THIS WEEK — DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUES

Repurposing PowerPoint: Authorware's New Converter

BY JOSEPH GANCI

Among its many new features, Macromedia® Authorware Version 7 introduced one that should be of particular interest to designers and project managers who find themselves sitting on top of a great deal of learning material in the form of PowerPoint files. Authorware's PowerPoint converter can help kickstart your e-Learning by bringing PowerPoint storyboards or rapid prototyping materials you may already have into Authorware, and then letting you change and build upon those converted files.

The converter is included in Authorware 7 and later. Some bugs in Version 7 were fixed in Versions 7.01 and 7.02. I highly recommend that you download the 7.02 update (free of charge) from Macromedia so that you don't have to deal with any potential bugs resident in the prior versions. See www.macromedia.com/support/authorware/download.html if you haven't already updated your version.

The converter has been tested most extensively with the latest versions of PowerPoint, but should work with earlier versions as well, at least back to PowerPoint 97.

PowerPoint? Say it isn't so!

Let's get one thing out of the way: I do not advocate the use of PowerPoint files as a delivery medium for excellent e-Learning. I'm sure some of you out there will swear up and down that you have imparted the wisdom of the ages to your personnel or customers through the best kick-butt PowerPoint presentation you brilliantly created in a moment of intense inspiration brought on by The

Microsoft PowerPoint has become a ubiquitous storyboarding and prototyping tool for e-Learning development. In addition, many projects seek to convert static slideware, developed to support instructors, into interactive e-Learning applications. In either case, designers hand off the PowerPoint files to developers who copy, paste, or rewrite the contents in a more robust authoring tool. Macromedia provides a built-in converter to move PowerPoint directly into Authorware, saving a step and saving time and money. Read this article to learn how to use this valuable feature of Authorware!

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Ultimate e-Learning Muses. That may be
so, but I haven't seen your presentation
nor have I seen any PowerPoint presenta-
tion yet that did much more than present
facts and knowledge points or that con-
veyed more than a very few aha! mo-
ments of understanding. Of course, it is
that understanding that is the goal of all
good e-Learning.

Without a doubt, over the years Power-
Point has become more powerful and it
is possible to build some limited interac-
tivity, navigation, and progress tracking,
but comparing PowerPoint's features to
what a product like Authorware or Flash
can do for you is a bit like comparing the
capabilities of a tricycle to those of a
Harley-Davidson VRSCB V-Rod.

On the other hand, those who are de-
signing e-Learning often employ Power-
Point to create their storyboards or use
PowerPoint when doing rapid prototyping.
These PowerPoint files are usually hand-
ed over to developers or programmers
who then copy and paste or rewrite the
contents of those storyboards in Author-
ware. This is silly; wouldn't it be much
better to save a step? Why not convert
those materials in an organized manner
and then build the proper interactivity,
navigation, and progress tracking on top
of the PowerPoint slides? It makes
sense to me!

What the converter can and can't do for you

PowerPoint and Authorware are two
very different products with different
aims. It should come as no surprise that
PowerPoint files sometimes will not con-
vert completely and perfectly to Author-
ware, much as translating Chinese to
English will result in a loss of nuance
and other difficulties when word mean-
ings don't quite match perfectly between
the languages.

For example, PowerPoint contains a
set of transitions that you can apply to

objects and slides just as Authorware does. However, most of the transitions in PowerPoint don't match those that Authorware offers. In this case, you can guide the converter so that it maps transitions to your liking. Other features in PowerPoint don't have a direct equivalent in Authorware, so they may not come across as expected.

If you take any PowerPoint file and convert it to Authorware, you can expect that about seventy to eighty percent of the features will come through. Not good enough? Consider this: if eighty percent of a PowerPoint file converts correctly, you've just cut five days of work down to one!

Once you come to understand which features convert directly from PowerPoint, you can create templates in PowerPoint that avoid unsupported features, making conversion to Authorware an easy exercise. This article should help.

What's going to happen?

This section is for the curious among you. You don't have to be too concerned with the details of the conversion but it's sometimes nice to know what's happening behind the scenes.

