

Comparing Switch Operated Resources

Quick Guide

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PowerPoint: Clicker: SwitchIt Maker 2, TextEase Presenter (to name but a few)

There are various different software applications that you *COULD* use to make single switch accessible talking books and other similar personalized resources (ie. that use photos or other graphics, recorded sound and imported .wav files, and so on). How do we know which software is best? Here are a few considerations that might help you choose the most suitable option for your setting (but there are many other considerations...).

SwitchIt Maker 2		
From Inclusive Technology http://www.inclusive.co.uk/products/index.shtml		
What's good about it	What's not so good about it	What does it link with?
It's simple and really easy to use. It might be especially useful for staff or parents who are not experienced of confident with more complex software	It's limited – you can only do one thing with it; You have only 1 font and 3 font sizes, one picture per page, limited choice of colours, can't change, size/shape of picture etc. If you decide you want to go on and add other features, you'll have to change to another more powerful, more flexible application.	There are also other programs in the 'SwitchIt!' Series, many with the same interface and structure
This newer version is a huge improvement on the original SwitchIt Maker, as you can now print out stories, and move saved story files easily from computer to computer. It allows you to import a wider range of graphic and sound files than before, also will take movie clips, and offers limited animation to 'pep it up'.	Although it appears relatively cheap when compared to Clicker & TextEase etc. the new version has a higher price tag (£59 for a single user; £119 (5); £159 (10); £279 (network license)) so that it is now quite expensive for such a simple application	Once you've learned how to use SwitchIT Maker 2, you can than also easily use its 'big brother' ChooseIT Maker 2 that introduces choice making and scanning– the two programs are very similar to operate.. JigSaw Maker, too
It comes with lots of examples and sample materials and pictures, symbols etc.	Although it provides one hit/one page access for early switch users, this may be too simple for users who need to learn to scan.	You can also use the graphics from the other SwitchIt Maker games to make additional worksheets and 'sideways' resources
It includes a freely copiable "player" version so students can take their activities home and play them even if parents do not own this software.		



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PowerPoint

From Microsoft <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/FX010857971033.aspx>

What's good about it	What's not so good about it	What does it link with?
PowerPoint is very powerful and versatile – it can be used in so many ways and for learners at every level from 'visual stimulation' through 'animal noises', mouse skills, to talking books, Passports, on-screen worksheets, and - potentially – almost any and every aspect of teaching and learning.	Although it is pretty easy to use at a superficial level, if you want to get into all the finer points of animation, sound files etc., it can start to get pretty complex (especially the later versions), and so you may need special training, support materials and /or a bit of time to get to grips with it.	As part of Microsoft Office, Power-Point is closely linked with MS Word & shares many of the same features and conventions. If you feel familiar and confident with Word, you will take to PowerPoint easily. If you do not know Word well, PowerPoint is still pretty easy to use.
Anybody with Microsoft Office installed already has PowerPoint (though they may not be aware of it) so it may not need to be purchased.	If you don't use MS Office then it is expensive to buy PowerPoint on its own (or to buy Office just to use PowerPoint).	As part of Microsoft Office, it is well integrated with all the other components of Office – you can insert clip art, tables, and spread sheets etc.
	The training available in PowerPoint in local authorities is not usually Additional Support Needs oriented. So be careful if you sign up for a course - most will usually just be about creating text-based presentations.	There are oodles of crib sheets and tutorials available for PowerPoint, eg. on the Internet (Type "PowerPoint tutorial" into www. Google.com) To be useful, make sure you match the tutorial to the right version of PowerPoint
There is also a PowerPoint Viewer (free) that can be packaged with presentations, so you can use (though not edit) resources without having the program. So students can take their work home even if parents do not have this software	This works but it can get bit complicated if you have one version installed in your machine, and presentations made in different versions.	
It handles all different formats of graphics, animations, sounds and movies well. As software, it is 100% robust – it never crashes or corrupts files or does the strange and upsetting things that other programs can sometimes do....	Later versions of PowerPoint are getting more and more complex, so if you are trying to transfer presentations across different versions, complications may occur.	
It is dual platform (PC/Mac); PowerPoint files made on one machine should transfer happily across to the other.	Just occasionally, if you pass files back and forth across these two formats repeatedly, or if you are crossing from very old to much newer versions, slightly odd things may happen to graphics (and with later version, major complications with different sound file or movie formats may occur).	Eg. Cut & Paste from BoardMaker, Communicate in Print 2 allows you to copy and paste directly across into PowerPoint
Offers one hit/one page access for switch users, and also allows choice-making for mouse /touch screen users, linking to different presentations	It is difficult - though it can be done - to 'simulate' simple scanning. Full range of scanning options is not possible..	
It has a range of interesting printout options, to let you make books but also photo albums, diaries, newsletters, worksheets, etc.	Finding the different printout options is a bit complicated (different from printer to printer) at first....	
ASN linked Powerpoint tutorials and crib sheets and freely downloadable pre-made resources on the InterNet http://ace-centre.hostinguk.com/index.cfm?pageid=D1CFEF12-D613-62F1-CEAA6E105D0260F4 http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/meldreth/textandinfo/Powerp/Media1.html http://www.priorywoods.middlesbrough.sch.uk/resources/restop.htm		

