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PowerPoint 2002 features many new animation effects

I feel like a kid with a new toy. Ever since my copy of PowerPoint 2002 arrived, I have been playing with the program nonstop. Microsoft made big strides with this new version, adding password protection, multiple masters, image rotation, transparency fills and greatly improved animation tools.

After waiting years for improvements to PowerPoint's animation capabilities, users will find this version finally delivers. For me, the best way to learn the ins and outs of new software is to play around with it. So I've been doing precisely that with the new animation facets, drawing random shapes, adding text and logos, then simply trying all the different effects.

I quickly went overboard on my slides but gained a good sense of the new features and what they can do to improve my future presentations.

Getting started

Controlling the animation function in PowerPoint 2002, fortunately, involves commands that are very

similar to those in the past version. As always, when you've created an object, simply right-click on it, select CUSTOM ANIMATION and you're ready to begin. This will open a task pane where you can select, edit and apply animation effects. With an object selected, click on ADD EFFECT at the top of the task pane and the effects will be grouped into four categories: entrance, emphasis, exit and motion paths (see Figure 1).

In all, you can choose from 52 entrance effects when animating an object or text onto the slide. The emphasis effects are used with objects in place, and exit effects are applied to objects as they leave the slide. Each set of effects is further divided into four animation schemes: basic, subtle, moderate and exciting. After you have chosen the effects, you can preview a slide's entire animation by using the play button at the bottom of the task pane.

Click through any of the schemes — subtle, moderate, exciting — and you'll see a real-time preview of that scheme applied to the current slide.

Although you probably will not need all the different schemes, some have very specific uses and all the custom animation is already done for you. As with all animation effects, I would recommend restraint. Too many on a slide can be hard on an audience's eyes.

Paths to more motion

The motion path is my favorite new animation feature. The program's 64 motion paths are divided into three categories: basic, lines and curves,

and special. For path control, you have available editing points with scaling and stretching to create the effect you want. The green arrow indicates the start position and the red arrow line indicates the end position (see Figure 2). To move the entire path, drag the green arrow. Rotate using the green circle handle at the top of the path and any other handle to scale or stretch the path. To scale proportionately, hold down the shift key and drag a corner handle.

If you don't want to start with one of the predefined motion paths, you can draw your own custom path using the line, curve, freeform or scribble tools. Use these in the same way as you do the line tools from the AUTOSHAPES menu. After drawing your custom path, right-click on the path and select EDIT POINTS (see Figure 3). For further editing features, right-click on each point and you will get additional options for the path, including smooth, straight and corner points.

When you are satisfied with the shape of the motion path, you can attach it to any object by clicking the small arrow for the drop-down menu in the custom-animation task pane. From here, select EFFECT OPTIONS. Notice the option to lock or unlock a path. You also have other options within this menu, including smooth start, smooth end and autoreverse. Sounds and after-animation enhancements are also located here.

Timing and triggers

Setting the timing of animation effects has become much more precise in PowerPoint 2002. For example, you can start an animation ON CLICK, WITH PREVIOUS (for multiple animations at once) or AFTER PREVIOUS. You also have five

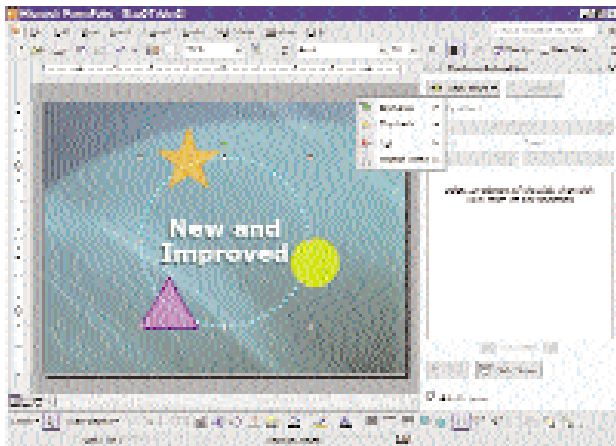


FIGURE 1: The ADD EFFECT button provides all the transitions available, grouped by type of path and the general mood of the effect.



speeds to choose from on the main custom-animation task pane, and if you need to fine-tune your timing even further, you can edit the advanced timeline. To do this, open the menu by clicking on the arrow next to the animation to view the drop-down menu. Select **SHOW ADVANCED TIMELINE** and some small blue boxes will appear next to each animation. These can be stretched or shrunk to change the start and end times (see Figure 4).

If you're looking for interactivity, check out the new trigger function. On the drop-down menu next to each animation, you can select **TIMING** and you will see the trigger button. The trigger button allows an effect to start when you click the mouse on any object on the slide.

Slide transitions

Besides animation, slide transitions have been improved as well. Located in the task pane, you have quick access to the speed, sound and advance slide options. The most highly anticipated transition has got to be fade smoothly, and it truly does a nice fade. Also, the transition preview is now in real time and on the actual slide, not in a thumbnail-size window.