Converting a PowerPoint file to Authorware is a two-step process, though there is an option to combine these two steps into one.

Step 1 will create a folder in a location you choose and will name it the same as your PowerPoint file followed by **(Internal Media)**, such as:
`Ganci — Developing Great e-Learning (Internal Media)`

The folder will then contain a series of folders, one for each PowerPoint slide. The folders will be titled **slide** followed by the slide number:

> **slide0**
> **slide1**
> **slide2**
> **slide3**

Each of the above folders will contain the images and text from the respectively numbered PowerPoint slide. Note that the first folder, numbered **0**, will contain the text and images from your PowerPoint file's master slide.

In addition to the folder, the converter will create an XML file with the same name as your PowerPoint file. This XML

file contains all of the information needed to reconstruct the slides in Authorware.

Step 2 will import the XML file and all of the image and text files from these

folders and create an Authorware file containing a Framework icon and a Framework page for each PowerPoint slide converted. Voilà! The conversion is complete.
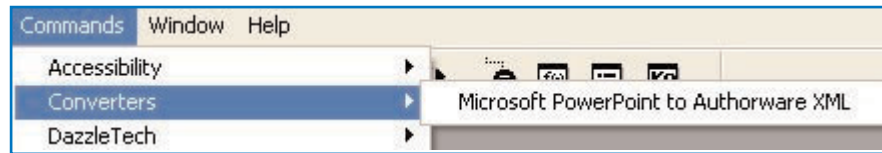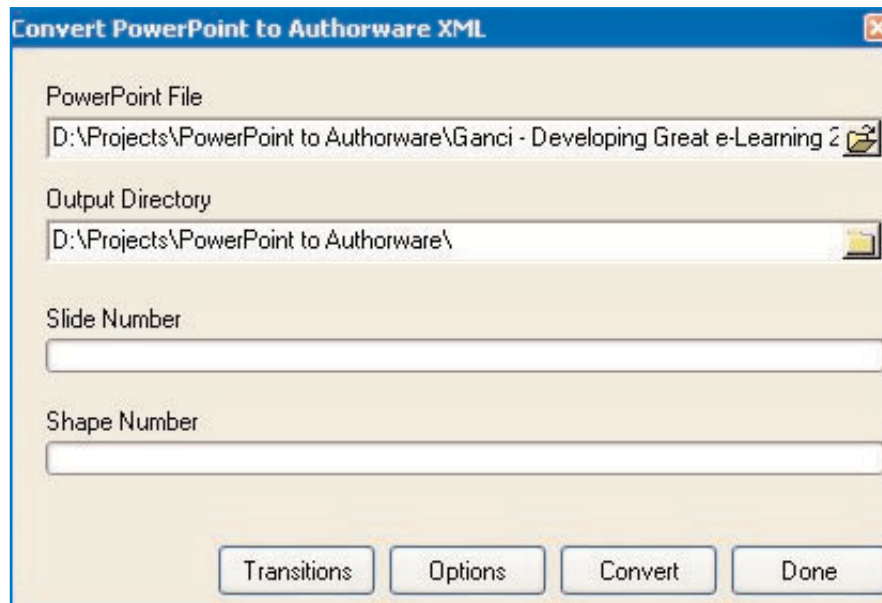