Clicker (4 or 5)		
What's good about it	What's not so good about it	What does it link with?
Clicker – both versions - is a really good quality and extremely versatile powerful program that can be used at many levels and in many different ways, for all ages and stages of learners. Talking books is only one way to use it– you can also make grids (pictures and/or text) to support pupils with difficulties with communication, early language work, reading, or spelling and writing. You can use synthetic speech, recorded speech or imported sound files etc., music animation and video (especially in new version 5)	It's a complex application – to get the best out of it, you really need training and/or to spend a good bit of time learning to master it. The Manuals are not great (but the Tutorials and Training Packs that you can get are useful and there are LOADS of freely downloadable clicker crib sheets on the Internet (Contact CALL for details). Making grids gets easier & quicker the more you do it, but they still take a fair bit of time to do well. Clicker is very definitely for education and literacy, perhaps not quite so geared to FUN as PowerPoint...?	CrickSoft publish many many 'add-ons', see http://www.cricksoft.com/uk/ 'Curriculum Resources powered by Clicker' .eg. Oxford Reading Tree & Trackers, Find out and Write About (14 themes, eg. Egyptians, Dinosaurs, Castles etc.) and also the reading scheme Planet Wobble, and Clicker books, Daisy, Archie and Gamba. There are also related applications such as All My Words, WordBar, JigWorksand Cloze Pro.
It's ideal for switch users moving beyond the basics of "one hit/one page" as it offers early scanning possibilities – a good trainer for more complex scanning later (e.g. for grids or communication aids)	You need to make sure the 'Switch Access' option has been installed as well as the main program (it doesn't install automatically and is often ignored by technicians or others). Some switch functions are still not quite resolved in the new Clicker 5 version	You can use pre-made grids but you often need to re-work grids of irregular design to make them scan properly as 'scan order' only works sensibly on regular grids, and Crick don't always check them for scanning before they put them on the web.
It is available for both Mac and PC, though you need a specifically PC or Mac version of the program, grids made on one platform can be transferred across to use on the other	In Clicker 4 the grids don't automatically save their pictures (just the links to them), so people often lose bits of their resources because they have not done 'organize files for grids' or have not grasped the special 'Clicker Explorer filing system. Clicker 5 is much better in these respects.	For communication, you can link Clicker with a library of PCS symbols (but not Widgit Literacy Symbols). For Clicker 4 only there are pre-stored vocabularies ('Quickfire' A,B,C,D) for assessment and early training for a communication aid.
Clicker is used widely across the country in all Special and Primary schools, and is supported by technical support for throughout an authority, and often by regular in-service for staff across the authority. Crick often run training days & Information Day around the country	Clicker is not always correctly installed on networks and staff cannot always access the downloadable resources	An ever growing resource bank of freely downloadable pre-made grids & materials made by teachers 'Clicker Learning Grids' can be downloaded (free) from the internet, (or available on CDs) http://www.learninggrids.com/uk
New Clicker 5 is even more powerful and versatile than the popular Clicker 4, with lots of new features that make it easier to make, edit and share resources. (in some ways it's a bit more like PowerPoint than 4 was!)	Clicker 5 is very different from 4, so it will take a while to learn how to use it if you are used to Clicker 4.	Although the new Clicker 5 is better, you don't automatically need it if Clicker 4 is doing the job fine for you. Might be better to wait until your authority is switching to support Clicker 5
What would clinch it? I would HAVE to choose to go on to Clicker from PowerPoint at some stage, when my user is a switch user who is beyond 'cause and effect' and simple 'one-hit' activities, but needs to go on to learn to scan through and make a selection from a range of options.		