The caveats

Although I am anxious to begin applying these new animation techniques to a presentation, the new software version does present some limitations, particularly when it comes to sharing presentations you create in PowerPoint 2002. The problem is that some of the animation effects are not supported in the PowerPoint viewer. And Microsoft has decided not to upgrade the PowerPoint viewer.

To get around this problem, Microsoft recommends publishing your presentation as an HTML file and using Internet Explorer as the viewer. I don't recommend this option, however. I saved a few

animated slides to HTML and wasn't satisfied with the quality.

Another problematic area is Microsoft's decision to continue using Windows Multimedia Control Interface (MCI) for playback of multimedia files within PowerPoint. The MCI is not as rich in potential as Windows Media Player and will continue to limit presenters who like to work with video and audio.

Web resource

If you are looking for more detailed information on PowerPoint 2002, check out the Web site www.indezine.com. There you will find a detailed article by Geetesh Bajaj (www.indezine.com/products/powerpoint/ppxp.html) that outlines the 20 most notable features added to PowerPoint 2002, along with graphics showing where each new function can be found.

This site is chock full of information, including PowerPoint tips, explanations of features and user feedback and information on other presentation programs. The site is a great resource, especially as you begin to delve deeper into PowerPoint 2002 and its features.

Regardless of some of the flaws, PowerPoint 2002's animation effects are just what I've been waiting for. With so many options, I find it's easy for me to overdo the animation effects. But in the end, it's great to have these tools at hand for when I really need them. ■

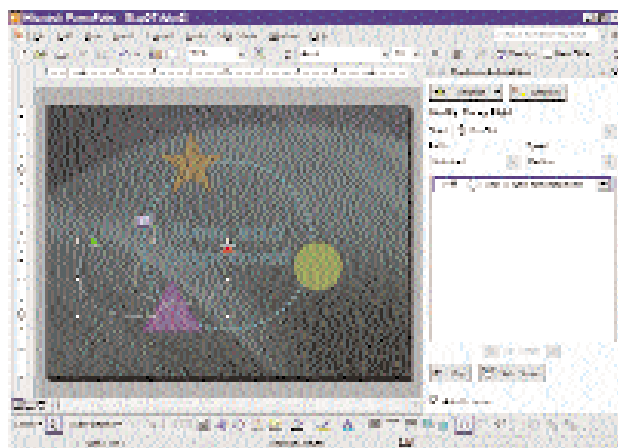


FIGURE 2: When you work with the motion paths, the green arrow (think "go") indicates the start position, while the red arrow line (think "stop") indicates the end position.

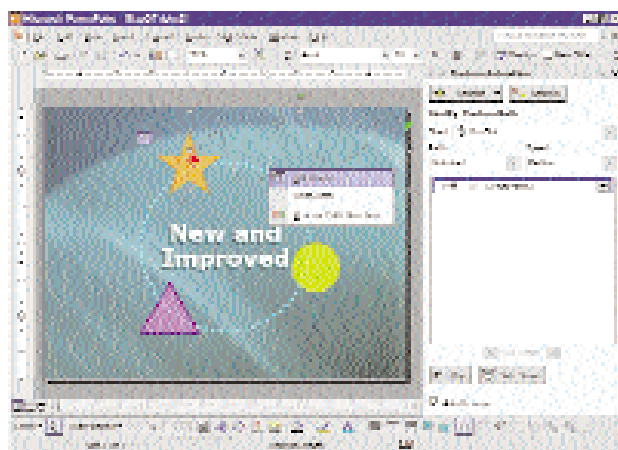


FIGURE 3: Find the effect options for motion paths by clicking on a small arrow for the drop-down menu in the custom-animation task pane.

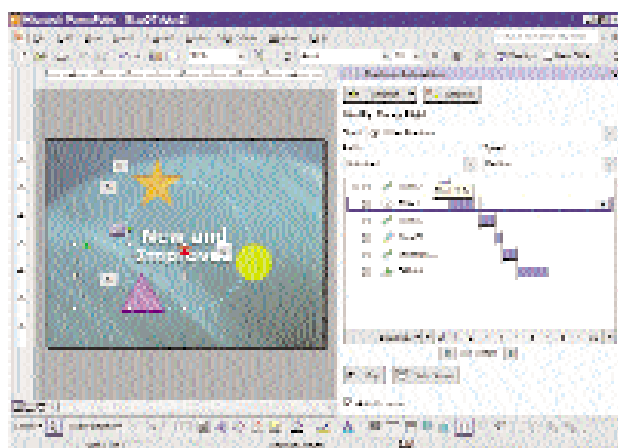


FIGURE 4: Within the advanced timeline menu, presentation designers can fine-tune start and stop times by adjusting the small blue boxes next to each animation.