FIGURE 1 *Choosing the PowerPoint converter*

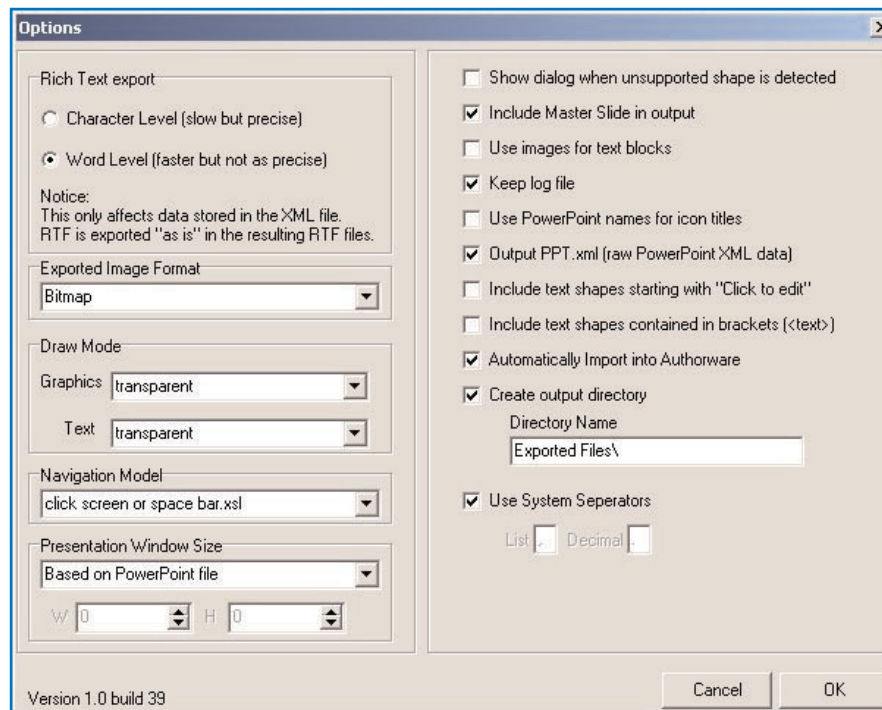**FIGURE 2** *The PowerPoint converter dialog box*

FIGURE 3 *The Options dialog box*

SIDEBAR 1 *The left pane of the Options dialog box in Figure 3*

These five options control how the converter will import your text and images into Authorware and how they will be displayed, which style of navigation (if any) the converter will add to the PowerPoint slides, and how large the presentation window for the converted file in Authorware will be.

Rich Text Export

The text in the PowerPoint file will be exported to RTF (Rich Text Format) files before being imported into Authorware. Let's say that in your PowerPoint file, your text changes format sometimes from character to character within the same word, for instance:

Ga**n**ci

In this case, you'll want to choose the Character Level option. Otherwise, leave it as Word Level, as this will result in a faster conversion.

Setting: Character Level

Choose this setting only if your PowerPoint file changes text formatting at times from one character to the next character, as shown in the example above.

Setting: Word Level (default)

Choose this setting if your PowerPoint text is pretty consistent and only changes formatting word to word.

Exported Image Format

The converter will export the images in the PowerPoint file in any of four formats: Bitmap, JPEG, PNG, or TIFF. Choose your preferred format (the default is to export images as bitmaps).

Draw Mode

The Draw Mode option allows you to choose how Authorware displays both text and graphics. The choices include all six of the standard Authorware formats. You may want to choose transparent for both graphics and text. However, you should experiment to find the best choices for you.

Navigation Mode

You can apply navigation to the converted PowerPoint file in Authorware by choosing one of four options.

Click Screen or Space Bar (default)

Move to the next PowerPoint slide whenever the presentation window is clicked or the space bar is pressed. You will have to add your own provision for moving backwards if you wish this option.

Next and Back Buttons

Include a set of Next and Back buttons that will take you between slides.

None

Don't include any navigation. You will be responsible for adding your own.

Spacebar

Move forward only when the space bar is clicked. You will have to add your own provision for moving backwards if you wish this option.

Presentation Window Size

Choose the size of the presentation window from the options given, which include all of the ones normally available within Authorware. By default, **Based on PowerPoint file** is chosen, which will result in the Authorware file being set to Variable and then to the specific dimensions of the PowerPoint file. If you pick the **Variable** option, you can supply the exact width and height desired.

Based on PowerPoint file (default)
Variable
512 x 342 (Mac 9")
512 x 384 (Mac 12")
640 x 350 (EGA)
640 x 400 (Mac Portable)
640 x 480 (VGA, Mac 13")
640 x 870 (Mac Portrait)
800 x 600 (SVGA)
832 x 624 (Mac 16")
1024 x 768 (SVGA, Mac 17")
1152 x 870 (Mac 21")
Use Full Screen

Getting started

Before you can use the converter, you must close PowerPoint if it is currently open. To access the command in Authorware, choose `Commands > Converters > Microsoft PowerPoint to Authorware XML`, as shown in Figure 1 on page 3.

