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# DIG Presentation - Pro Show Producer

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These notes recap my presentation at the November 2007 DIG meeting on the Pro Show Producer software for creating photo slideshows.

## 1. Introduction

There are several software packages on the market that assist in preparing slideshows containing digital photo images. Windows Media Viewer and Photoshop include slideshow facilities that are appropriate for an interactive audience presentation where you want to control the pacing using a remote control device or the computer keyboard as you deliver the presentation. PowerPoint offers the same kind of presentation control but adds features for visual enhancement and also adds some automation capability. PowerPoint is optimized for business graphics - text, spreadsheets, and diagrams - but it also works with photos as we saw in the George Lepp presentation last year. Several of us have been using Pro Show Gold as a presentation tool that offers a robust set of visual enhancements and automation features. The PSA show that Lou Romain presented a few months ago was created with Pro Show Gold, and Cindy Marple's marvelous Antarctica travel show was created with Pro Show Gold. I recently stepped up a notch to the top of the Pro Show product line offered by Photodex called Pro Show Producer.

Producer offers a very rich set of slideshow enhancement and automation features. Compared to Gold it provides additional degrees of control, more refinements to the visual appearance of the images, and it creates a fully automated, multi-media, stand-alone slideshow. This becomes important if you have to repeat the slideshow many times or want it to run in a hands-off unattended situation.

Further, Producer can transform the output into 10 different forms such as a standalone executable file for use on a personal computer and a video encoded file for use with a DVD player and TV screen.

However, all this wonderfulness makes the software more expensive and more complex, requires a longer learning curve to reach proficiency, and takes more work to produce a show. So if your objective is a straight forward, manually paced slideshow this is the wrong tool. If you want a tool that will show off your photography in a fully automated richly ornamented way, Producer is a good choice.

Producer is list priced at \$250 (there are discount options) and is aimed at "professionals" for use in corporate, education, advertising, and real estate situations. Gold is priced at \$70 and is aimed at "enthusiasts". Photodex has been in the business for 20 years, so this is not a fly by night operation ([www.Photodex.com](http://www.Photodex.com)). This is the third major release of this software so it is a mature product. The user interface makes use of many menus, tool bars, and complicated dialog boxes - richly featured graphics software requires a complex interface. For an extra fee they will send you a hard copy user manual, which is a good starting point and better than just reading Help files, but as with most complex software there is no substitute for experience - you learn by trial and error with considerable swearing.

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## **2. Features**

### **2.1 Sequence**

Producer provides great flexibility in establishing the sequence and timing of a slideshow. Images to be used as slides are placed in a source folder on your hard drive and Producer displays those images on its work area screen. The slide sequence is established by dragging those photo images to a slide timeline. Note, the image files are not moved or copied, they are linked to the slideshow. The slide sequence can be easily changed as you develop the show. The slide durations can be globally set and individually adjusted - slide by slide. Slide to slide transitions can also be globally set to a selected transition type and duration, but can also be individually adjusted - slide by slide. Producer remembers the sequence without requiring you to rename or number the slides.

### **2.2 Audio**

Producer supports two forms of audio - voice narration and background music. Voice narration is recorded with a microphone attached to your computer using a dialog box that allows you to playback the sound for review and to name the audio file. Each slide is associated with a separate audio file. You can adjust the start of the audio in relation to the start of the slide and can set slide durations so a single narration segment can cover several slides. As another option, Producer can automatically adjust slide duration to fit the duration of the narration.

Background music can use any previously recorded audio file or can be directly imported from a CD to the slideshow soundtrack file, which is separate from the narration audio files. There is a single soundtrack for the show but it can contain multiple music tracks that play in sequence, with control over the fade out and fade in. The waveforms for the music and voice narration are visible on screen in relation to the slide sequence and there is a way to sync slides to the music. If you wish, Producer can adjust slide durations so that the slideshow ends as the music track finishes. A nice feature is the ability to automatically suppress the music volume when the voice narration comes on.

### **2.3 Captions**

Producer provides flexibility in creating slide captions - you choose font, type size, style, and page position individually for each slide.

### **2.4 Motion effects**

Producer offers a full array of the so called “Ken Burns” motion effects. You can pan the contents in any direction while the slide is visible, including starting off screen and flying in. You can zoom the size - smaller or larger - faster or slower. You can rotate in any amount at any speed. You can zoom the opacity to make the slide fade in or out. And several effects can be running concurrently. And you can also apply fancy motion effects to the caption text.

### **2.5 Layers**

A unique and useful capability is Layers. Producer supports multiple image layers on the same slide with independent timing and motion on each layer. This supports the George Lepp effect of multiple image “banners” slowly gliding across the screen in different directions.

### **2.6 Detailed timing control**

Producer uses a unique mechanism called a Keyframe to enable very refined automated control of the behavior of an individual slide. At the meeting I demonstrated this control to implement the

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following show introduction sequence: Background music plays for 10 seconds with nothing visible on screen; Title Slide photo appears on screen with a 2 second fade in; after 2 seconds, the Title text appears on screen with a 2 second fade in; voice narration begins 5 seconds later; 2 seconds after the narration is complete the image and caption fade out and the transition to a second slide begins. And when the slide contains several layers, separate timing can be applied to each layer.

## **2.7 Output formats**

Once you have finished and polished the slideshow with the optimum sequence, pacing, music, narration and special effects, Producer allows you to transform the result into many different formats. The most useful is a free-standing executable file that can be run on your own (Windows) computer with just a single click or burned onto a CD that can be executed on another computer that does not have the Producer application installed. Producer will also perform the MPEG encoding to burn a DVD disc that can be played on a DVD player for display on a TV screen. Producer has a nice feature for this purpose - it will resize the output to fit in a “safe zone” that prevents the clipping that often occurs on a TV display.

## **3. Conclusion**

The danger is that a slideshow with all this fancy stuff will detract attention from the photographs that we consider the reason for the slideshow in the first place. And with this many degrees of freedom you can spend more time than even retired folks have available to construct a slick professional presentation. Most of us don't have occasion to use all that capability, but it sure is fun to play with.