Chapter 1: What Is Microsoft Producer?

This chapter is intended to give you a broad overview of Microsoft Producer and what you can accomplish using it. Our goal is to explain how the features in Producer help you to create dynamic, rich-media presentations—ones that let you go beyond using simple text and images.

Producer lets you share your message with others through the Web, through a corporate intranet or extranet, or through a third-party e-service provider. You can easily incorporate audio, video, HTML files, and still images with your Microsoft PowerPoint presentations to create dynamic, distributable, rich-media presentations.

What Can I Do with Producer?

You can install and run Producer on a computer that is running the Microsoft Windows 2000 or Windows XP operating system and PowerPoint 2002. Producer is a standalone application that lets you take your PowerPoint slides and synchronize them with audio and video. This can be audio and video that you have already recorded on your computer or new audio and video content that you record in Producer. Furthermore, you can add still images and HTML files to your presentations.

The final product is a rich-media presentation that you can distribute on a company intranet site, on an e-service provider's site, on a CD, or to the Web so clients, colleagues, or anyone with Microsoft Internet Explorer can watch.

Working with Producer, you can create a variety of presentations based on your specific needs. Later in this chapter, you will see a list of different scenarios in which you might use Producer.

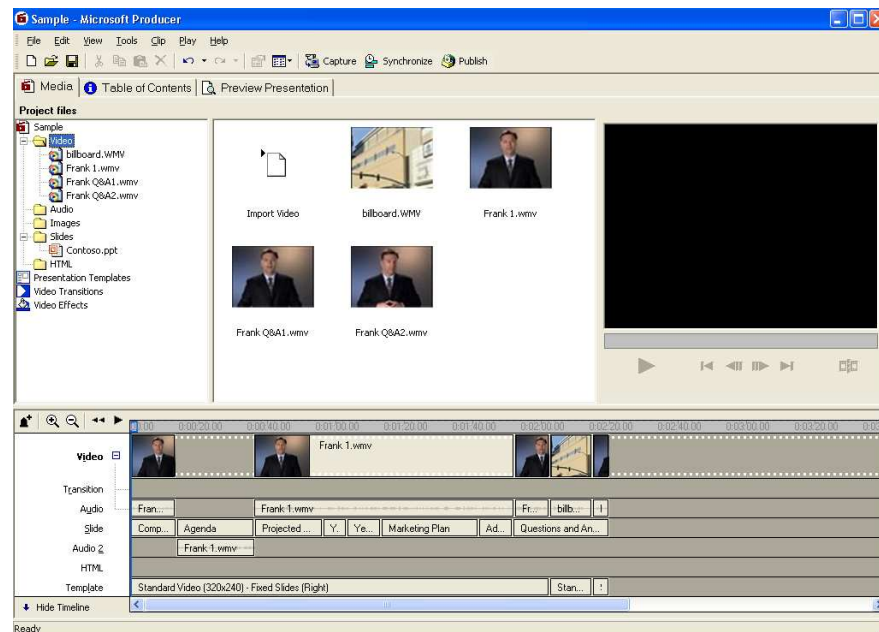Figure 1-1 shows a presentation that is being edited in Producer.

Figure 1-1   Editing a presentation in Producer.

Working with Producer

Before you start working with Producer and this book, it's helpful to know what features are included in Producer and where they are discussed in this book. The following section is designed to do just that.

Getting Content into Producer

The first task is to bring digital media files into your Producer project. The files that you can use in your projects can include audio, video, PowerPoint slides, still images, and HTML files.

Because you can import a wide variety of digital media file formats, you will be able to use many of your existing still images, HTML files, audio files, video files, or PowerPoint slides.

You can capture audio and video in Producer if you have an appropriate capture device connected to or installed in your computer. You can record from a wide variety of video capture devices, such as Web cameras, analog video cameras, digital video (DV) cameras, and analog or DV VCRs. These features enable you to capture full-

motion video—either live or from tape—or to simply capture individual still images from video.

You can also use a standalone audio capture device such as a microphone to capture audio. If you plan to capture audio and video using an analog or DV camera or VCR, you need to have a video capture card connected and properly installed on your computer.

If a capture device is properly installed and detected on your computer, you can then record video and audio in Producer. The video and audio you record play an important role in the presentations you create; they're one of the key elements that helps turn your standard, old-fashioned slide shows into dynamic, rich-media presentations.

Other capturing options include recording video and audio (or audio only) alongside your PowerPoint slides or recording video or still images of your computer screen.

Regardless of the recording you want to make for your presentation, the Capture Wizard walks you step-by-step through the capturing process and lets you choose what type of recording you want to make. The type of content you capture is up to you.

Editing in Producer

After you have imported digital media files or recorded the video and audio you want to use in your presentation, you can then begin arranging them in your project. You start by adding them to the *timeline*. The timeline is the Producer workspace in which you arrange the various elements that will appear in your presentation. The timeline enables you to edit the entire project or elements of the project, such as individual audio and video files.

When working with video and audio, you will often need to edit or hide some unwanted material. For example, a video file might contain the frantic preparation and last-minute changes that took place during recording. You probably won't want to show this part in your presentation. However, you might not want to delete those last-minute changes because they could be used for a separate training video.