The dialog box in Figure 2 on page 3 will appear. Next, you will click the Folder icon in the first field to choose the PowerPoint file to convert. The Output Directory field will automatically fill in with the same folder you chose, though you can change it if you wish.

Setting Options

If this is the first time you're using this command, you will want to set some options before performing the conversion. Click the `Options` button. The dialog box in Figure 3 on page 3 will appear.

It's important to review these options and set the appropriate ones to address your needs. They can be the difference between an easy conversion and one fraught with problems. Once you've set options, they will be remembered for future conversions. Sidebars 1, left, and 2 on page 5 list all of the options and their settings. Note that the choices in the right pane of the Options dialog box are all checkboxes that you can either check or leave unchecked.

Setting Transitions

Remember that many PowerPoint transitions don't have direct correlations to the Authorware transitions. You have the ability to map any transition you may be using in PowerPoint to the Authorware transition you wish. Of course, you could change all your transitions one by one in Authorware, but using the converter option is much faster, letting the conversion take care of all the transitions at one time. However, after the conversion is done, you can still change any individual transition in Authorware to your liking. You have the best of both worlds. Figure 4 on page 6 shows you the Transitions dialog box. Table 1 at the end of this article (on page 9) shows you how each transition is mapped by default.

Performing the conversion

After setting the options you wish, you can close the Options dialog and click the `Convert` button. You will see the

Slide Number and **Shape Number** fields count while it is converting the file, as seen in Figure 5 on page 6.

When the conversion is done, if you have not chosen the **Automatically import into Authorware** option, you will be told that you can import the file next and you will be given a location. To import the file, choose **File> Import and Export > Import XML menu item**. When you do so, you will be told that this will create a new file so your current file will be saved and closed.

Reviewing the results

As mentioned earlier, the results in Authorware will take the form of a Framework icon and attached pages. An example appears in Figure 6 on page 6.

Each object from PowerPoint has been placed in its own Display icon (you can see these on the right side of Figure 6), which allows each to have a separate transition applied to it. The Framework icon itself (on the left side of Figure 6) will contain whatever navigation you had chosen when performing the conversion.

This is now an ordinary Authorware file. You can build upon or make changes to the Authorware file any way you wish. Note too that you don't need to deliver to your end users the PowerPoint file or the XML file that was just created.

Potential pitfalls

Most of the time, you'll find converting PowerPoint files to Authorware a smooth process, especially as you get a few conversions under your belt. If you run into a problem, see if one of the following situations applies to you.

If you get the error message "XML was aborted."

You may receive the error message dialog in Figure 7 on page 6.

As you can see, you can view the error log by clicking the **View Log** button. However, most of the time, this error message will appear because you forgot to set one of two options in the Options dialog box:

- You haven't set the list and decimal separators correctly; or
- You haven't set the draw mode to one of the choices provided.

Be sure to check that those options have been set correctly. If you haven't, then:

1. A typical log might contain the mes-

These 11 check box options determine how the objects in the PowerPoint slides will be handled, where the converted files will be stored, and how local settings will be handled.

Show dialog when unsupported shape is detected

Some shapes in PowerPoint cannot be converted. For those that cannot, checking this box will display a dialog box each time one of those shapes is detected.

Include Master Slide in output

Check this box to include the text and images from the PowerPoint master slide as a background in Authorware.

Use images for text blocks

Text blocks in PowerPoint will be brought in as images into Authorware if you check this. This will preserve the appearance of the text box more faithfully but will mean you won't be able to edit the text. Also note that because text will be turned into images, the draw mode you choose for graphics will be the one used for the converted text as well and the draw mode you choose for text will be ignored.

Keep log file

Checking this box will create a log file, called **LOG.txt**, in the same folder showing each step that was performed.

Use PowerPoint names for icon titles

If you leave this box unchecked, icons in each Framework page will be titled generically **Shape 1**, **Shape 2**, etc. Checking it will name the icons according to PowerPoint names, such as **Picture 1** and **Rectangle 1**.

