program with an audio that has been recorded in Audacity, a no-cost software program for Mac OS X. <http://audacity.sourceforge.net> There is a version of Audacity for Mac OS 9, but I prefer using the older software named Sound Effects on older Macs. SoundEffects works well on any Mac OS 7, 8, and 9 computer.

To go beyond this presentation, I recommended various books on QuickTime Pro that you can find in public libraries and sold on the web. (Search Google for QuickTime Pro.) A new book about QuickTime Pro available as a \$12 purchase (as a PDF download) is available at <http://dotmac.info/pages/17590> I haven't seen this book yet, but the author, Kirk Krueger, is very, very talented. This book's intended audience is probably intermediate to advanced Mac users.

For today's QuickTime Pro project we'll be starting with AppleWorks draw module, which is generally quite easy to use. AppleWorks ships for free with all iBook and iMac computers. PowerBook and PowerMac users can purchase AppleWorks 6 new from Apple for \$79. You can also find AppleWorks 6 sold as an OEM CD disk (without the box) for less than \$20. Search Google for AppleWorks 6 OEM. (OEM = original equipment manufacturer.)

Older versions of AppleWorks (ClarisWorks 3, 4 and 5) work as well for the drawing part of the digital storytelling we'll be doing. The first thing we want to do is to choose the rectangle tool and draw a rectangle (backdrop) for our digital storytelling project. After drawing the rectangle, you might choose to remove the surrounding border line. (Choose "No Border") Then choose a fill color. Usually a pale fill color is recommended as a background. (Light yellow, light blue, light brown all make attractive backgrounds.)

You can then import your digital or scanned photos (or other graphics) and place these objects on your background. Use the the text tool to create a text field to the side (or underneath) your objects. Choose a text color that contrasts well with your background. (Usually a dark color, but not always. White is sometimes an appropriate text color.)

The next step is to save your graphics in both AppleWorks format and as a PICT file. The AppleWorks format file can be later edited and resaved. The PICT format file (available as a choice from the drop down Save As menu) will let you import this graphics into QuickTime Pro. To import the graphics into QuickTime Pro, start the QuickTime Player. Then choose Import from the File menu. You will then end up with a QuickTime file with a single graphics and a duration of zero seconds. Now is the fun audio narration part of the storytelling. There are several audio recording/editing programs for Macs that are free or no-cost. I'll be showing Audacity today. I also like Sound Studio. Amadeus is popular. For older Macs, Sound Effects works well. You can download Audacity from <http://audacity.sourceforge.com>

How to Record Your Audio Narration

Every iBook, iMac and eMac has a built-in microphone you can use for recording narration. Recent PowerBooks (from 2000?) also have microphones built-in. If you own a Power Mac, you will need to use an external microphone. Most often people use an external microphone with an iMic USB microphone adapter. If you use an external microphone, you will have to tell your Sound Control Panel (System Preference) to use it. If you have a Mac that is from 1992 to 1997, you'll need to use an Apple PlainTalk microphone. It's difficult to find places to purchase these today, but you can likely borrow one from a user group member. Every Mac shipped between 1992 and 1997 had a Plaintalk microphone bundled in with it.

Audacity is a program with many features, but the key features we want to use are to record audio and then edit out the uhms, ahhs and pauses. We might also want to use Audacity to increase the tempo of the audio narration to make it more lively. Audacity is able to do this without increasing the pitch. Choose Select All from the Edit menu before doing this transformation. Then choose Change Tempo in the Effects menu and move the slider over to the right a bit. A slight increase in tempo (about 10 percent) is all that is needed.

If you increase tempo too much, the increase becomes too noticeable. The tempo of your narration should be fairly crisp to start with. (i.e. Not too slow/sluggish.) Audacity lets you have more than one audio track, so presumably you can have a narration with a softer background music also playing. If I wanted to mix narration with music, I think I'd use iMovie 3 or iMovie 4, which gives people good control over the volume level of 2 audio tracks.

