

Let Vox Proxy animated characters present your next slide show

by Matt Gebhardt

Applications: Microsoft PowerPoint 2000/2002, Vox Proxy 2

Operating System: Microsoft Windows

If you're looking for an innovative and entertaining way to add some character and personality to your next presentation, you'll want to check out Vox Proxy 2, an interactive multimedia add-in for PowerPoint. Vox Proxy lets you add characters to your slide and animate them in numerous ways to narrate your slides and/or highlight important points, as shown in **Figure A**. You can enter scripts for them to speak, designate expressions and gestures for them, and move them around your slide at will. If executed properly (which isn't nearly as difficult as you might at first imagine), you can use Vox Proxy to lay an animated film or tutorial over all of the slides in your presentation.

A quick look at the add-in's components

Once Vox Proxy is installed, you'll see a Vox Proxy menu seamlessly integrated into the PowerPoint menu bar. For starters, it's a good idea to launch one of the tutorials from this menu—not only do they show you how to use the various components of the add-in, such as the Script Writer and Script Wizard, but they also give you an idea of the versatility and potential of the animations. To illustrate how quickly and easily you can start creating your character animations, we'll step through a simple audio/visual animated routine.

Getting the thumbs-up from Squidge

When you're ready to script your first simple animation, choose Vox Proxy | Script Writer from the PowerPoint's menu bar. Next, click the Wizard button, and then click the Show A New Character button in the resulting Script Wizard. Select a character you want to start with, such as Squidge, from the Select Character list box in the resulting Show Character dialog box, and click Insert.

To make your character speak, select the character in the Script Wizard's list box, and then click the Say Something button. When the Speech Command dialog box appears, simply type what you want the character to say and click Insert, as shown in **Figure B**.

To assign a preset gesture or emotion to your character, click the Do Something button. Then, select an animated sequence or expression, such as Congratulate, from the list box in the resulting Animations For Character dialog box, and click Insert & Close.

Finally, click Close to exit the Script Wizard. Then, to preview this simple masterpiece, which is illustrated in **Figure C**, click the Test button back in the VP Script dialog box.

Inserting complexity into your animations

To say that the simple preceding tutorial is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the possibilities Vox Proxy brings to your presentations is an understatement. You can choose from a multitude of male and female preset voices, and you can change a character's vocal volume, inflection, speed, and pitch on a

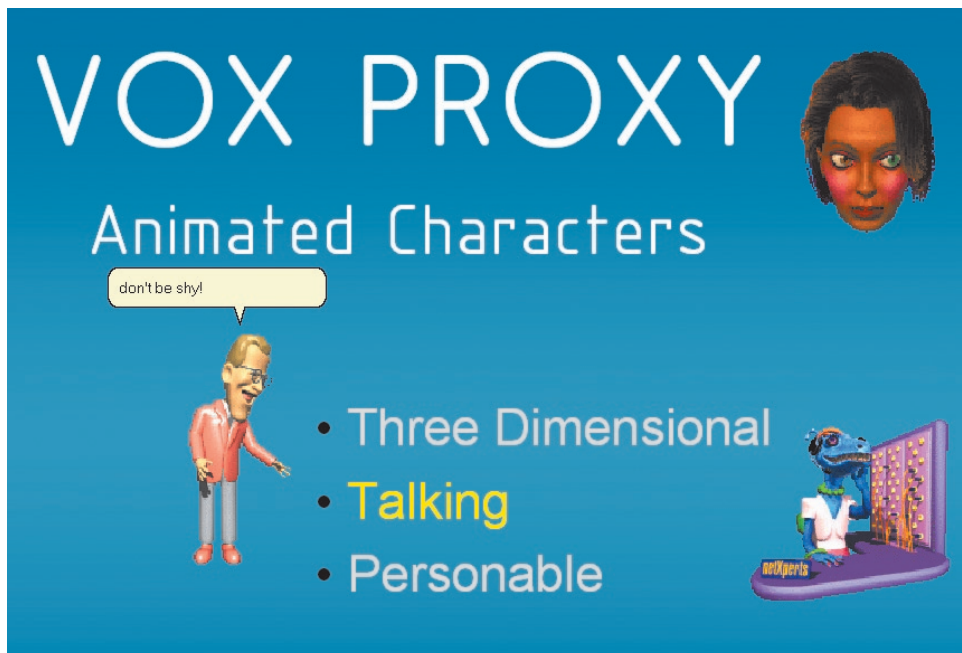


Figure A: Debra, shown here embarrassed, Chuck, shown speaking and pointing, and Marge, shown smiling, are just a sample of the 27 characters and the numerous preset animations included with Vox Proxy 2.

word-by-word basis to create realistic monologues and dialogues (indeed, you can have several characters interact with each other). You can also gain precise control over the placement and movement of the animated characters by using preset slide locations in combination with Vox Proxy's click-and-drag capabilities.