Output PPT.xml (raw PowerPoint XML data)

Checking this box will output a file called **PPT.xml** in the same folder that contains very detailed data regarding the conversion.

Include text shapes starting with "Click to edit"

In PowerPoint, when you create a new text object, it will start with the words "Click to..." to remind you to change those words to your text. Setting this checkbox tells Authorware to convert

those text objects that you haven't changed yet in PowerPoint. You probably will not want to check this option.

Include text shapes contained in brackets (<text>)

When you set up a new PowerPoint file, you will see, at times, text shapes in brackets. For instance, you will see the following on the Master slide when you create a new file.
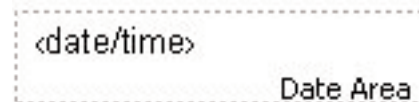
This option, when checked, will convert these text shapes. You normally will not want to do this.

Automatically import into Authorware

Check this to combine the steps of exporting the PowerPoint file and importing the resulting files into one step.

Create output directory

This allows you to specify the output directory if you check this. Otherwise, it will be called **Exported Files**.

Use System Separators

It is important to set this option to your local settings before converting a file. You will need to set the System Separator in the spaces provided for both *List* and *Decimal*. You can easily find the List separator in Authorware by looking up the value of the system variable *ListSeparator*. This will be either a comma (,) or a semicolon (;). Second, for the Decimal separator, use either a period (.) or a comma (,) depending on what your local standard is. For instance, if you write numbers in your country as 1,234.56, use the period as your decimal separator. If you write numbers as 1.234,56, use the comma.

Note: *To change the values of the list and decimal separators, you must have the checkbox off. After you've set the separators, check the option to turn it on.*
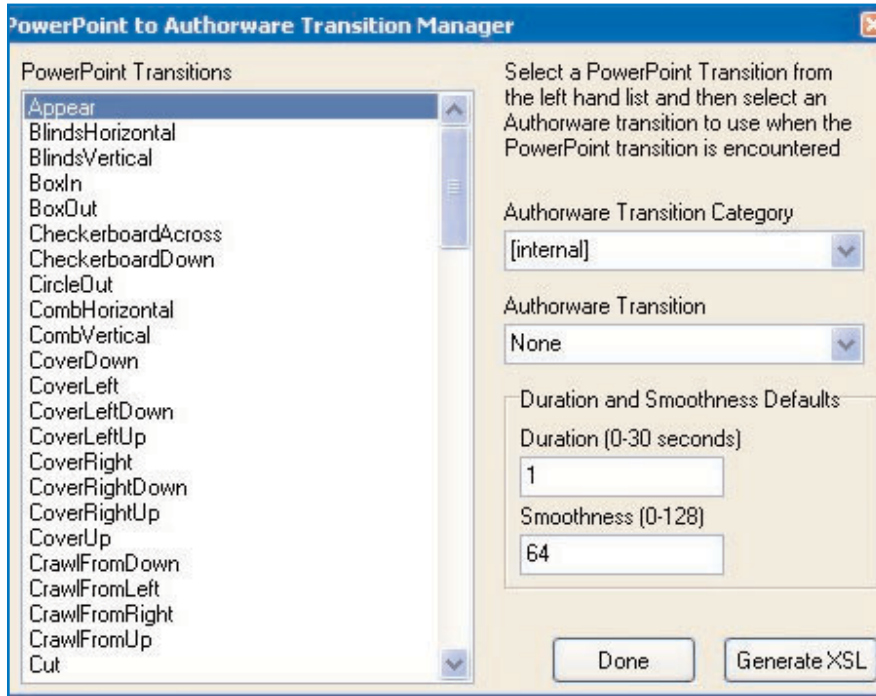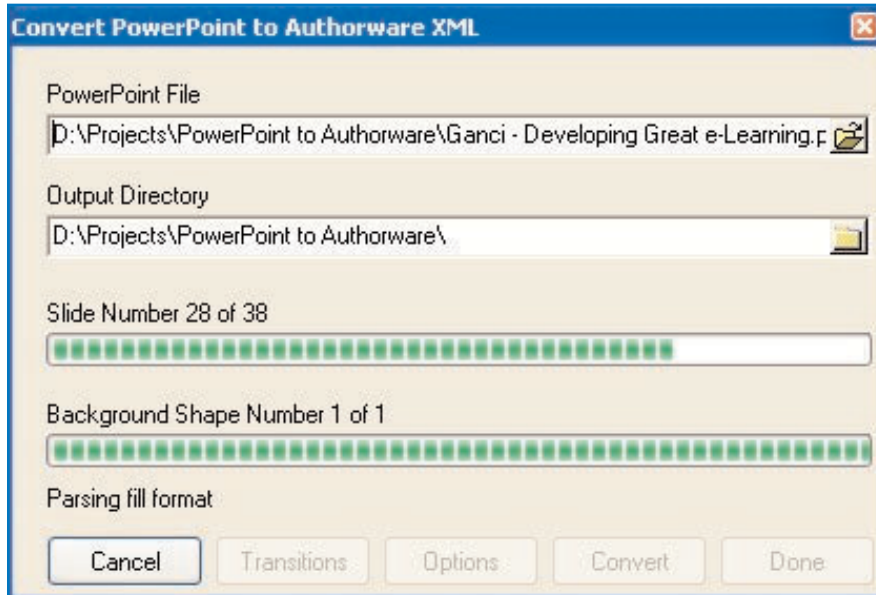
FIGURE 4 *The Transitions Dialog Box*