Don't forget to switch off your landline phones and cell phones when you're doing audio narration. It can be frustrating to have 3 or 4 minutes of excellent narration interrupted with a phone ringing sound. You can always record your narration in short segments and then import each segment one after the other into your digital storytelling. Keep in mind that your voice should sound pretty much the same in the various segments. It should not sound as if you recorded the narration at different times. Try to make your voice intonation engaging. Listen careful to the evening news on television (or radio) to learn voice intonation skills.

When you are happy with the audio narration part of your digital storytelling, export your narration to a WAV file. WAV is an uncompressed audio format that is similar to the AIFF (audio interchange file format) that is also uncompressed. Each minute of your audio will be about 4 megabytes in uncompressed, mono audio format. You are now ready to compress your audio using QuickTime Pro.

Start QuickTime Player and choose New from the File menu. Then choose Import from the File menu to import your audio file. Press the spacebar to play your audio file just to double check it sounds as good as you want it to sound. To compress your audio file, choose Export from the File menu. You want to Export "from a QuickTime file to a QuickTime file." Click on the Options button. One of the best audio compression choices is QDesign Music. Choose QDesign Music from the drop down menu. The click on Options. On the Options drop down menu you can choose how much you want your audio compressed. I recommend either 32 or 40 kbps. That compression yields audio that is very intelligible, with a relatively small file size.

After you have exported your WAV file you will now have created a QuickTime file with compressed audio. You are now ready to "marry" the graphics to the audio using QuickTime Pro. You will need to have both QuickTimes loaded on your screen at the same time. Click into the graphics QuickTime to select it. Then choose Select All from the Edit menu. Click over to the compressed audio file. Then choose Select All from the Edit menu. You're one step away from marrying the graphics to the audio.

The last (and magical) step is to choose Add Scaled from the Edit menu of the compressed audio QuickTime. Your graphics will now pop into the compressed audio QuickTime -- with the same duration as the audio. Press the spacebar to enjoy and appreciate your new creation. Choose Save As from the File menu to save your new digital storytelling QuickTime. Click into the radio button, "Make Movie Self-Contained." This is a vital step. Then click on Save.

Sharing Your QuickTime With Others

There are several ways of sharing your QuickTime storytelling with others. The most common way of doing so is by uploading the QuickTime file to some web space and then sending a link to that web space in an email to people you think might want to see it. People receiving your email will be able to double click on the link and their web browser should start downloading and playing the QuickTime. (They might need to install the latest version of QuickTime, available from <http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/>)

Almost every Internet Service Provider (ISP) gives you web space to upload files to. This space is usually about 10 to 20 megabytes. While this is not a lot of space for uploading QuickTime videos, it is a lot of space for digital stories. The programs people use to upload QuickTimes to the web include Fetch, Interarchy and the built-in file transfer capabilities at the bottom of the Connect menu in Mac OS X. America Online subscribers can upload files to the web space for each screen name. You do so by using the keyword "ftp," and then following the directions you see on the screen. Last I heard AOL gives 2 megabytes of webserver space per screen name. Once you upload your QuickTime files, people will be able to view them at <http://members.aol.com/yourscreenname/quicktimefilename.mov>

Another good choice is Apple's .Mac (dotmac) service, which costs \$99/year from Apple. This service gives 250 megabytes of webserver space. For an extra \$50/year you can boost your webserver space to 1 gigabyte. You can purchase a dotmac account less expensively from several mail-order vendors. Amazon.com and Buy.com usually sell dotmac accounts for \$80 (or less.) You can use one of these purchases to renew your dotmac.

If you have a dotmac account and you create something that would be interesting for the public to view, you can list it as a web page on a no-cost service named dotmac.info. (<http://dotmac.info>.) As of September, 2004, dotmac.info has about 15,000 members. You can view some interesting QuickTimes (and other dotmac sites) at dotmac.info. Every item listed on dotmac.info can be commented upon. Some items can be rated. (The person who lists the item choose whether they want it to be rated.)

A third way of sharing your digital storytelling is to set up your own webserver at your house. People sometimes do this using an older Mac (i.e. a Mac from a few years back -- not a very old Mac.) The webserver needs to have an Ethernet port. You need to have a "static ip" address from your ISP to have a webserver. For example, my DSL provider, Speakeasy.net, provides me with 4 static IP addresses for an extra \$10/month.

