TechMatters: Beyond Basic Presentations: Using Swipe to Engage and Interact With Your Audience, Wherever They Might Be

Krista Graham, Georgia State University

As instruction librarians, we "present" to a variety of audiences (e.g., students, learners, colleagues) in a variety of venues (e.g., classrooms, labs, conference settings) on a regular basis. As we do so, we frequently choose to utilize presentation tools such as PowerPoint, KeyNote, and Prezi to add a visual element for the audience and hold their interest. As powerful and feature-rich as these applications can be, their features, on their own, only enable in-person sessions and one-way communication with the audience. Fortunately, a new breed of presentation tools specifically designed to reach an audience, regardless of their physical presence, and facilitate their participation and engagement have started to appear online. In this article, we'll take a closer look at one of them.

Swipe (https://www.swipe.to/), from a European tech company, is a web-based application that allows you to create presentations, and share them directly with your audience on their device of choice. As long as an audience member has an active internet connection, you can control the display of content regardless of whether or not they are in the same room as you. In addition, Swipe allows presenters to include interactive polls and view the results in real time.

Getting Started

Swipe has multiple pricing tiers. The standard version is free and allows for an unlimited number of presentation decks, unlimited collaborators, private decks, and access to basic statistics. The $20/month "Pro" plan and $50/month "Business" plan provide additional security features (e.g., password protection), more advanced analytics options and different levels of technical support. An educational discount is available. Users can create a free account by simply providing their name, a valid email address, and a password.

Creating Presentations

Once logged in, if you are ready to create a new presentation deck, press the prominent green "+" button.

This will take you to an empty template where you can give your new presentation a name. Then, you can begin adding slides either by uploading images or PDFs, providing links to videos on YouTube or Vimeo, or by using the built-in markdown editor to create basic text-based slides.

Using Swipe's built-in editing features, it is possible to design and create a new presentation deck from scratch directly within the application. Alternatively, you may choose to upload slides that you previously created using other applications such as PowerPoint or Keynote. Although Swipe does support direct upload of Keynote files (.key), the PowerPoint file format (.ppt) is not yet supported. Fortunately, you can work around this limitation by saving your PowerPoint as a PDF file, and then uploading to Swipe. When you do so, each "page" in the PDF will import as a separate slide just as you would expect. Keep in mind, however, that individual presentation slides imported in this manner cannot be edited in Swipe.

Presenting

Although you can create modern, clean-looking presentation decks using the Swipe application, that is not its primary strength. Rather, the feature that sets it apart from traditional presentation tools is its ability to allow the audience to view the presentation directly on a personal device of choice (e.g., a laptop, tablet, or smartphone) from any internet-connected location in the world.

When first created, each presentation deck is private by default. In order to allow others to view your presentation slides, you need to first change the privacy setting to "Public" and then share the "short link" for the presentation (see Figure 1) with your audience. Using the web browser of their choice, audience members will then be able to view and navigate through your presentation slides where they can be edited and/or shared in all the standard ways.

Figure 1: Control privacy and sharing options using the sideboard for your Swipe presentation

Swipe also provides the presenter with the option to take control of the end users' viewing experience, so that everyone watching a presentation sees the slides advance at the same time. To take control, enter "View and Present" mode via the orange button in the control dashboard (see Figure 1). Once in presentation mode, you will see a "Control live" button in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen (see Figure 2). Once you select this option, the slides on your audience members' screens will advance in sync with those on your device. You can even start, pause, and stop an embedded video for your audience using this feature.

Figure 2: Use the "control live" feature to advance presentation slides for your audience members on their devices

This is a powerful feature, as it allows a presenter to easily present, in real-time, a slide show to any size audience, regardless of location, without the need to license pricey web conferencing tools such as Adobe Connect or WebEx. By pairing Swipe visuals with an audio source, such as FreeConferenceCall.com, you can conduct a live, multi-person webcast for zero incremental dollars.

However, Swipe does not have the bells & whistles that web conferencing tools such as Adobe Connect have: for example, while you can conduct polls to get some audience feedback, there is no chat box, no "raise hands",

no white board, etc. Additionally, the "Control live" function is a bit limited in its level of control: in testing I conducted, while it quickly and seamless displayed the live presentation on each viewer's screen, the only viewers able to watch the included YouTube video when the presenter hit play were those on "traditional" devices (i.e., laptop or desktop); those on mobile devices (i.e., phone or tablet) had nothing happen. This is likely because Swipe couldn't force open a new browser tab or a native YouTube app on those mobile devices. Thus, you can either work around this, or only use this "Control live" feature when you are presenting a deck that just has regular, text or image based slides when your audience will be using mobile devices.

Interacting with Your Audience

Swipe allows you to embed polls directly into your presentations in order to query your audience and view the results in real time. To add a poll question to your slide deck, click in the "Add slide or upload file" search box while in Edit mode, and then select "Poll" from the drop down menu. You are then taken to a poll editing screen where you can enter your question and answer options. Currently, Swipe only offers the option for multiple choice questions with a maximum of four answer options.

Poll slides created in Swipe are interactive, so audience members viewing the presentation on their own devices can select and submit an answer to your question (see Figure 3). On the back end, you can then view the results to see how many people chose each option. Ideally, you would then use this information to inform your talk and engage with your audience.

Figure 3: Poll slides allow you to collect audience feedback during a presentation

Collaborating and Sharing

Swipe allows you to privately share your presentations with specific individuals via the collaboration feature in the sideboard (see Figure 4). To add a collaborator, you simply submit their email address and then select the level of access (view, present, edit) that you want them to have to your slide deck. By enabling this option, you can easily work with co-presenters or just share you content with colleagues without risk that your work will be edited without your permission. The only caveat with using this feature is that your collaborators must also have Swipe accounts in order to access your content.

Should you wish to share your presentation slides with a wider audience when you are not actively presenting it yourself, another option that Swipe provides is the ability to embed it into a web page or blog. To do so, simply navigate to the full slide deck view and then select "Embed code" from the "Manage Deck" menu. This will give you a code snippet that you can copy and paste into a web site. Remember, the presentation must be "public" if you want to make it viewable.

Conclusion

If you are looking for a simple tool that will allow you to allow you to add interactive elements to your presentations and allow your audience to view them easily online, then I recommend that you give Swipe a try. Do keep in mind that working with a markdown editor can be a little bit disorienting at first, but after the first few slides you are likely to get the hang of it fairly quickly. But remember, you can alternately just opt for doing all of your design work in a traditional presentation tool and importing your slides into Swipe. Either way, once you have your slide deck on the Swipe platform, you'll find that it's a snap to work with the other features to collaborate, share, and add interactive polls to your presentations.

Figure 4: Add collaborators and control their level of access to your presentation from the sideboard