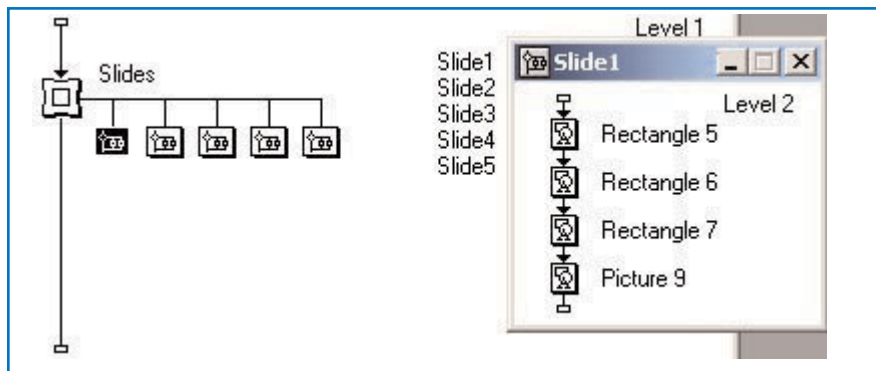**FIGURE 5** *The Transitions Dialog Box*

FIGURE 6 *Typical Resulting Flowline*

sage shown in Sidebar 3a on page 7 when you haven't set the separators correctly.

2. If you haven't set the draw mode correctly, you might see in the log file something like the message in Sidebar 3b.

If you get the message "Unsupported Shape"

If you've set the option `Show dialog when unsupported shape is detected` you may see the dialog box in Figure 8 below appear, perhaps more than once. In fact, you will see it each time an unsupported shape is detected.

You can stop the dialog box from appearing again by clicking the checkbox shown in the dialog box.

Many times you will see this box appear even when all shapes appear to transfer correctly. This is because there may be an unsupported background ob-ject that does not cause any visual effect in your file.

If you get the message "Cannot Create File"

You may see a message such as this one:

`Cannot Create file H:\Tests\Test.xml`

The most common reason for this is that you have chosen to output to a drive such as a CD-ROM or a restricted network drive. If you can't write to a location, you will receive this message. Change the location to an unrestricted drive.

If you get the message "Microsoft virtual machine cannot be found"
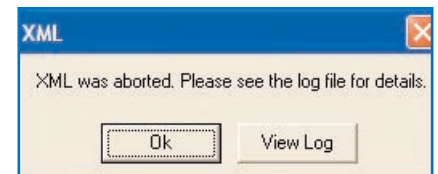
You may see a message such as this one:

FIGURE 7 *This error message appears if you forgot to set one of two options; the log will tell you which one.*
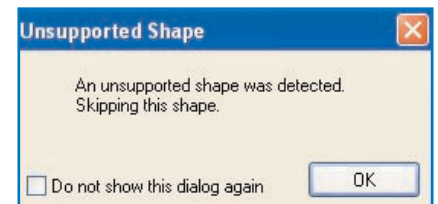

FIGURE 8 *Unsupported Shape message*

Unable to start the application. The Microsoft virtual machine cannot be found.