What are the advantages of having your own webserver? You're more in control of your own files. If you need more webserver space, you just buy a bigger hard drive. The disadvantage of having your own webserver is that your upstream bandwidth is probably less than the upstream bandwidth at a web hosting company. So people viewing your files might be waiting longer to see them as they transfer to their browser.

More Advanced Stuff

Say you'd like to try something a little more snazzy in your digital storytelling. How about adding a QuickTime movie to a still graphics (such as a background photo.) Yes, it's possible to do that in QuickTime Pro. As an example, see the "Green Honda Civic" QuickTime I listed on dotmac.info.

Creating one of these is similar in some ways to the above steps. You copy and paste the QuickTime movie into the QuickTime of the still graphics. QuickTime Pro allows you to position the QuickTime anywhere on top of the still graphics. The steps for doing that are more involved than can be covered in this digital storytelling presentation, but if you search Google for the phrase "quicktime skins," you reach a web page where Apple explains how to do these kinds of things.

Storytelling is a very human endeavor. The process of telling stories and listening to them reminds us of the common bonds that all human beings have to one another. In a world being pulled apart, we need much more storytelling to connect to connect us to each other. Do you have a story to tell? Do you know someone with a story to tell? Tell your stories. Help them tell your stories. You'll think of yourself in a different way when you do.

VMUG members who create digital stories that they'd like to share on the web can send me the QuickTimes using the no-cost service called <http://yousendit.com> (Thanks, Gini Moore, for telling VMUG members about this useful service.) As a volunteer, I will host your digital stories on a webserver I've set up at my home.

Please do not send me the QuickTime directly as a file attachment. That will clog my email box, preventing me from receiving other emails. My email address is pshapiro@his.com My home phone is 703-685-1188. I prefer to be reached by email, but also enjoy hearing from VMUG members by phone.

Surprise me with the stories you make. Teach me something new. Create a more emotionally connected world.

Storytelling Quotations

Where there is storytelling there are folks who crave to speak and learn. - Brenda Laurel

Every fine story must leave in the mind of the sensitive reader an intangible residuum of pleasure, a cadence, a quality of voice that is exclusively the writer's own, individual, unique. ~ Willa Catha

Stories are medicine. They have such power; they do not require that we do, be, act anything — we need only listen. ~ Clarissa Pinkola Estes

When we let our stories flow, we can astonish and renew each other. Kimberly Ridley

We interpret the world through stories... Everybody makes in their own way sense of things, but if you have stories it helps. ~ Paula Rego

The one story worth telling is the one that strikes most nearly to the heart. For each person, that story will be different, for each heart is like a harp with its own distinct tuning. - Caitlin Matthews

Stories differ from advice in that once you get them, they become a fabric of your whole soul. That is why they heal you. --Alice Walker

“If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.” —Barry Lopez

The universe is made of stories, not atoms. Muriel Rukeyser, poet

The longer we listen to one another - with real attention - the more commonality we will find in all our lives. That is, if we are careful to exchange with one another life stories and not simply opinions. Barbara Demin

Those who tell the stories rule society. - Plato

Recommended Book and other Resources:

QuickTime 6 for Macintosh and Windows: Visual QuickStart Guide, by Judith Stern, Robert Lettieri

For youth digital storytelling, the new DVD titled “Brainglow: Ideas for Digital Storytelling” looks interesting. I haven’t seen the contents of this DVD, but the creators of this DVD usually produce high quality learning materials. Created by the Bay Area Video Coalition.
<http://www.bavc.org>

Meetings of the Washington Apple Pi iLife group (formerly the iMovie group) sometimes cover digital storytelling topics. These meetings alternate between Micro Center, in Fairfax, and Mac Business Solutions, in Gaithersburg. Check the WAP calendar for dates of meetings. I’m one of the leaders of this special interest group (SIG). <http://www.wap.org/imovie/> This group also has an active email list where people help each other and share information. It’s important to support Mac user groups by getting involved, joining as a member and spreading the word. Without a support network, we become islands.