You can use Producer to trim unwanted video and audio out of your presentation. This lets you hide the unwanted footage from your audience without deleting those scenes from the source video file.

To aid in synchronizing slides with audio and video, Producer provides a timeline workspace. Once you have the files for your presentation laid out on the timeline, you may want to rearrange the digital media files. You can quickly do this by dragging the files from one part of the timeline to another or by using the menu commands to cut, copy, and paste files. And if you later decide that you have a file on the timeline that you do not need anymore, you can easily remove that file from the timeline so it does not appear in your final presentation.

In addition to editing video footage, you can enhance your presentations by adding video *transitions* and *effects*. Producer provides many different video transitions and effects that you can add to your presentation. A video transition plays between two video clips, slides, or still images, while a video effect applies a new style or appearance to your still images or video content.

To help your audience understand the topics discussed in your presentation, you can create a *table of contents*. The table of contents in your presentation is much like the table of contents you see in a book; it provides a way for your audience to see the topics or subjects that will be discussed. Just like a table of contents in a book lists page numbers for chapters or topics, the table of contents for your presentation contains links to a specific topic or part of your presentation. This way, viewers can simply click a link to go to that part of the presentation. When they click a table of contents link, they will go to the corresponding video, text, images, or PowerPoint slides that are contained in that topic.

Synchronizing Your Presentation

You can choose to synchronize existing video and audio files with your PowerPoint slides. This is an important feature of Producer because it lets you take different digital media files, such as audio, video, still images, and slides, and then quickly synchronize them to create a rich-media presentation. Synchronizing is done through the synchronize slides feature.

In addition to synchronizing existing audio and video files with your slides, you can also choose to capture new video and audio while synchronizing it with your PowerPoint slides. You can do this by narrating your slides to video with audio or audio only in the Capture Wizard.

Previewing Your Presentation

As you work on your project in Producer, you can preview it to see how the presentation will appear after you publish it. By previewing, you can get a "sneak peek" of your project before publishing it to a local computer, Web server, Windows Media server, or e-service provider.

Producer lets you preview in two different tabs: the Media tab and the Preview Presentation tab. Each tab gives you a different view of your presentation.

Publishing Your Presentation

When you have finished editing your project, you are then ready to publish the presentation. When you publish the project as a presentation, all of the digital media in your project, including any video, audio, HTML files, PowerPoint slides, and templates, is compiled into one final presentation. You can then take the final presentation and the files contained in it and publish it to a local computer, Web server, Windows Media server, e-service provider, or even to a CD that you can then distribute.

What Other Software Works with Producer?

You can use many different types of digital media in your presentations. The presentations you create can use still images, HTML files, PowerPoint slides, video, and audio. The software you use to create these original files is completely up to you, as long as you can save the source files in file formats that can be imported into Producer.

For example, you can create your HTML files by using a WYSIWIG (What You See Is What You Get) HTML editor, such as Microsoft FrontPage, or you can use a simple text editor, such as Notepad. As long as the software you choose lets you save in a supported file format, you can use the applications you are most comfortable with to create the original still images, video, audio, and HTML files you want to use in your Producer presentations.

You can use slides that were created by any version of PowerPoint, but to run Producer and import PowerPoint slides to your Producer presentations, you must have PowerPoint 2002 installed on your computer.

To watch your published Producer presentation, both you and your audience must have Windows Media Player 6-4 or higher installed—Windows Media Player 7.0 or higher is recommended. In addition to having Windows Media Player installed, Internet Explorer 5.0 or higher is needed to view your published presentation.

What Hardware Can I Use with Producer?

Recording video and audio for your Producer presentations requires you to have specific hardware properly installed and connected to your computer. To record audio and video for your presentations, you need to have video and audio capture devices installed on your computer.

Video Capture Devices

To record video in Producer, you must have an appropriate capture device connected to and recognized by your computer. A capture device is a piece of hardware, such as a Web camera, a VCR, or an analog or digital video (DV) camera that lets you record video to your computer.

To record video and audio to your computer using a DV or analog camera or VCR, you must use a video capture device, such as a video capture card, that is installed on your computer. If you plan to use an analog video camera, you will need to use an analog capture device. However, if you have a DV camera, you can use an analog or digital capture card. An IEEE 1394 DV capture card, sometimes called a FireWire card, can be used to transfer digital video from your camera, whether live or from tape, to your computer.

Today, some new computers already include a video capture device, such as FireWire card, to connect your DV camera or VCR. However, a majority of computers require that a separate video capture card or device be installed on your computer.

Audio Capture Devices

Just like you need a video capture device to record video to your computer, you also need to have an audio capture device, such as an audio card, connected and properly detected by your computer to record audio. Many sound cards let you connect an external audio capture device such as a microphone to your computer, so you can record audio on your computer.

Your Presentation: The Final Product

The final product of your project is the published presentation. This contains all of the different digital media files and effects you added to your Producer project, and is the presentation that your audience can watch in their Web browsers. The final presentation is created by publishing the project. The presentation can be published to a variety of locations including a Web site, corporate intranet site, a shared network location, your local computer, or to a recordable or rewriteable CD.