You should update your version of Authorware to 7.02. Earlier versions of the PowerPoint converter relied on the Java Virtual Machine, which is normally not included in Windows. It has to be downloaded from http://www.microsoft.com/mscorp/java/ and installed separately. However, using the latest version of the converter eliminates this need.

PowerPoint slides with no transitions get converted to "Wipe-Right" transitions in Authorware

If you have slides in PowerPoint that don't use any transition but, when converted to Authorware, have a Wipe Right transition applied to them, you can change the default setting easily.

1. Open the PowerPoint Converter Command.
2. Click the **Transitions** button.
3. Choose the Cut transition in the left

SIDEBAR 3 *These log entries indicate why XML was aborted during conversion.*

a. Log entry: Separators not set correctly

```
Message:Function > SetFileProperty
Args > [AWWindowSize, [#type:#variable #size:point(720540)]]
Error KO.LastResult: 1
```

If you're an experienced Authorware scripter, you might notice the error in the above. If you're not, don't worry: it's not important! If you're curious, though, as to what is happening, notice the number 720540 on the third line. This is incorrect. The **Point** function requires two arguments, not one, and the numbers 720 and 540 in this case represent the width and height to which to set the Authorware presentation window. Because the list separator was not set in the Options dialog box, the two numbers 720 and 540 were not separated properly.

b. Log entry: drawMode property not set correctly

```
Message:Function > BuildDisplay
Args > [65545, [[#rect:rect(54,180,666,270), #type:#rtf,
#antialias:1, #fileName:"D:\\Projects\\PowerPoint to
Authorware\\Ganci - Developing Great e-Learning 2 (Internal
Media)\\slide1\\3.rtf", #attributes:[#drawMode:#]]]]
Error KO.LastResult: 0
```

Notice that the **drawMode** property is not being set correctly.

---

panel.

4. In the right panel, choose `[internal]` in the Authorware Transition Category.

5. Choose `None` for the Authorware Transition.

6. Click the `Generate XSL` button. You will be told that the Export is complete.

You should not see the problem re-occur for any subsequent conversions you perform. **Note** that following this change, all PowerPoint Cut transitions that were in your original PowerPoint file will also be affected — that is, they will also be converted to "None" in Authorware.

Text in PowerPoint does not appear in Authorware

This problem would appear at times in Version 7.01. You should update your version of Authorware to 7.02. If you must stay with Version 7.01, be sure to see the following tech note on the Macromedia site and follow the directions there: http://www.macromedia.com/support/authorware/ts/documents/701_ppt_fix.htm

Conclusion

The PowerPoint converter is a very useful feature in Authorware for anyone needing to convert storyboards, rapid prototyping documents, presentations, or any other PowerPoint-based materials into Authorware. Following the directions above, you should find the process easy and should also find it will save you a considerable amount of time.

Thanks go to Macromedia, particularly Jamil Zainasheff, Mike Baker, Stefan van As, and Tom Neuhold-Huber, and to two gentlemen who were instrumental in ensuring this feature was implemented. Mr. Christopher Swenson of Dazzle Technologies Corp. created the first step of the process, reading the PowerPoint slides and outputting the correct XML and XSL files. Mr. Erik de Bruin of S-5 Multimedia created the second step, creating Author-ware code from the XML and XSL files.

AUTHOR CONTACT

Joseph Ganci is President of Dazzle Technologies Corporation, located in Sterling, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. He has been involved in every aspect of multimedia and learning development since 1983, with an emphasis in development. Joe has taught classes and seminars at leading universities and in many government facilities, commercial firms, and educational institutions. He has also spoken at several industry conferences. Joe is a published author, having written several books and articles about e-Learning, and he is widely considered a guru for his expertise in e-Learning development. He has consulted on a wide range of multimedia and learning applications worldwide for many organizations. Joe holds a degree in Computer Science.

