PPLink Documentation

This document provides an overview of the concept of PowerPoint Link (PPLink) and instructions on how to use it.

Instructions on how to setup and use PPLink (this document) are also stored at https://github.com/ke43ro/PPLInk/wiki.

Concept

The concept of PPLink is to provide a simple interface for selection and projection of a short list of PowerPoint Shows from a large, semi-static collection of files. Essentially, PPLink can be operated completely from its main screen. Lists can be created by a text search of the file list and the whole list projected with one Play button. [More details here](#).

The need for this application became clear to me when I became associated with an organisation that has a large (over 1000) collection of PowerPoint files containing lyrics of songs used in Christian worship. To assist management of so many songs, the files are stored in single character subfolders named a to z, where this is the initial letter of the file name. The folders also contain Windows shortcuts to link common alternative names to the actual file. The "projectionist" is often a person who is not very savvy with computers and two problems arise:

- Navigating the folder structure is slow resulting in a long break between songs (or they open all the files in advance turning the problem from navigating the file structure, to navigating the running PowerPoint windows), and
- Lack of skill results in accidental moving of files within the folder structure.

A further problem is that the "alternate name" shortcuts become invalid if the files are moved or installed on a different computer.

My solution is to create an application that centralises all the necessary actions. It includes a database and functions that collect the file names. The database provides a second column in the file list to record the alternate names. When looking for a file, a text search is applied to both the actual name and alternate name fields to enable the operator to find the right file really fast and project it instantly or add it to a list for projection at a planned time later.

How To: 1 Setup

New installations of PPLink require that MS SQL Express be installed. If it is not, it will be automatically downloaded for you.

(to be completed)

How To: 2 Operation

PPLink is focused on providing the simplest possible operation. Once setup, the basic operations can all be done from the main screen that opens on startup. There are two main operations (a) creating a Play List and (b) projecting the show.

Creating a Play List

The current Play List is displayed in the list box at the top of the window while the whole database is listed in the table grid on the lower half. Creating the list is done with the controls across the middle and can be managed with keyboard alone. The keyboard focus will normally be in the Search box and typing characters there will trigger an immediate scan of the database resulting in fewer records being listed. The search text is matched against columns F_NAME (the actual name of the PowerPoint file on disk) and F_ALTNAME (the recorded alternate text) . Usually one of these is the first line of a song (e.g. "Lord, I come to you") and the other is the title ("The Power of Your Love").

Once the desired song is visible in the database list, use the arrow keys (**UP** and **DOWN**) to select it. Then press **ENTER** to cause it to be added to the end of the list. You can avoid using the arrow keys by continuing to type until you have entered a string that is unique and you can avoid using **ENTER** by pressing the *Add* button instead.

Editing your Play List

If you make a mistake, click on the erroneous entry in the list and press **DELETE** to remove it, **+** to move it down the list or **-** to move it up the list. In the case of a complete mess, use the *Clear* button and start again.

Using your Play List

Just press the Play button. PowerPoint will be launched with the first file open and in SlideShow mode. Move forward through the show using the usual PowerPoint keys or the buttons on a Laser Pointer - I do not recommend using a mouse as a click in the wrong place will lose focus from the PowerPoint control window. At the end of each show, pressing

"Next" will close that file and open the next one. You can go backwards through a single file, but not back to the previous file.

If for some reason you need to close the show before all files are run, press **ESCAPE** on each following file until the list is finished.

Instant Play

Even if you have a Play List in progress of creation, if you are suddenly called on to show a different file, select it with the search then double click on its line in the table. It will be presented immediately without interfering with the Play List. This is not available during presentation of a Play List.

How to: 3 Advanced

The Advanced options screen currently (v 1.4.0.36) includes two options:
1. Export a list of the files recorded in the database, and
2. Import a list from another installation.

Pending releases will add features to edit the list manually or update the list by scanning the disk.

Export

The export feature creates a tab-delimited text file in the Documents folder containing a line for every record in the table T_FILES. The columns F_name, F_Path, F_altname, Selected and Inactive are included and this file can be compared with that from other installations to check for differences.

Import

The import feature is intended mainly to ease installation on a new system and will allow the user to transfer the "Selected" state, the "Inactive" state and "Alternative Names". NB: PPLink does not use the Selected option currently. It was included in the design to reduce browsing and search time, but experience with the prototype (named Projection Helper - ProHelp) has shown that the search is instantaneous and the complication was not included in the design of PPLink.

There are extensive options available:
Selected Flag
- Remove my Selected flags if the matching file in the Import list is not Selected
- Set my Selected flags if the matching file in the Import list is Selected

These two options are independent. If both are unchecked, no changes will be made in the installation doing the Import

Inactive Flag
- Remove my Inactive flags if the matching file in the Import list is not Inactive
- Set my Inactive flags if the matching file in the Import list is Inactive

These two options are independent. If both are unchecked, no changes will be made in the installation doing the Import. NB: This feature does not check whether the relevant files exist

on disk or not. The Table Update feature will synchronise the database state with the file system.

Import will also list files that are missing from either of the installations and it is possible to save this list as a tab-delimited text file for at leisure analysis.

Alternative Text
- Replace my Alternative text with that attached to the matching file in the Import list
- Extend my Alternative text with that attached to the matching file in the Import list

If both of these are unchecked, no changes will be made in the installation doing the Import. However the two options are mutually exclusive. If you tick one, the system will untick the other. If you choose Replace, the process will replace all Alternative text where the matching file's Alternative text is not blank. If you choose extend, the text from the matching file will be added to the end of the existing text except where:

1. The incoming text is completely included within the existing text - no change
2. The existing text is completely included within the incoming text - the new text completely replaces the existing

Table Edit

The planned table edit feature will allow direct access to the table T_FILES so that a skilled user can adjust the table manually for any reason. Possible objectives will be to alter the Inactive or Selected status of any file or to delete records that are redundant or no longer wanted.

NB: This feature should not be used to add new records to the table. See Table Update.

Table Update

The planned table update feature will run a scan of the disk to update the table records to match. Options will be available to:
- Set new files to Selected if desired
- Mark records for missing files as Inactive or delete these records