Let an animation speak in your voice:

Using the preset voices and audio modulation tools, you can give characters impressive speech capabilities. To take your characters to the next level in vocal realism, however, Vox Proxy also allows you to record the scripts in your own voice using a microphone and VP speech recognition.

Getting down to business

The best way to learn how easy it is to create sophisticated animations with Vox Proxy is to play around with it (be prepared, as it can be addicting). At the time this article went to print, the online cost for Vox Proxy was \$199. (Note that additional features and services included in the package haven't been covered in this article.) Fortunately, you can download free 30-day trial software from the Vox Proxy Web site, located at www.voxproxy.com, to give yourself a chance to experiment with the animated presentation assistants, fun characters, and other multimedia and tutorial effects before doling out the cash. *

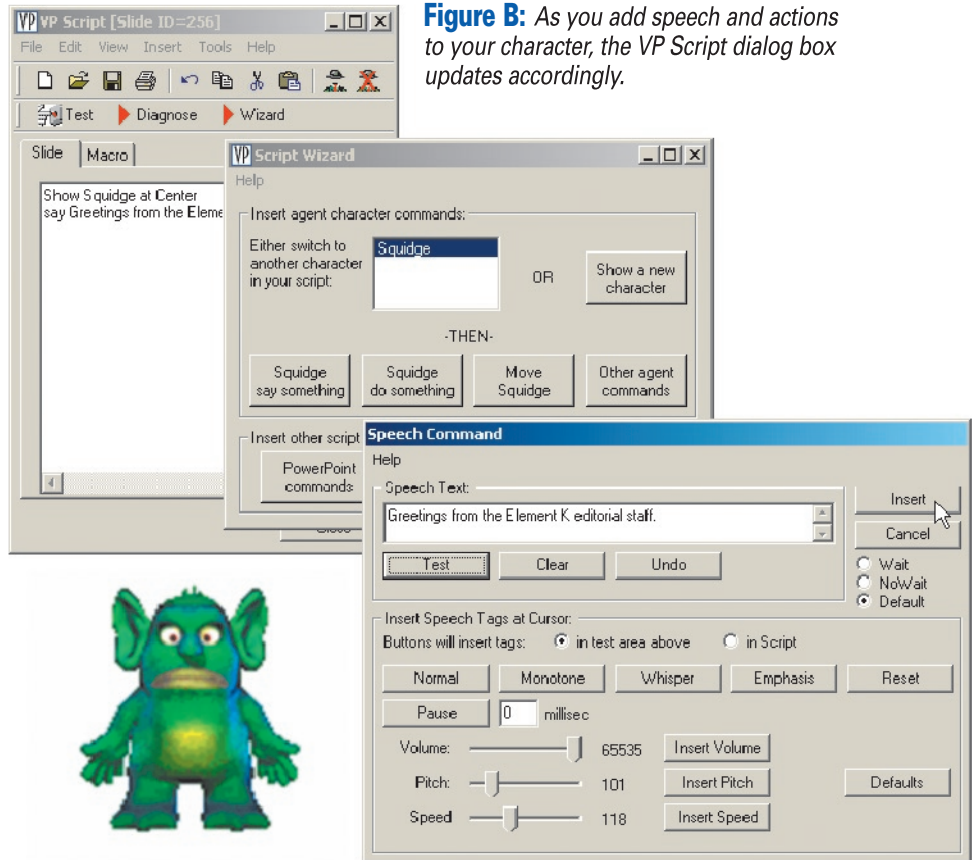


Figure B: As you add speech and actions to your character, the VP Script dialog box updates accordingly.



Figure C: You can opt to have your character's speech displayed as text in addition to the audio component.

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