Understanding Windows Media Technologies

When you record video and audio in Producer, it is encoded into Windows Media Format. Audio and video files in Windows Media Format can be streamed from a Windows Media server, which means that the audio and video can be seen or listened to while the file is being delivered to the viewer's computer. These files also can contain links from the audio or video to slides or other files. This is how the slides or other files stay synchronized with the video or audio.

Typical multimedia files like AVI or WAV files cannot be synchronized with other files easily, which is why Windows Media Format is used. Any audio and video in your final published presentation is saved in Windows Media Format.

Windows Media lets you easily distribute high-quality audio and video over a network, such as a corporate intranet or Web site. This is because high-quality Windows Media files are much smaller than original audio or video files in most other formats.

Streaming Media

Traditionally, audio and video needed to be downloaded to your computer before it could be played. However, Windows Media changes this by enabling *streaming* audio and video. Instead of having to wait a long time for a file to be completely downloaded, video and audio in Windows Media Format can be played as the file is delivered, or

streamed, to the local machine. This eliminates the "download and wait" issues that used to be associated with retrieving audio and video from the Internet.

In addition, a streamed file does not remain on the user's computer. The audio or video data is transferred to the user's computer and played, but never saved to a file; users have to access the original source of the streaming audio or video every time they want to access it. This functionality gives content creators more control over how and when their content is used.

Windows Media Tools

The following sections describe some of the Windows Media software that you are likely to encounter when working with Producer. These tools are not required to create successful presentations, but you might want to know about them anyway.

Windows Media Player

Windows Media Player is the software that lets you play Windows Media files on your computer. The audio and video files you play in Windows Media Player can be stored locally on your computer, or you can play Windows Media files that are streamed from a media server or downloaded from a Web server. Additionally, you can play other popular audio file types such as MP3, and other video file types such as AVI or MPEG. You can also use Windows Media Player to listen to Internet radio stations from around the world.

In addition to playing music, Windows Media Player acts as an entertainment center for your computer. You can use Windows Media Player to organize all the video and audio you have on your computer. You can copy CDs to your computer to save new music in Windows Media Format, and you can create (*burn*) CDs from lists of songs stored in Windows Media Player.

Windows Media Services

Windows Media Services lets you stream and distribute digital media files over the Internet or over a local network. A computer running Windows Media Services is known as a Windows Media server. This server is much like a Web server, but it can be used to distribute streaming digital media content over the Internet or a local network.

A Windows Media server is designed to distribute Windows Media files by *streaming* them across a network. Streaming eliminates the traditional "download and wait" experience that occurs when a Windows Media Format file is stored on and distributed from a Web server.

If you have Windows Media Services installed on a computer running Windows 2000 Server, you can set up this service to distribute Windows Media files over your corporate network or over the Internet. This server hosts Windows Media-based files that are stored on the computer, and you can also broadcast live events.

Windows Media Encoder

Windows Media Encoder lets you encode video and audio content from a Web camera, DV camera, analog video camera, or a DV or analog VCR connected to a capture device on your computer. The video you encode using Windows Media Encoder can be taken from a source such as a video camera or from tape, and it is encoded into Windows Media Format. In addition to recording from a camera or VCR, you can also record video screen captures—video of the actions that occur on your computer screen—into Windows Media files.

When you encode content using Windows Media Encoder, you can choose to record both audio and video, or audio only. You can encode to a file, to a live broadcast stream, or to both at the same time.

In addition to encoding content live or from tape, you can also use Windows Media Encoder to encode (and broadcast, if necessary) existing audio and video files into Windows Media Format.

Windows Media Encoder also lets you deliver a live stream. This lets users watch or listen to the content you are encoding and streaming using Windows Media Player. If your audience consists of 50 people or less and you want to stream live content, you can use Windows Media Encoder as an alternative to using Windows Media Services to stream and distribute the content.

A software development kit (SDK) is available for Windows Media Encoder. This SDK enables software developers to use Microsoft Visual Basic or C++ to build customized applications that incorporate Windows Media encoding technologies.

You can use any existing content you may have already encoded using Windows Media Encoder and then import it directly into Producer. This lets you use existing audio and video files that you have already encoded in your Producer presentations.

How Is Producer Different from PowerPoint?

A question that you might be asking is "How is Producer different from PowerPoint?" Well, that question is pretty easy to answer. You use PowerPoint to create slides (and HTML files) that can serve as the basic building blocks for your final presentation in Producer. PowerPoint lets you create versatile slideshows and presentations that can be used on their own or incorporated into a presentation using Producer.

You then import what you have added in PowerPoint into Producer and combine your PowerPoint creation with other types of digital media to create rich-media presentations.

In Producer, you can take the PowerPoint presentation and enhance it by adding video, audio, HTML files, effects, or transitions, and then synchronize these with your original PowerPoint slides. The final result is a seamless, rich-media presentation that you can deliver over a corporate network, intranet, extranet, CD, or Web site to effectively communicate your message.