Joe will be at the eLearning Producer Conference & Expo 2004, leading a one-day preconference workshop entitled, "Tools for Creating Effective e-Learning: Combining RoboDemo, Flash, and Authorware." He will also present three sessions during the conference, entitled, "Authorware Scripting for e-Learning," "Strategies for Getting ID and Developers to Work in Perfect Harmony," and "Prototypes and Authoring Tools for Developing Section 508 Compliant e-Learning."

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Additional information on the topics covered in this article is also listed in the Guild Resource Directory.

TABLE 1 *Default conversion mapping. PowerPoint transitions to Authorware transitions*

PowerPoint transition	Default Authorware transition	PowerPoint transition	Default Authorware transition
Appear	None	PushRight	Push Right
BlindsHorizontal	Venetian Blind	PushUp	Push Up
BlindsVertical	Vertical Blind	Random	None
BoxIn	Iris In	RandomBarsHorizontal	Random Rows
BoxOut	Iris Out	RandomBarsVertical	Random Columns
CheckerboardAcross	Checkerboard	Spiral	Spiral
CheckerboardDown	Checkerboard	SplitHorizontalIn	Edges in, Horizontal
CircleOut	Spiral	SplitHorizontalOut	Center Out, Horizontal
CombHorizontal	None	SplitVerticalIn	Edges in, Vertical
CombVertical	None	SplitVerticalOut	Center Out, Vertical
CoverDown	Cover Down	StretchAcross	None
CoverLeft	Cover Left	StretchDown	None
CoverLeftDown	Cover Down-Left	StretchLeft	None
CoverLeftUp	Cover Up-Left	StretchRight	None
CoverRight	Cover Right	StretchUp	None
CoverRightDown	Cover Down-Right	StripsDownLeft	Strips on Top, Build Left
CoverRightUp	Cover Up-Right	StripsDownRight	Strips on Top, Build Right
CoverUp	Cover Up	StripsLeftDown	Strips on Top, Build Left
CrawlFromDown	None	StripsLeftUp	Strips on Bottom, Build Left
CrawlFromLeft	None	StripsRightDown	Strips on Top, Build Right
CrawlFromRight	None	StripsRightUp	Strips on Bottom, Build Right
CrawlFromUp	None	StripsUpLeft	Strips on Bottom, Build Left
Cut	Wipe Right	StripsUpRight	Strips on Bottom, Build Right
CutThroughBlack	Wipe Right	Swivel	None
DiamondOut	None	UncoverDown	Cover Down
Dissolve	Dissolve, Pixels	UncoverLeft	Cover Left
Fade	Fade In	UncoverLeftDown	Cover Down-Left
FadeSmoothly	Fade In	UncoverLeftUp	Cover Up-Left
FlashOnceFast	None	UncoverRight	Cover Right
FlashOnceMedium	None	UncoverRightDown	Cover Down-Right
FlashOnceSlow	None	UncoverRightUp	Cover Up-Right
FlyFromBottom	None	UncoverUp	Cover Up
FlyFromBottomLeft	None	Wedge	Wedge
FlyFromBottomRight	None	Wheel1Spoke	None
FlyFromLeft	None	Wheel2Spokes	None
FlyFromRight	None	Wheel3Spokes	None
FlyFromTop	None	Wheel4Spokes	None
FlyFromTopLeft	None	Wheel8Spokes	None
FlyFromTopRight	None	WipeDown	Wipe Down
Mixed	None	WipeLeft	Wipe Left
Newsflash	None	WipeRight	Wipe Right
None	None	WipeUp	Wipe Up
PeekFromDown	Push Down	ZoomBottom	None
PeekFromLeft	Push Left	ZoomCenter	Zoom from Point
PeekFromRight	Push Right	ZoomIn	None
PeekFromUp	Push Up	ZoomInSlightly	None
PlusOut	None	ZoomOut	None
PushDown	Push Down	ZoomOutSlightly	None
PushLeft	Push Left		

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