Computer History Museum

Guide to the Dennis Austin PowerPoint records

Creator: Dennis Austin
Dates: 1984-2007, bulk 1985-1994
Extent: 4.67 linear feet, 3 record cartons and 1 oversize box
Collection number: X6642.2013
Catalog number: 102733943
Collection processed by: Bo Doub and Kim Hayden, 2015
Finding aid prepared by: Bo Doub, Kim Hayden, and Sara Chabino Lott, 2015

Abstract

The Dennis Austin PowerPoint records contain materials documenting the design and development of the slide show presentation software, PowerPoint. The bulk of the collection is from 1986 through 1994 during the time that Dennis Austin was working as a software developer on what became PowerPoint, first at Forethought, Inc. and then at Microsoft after Forethought was purchased by Microsoft in 1987. The records in this collection include Dennis Austin's notes and design drawings, PowerPoint source code, program and feature descriptions, correspondence, user's manuals, promotional material, and business records from Forethought and Microsoft's Graphics Business Unit (GBU). PowerPoint has been included with Microsoft Office from Office's first release in 1990. Dennis Austin had an important role in PowerPoint's design and growth and his records form a unique perspective on one of the most widely-used pieces of software in the world.

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions
The collection is open for research.

Publication Rights
The Computer History Museum (CHM) can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Copyright restrictions may apply and users are responsible for satisfying any claims of the copyright holder. Requests for copying and permission to publish, quote, or reproduce any portion of the Computer History Museum's collection must be obtained jointly from both the copyright holder (if applicable) and the Computer History Museum as owner of the material.

Languages
Collection materials entirely in English.

Preferred Citation
[Identification of Item], [Date], Dennis Austin PowerPoint records, Lot X6642.2013, Box [#], Folder [#], Computer History Museum.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Gift of Dennis Austin, 2013.

Repository
Computer History Museum
1401 N. Shoreline Blvd.
Mountain View, CA 94043
USA
650-810-1010
research@computerhistory.org
www.computerhistory.org

Biographical/Historical Note
First released in 1987, PowerPoint is the world standard in presentation software. It has been included with Microsoft Office since the software suite's first release in 1990. Dennis Austin designed and developed PowerPoint while working at Forethought, Inc., in Mountain View and Sunnyvale, California. He worked closely with Robert Gaskins, who conceived the program, and Tom Rudkin, who helped develop it. Born May 28, 1947, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Austin studied electrical engineering at University of Virginia then attended graduate school at Arizona State University, MIT, and UC Santa Barbara. He worked as a software architect for Burroughs Corporation and Gavilan Computers before joining Forethought in 1984. He worked for Microsoft from 1987 to 1996.

Originally called Presenter, PowerPoint was intended to be a simple program for the creation of professional-looking presentations. PowerPoint was first developed for Apple Macintosh because of the computer's simpler programming interface, superior graphical and textual systems, and eager user base, and Forethought was the first company Apple invested in. The first Mac version was released April 20, 1987. Four months later, Microsoft purchased Forethought and the rights to PowerPoint for $14 million in its first significant software

acquisition. Microsoft continues to release PowerPoint software, building upon the initial version with color, animation, and the slideshows and transitions it is now known for.

For a more detailed history of PowerPoint see:
Sweating bullets : notes about inventing PowerPoint, by Robert Gaskins
http://www.robertgaskins.com/powerpoint-history/sweating-bullets/gaskins-sweating-bullets-webpdf-isbn-9780985142414.pdf

Scope and Content of the Collection
The Dennis Austin PowerPoint records contain materials assembled, and mostly authored, by Dennis Austin as a key designer and developer of the slide show presentation software, PowerPoint. The records span 1984 through 2007 with the bulk of the collection being from 1985 to 1994. The collection follows the design and development of PowerPoint from its beginnings at Forethought, Inc. when its name was "Presenter," to its initial release for the Apple Macintosh in 1987, its purchase by Microsoft later that same year, and through the software's subsequent versions – with the bulk of this collection covering versions 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0. The records in this collection include Dennis Austin's notes and design drawings, PowerPoint source code, program and feature descriptions, correspondence, user's manuals, promotional material, and business records from Forethought and Microsoft's Graphics Business Unit (GBU). Since the late 1980s, PowerPoint has had a significant cultural impact on how people give presentations.

Arrangement
The collection is arranged into 5 series:
> Series 1, Forethought, Inc. records, 1984-1987
> Series 2, PowerPoint source code records, 1985-1988, bulk 1988
> Series 3, PowerPoint versions, 1987-1994
> Series 4, Notes and correspondence, 1985-1996
> Series 5, Promotional material, user's manuals, and ephemera, 1984-2007, bulk 1986-1995

Indexing Terms
Austin, Dennis
Computer programming
Computer software
Computer software design
Computer software--Development
Computer software industry
Microsoft PowerPoint (Computer file)
Source code (Computer science)

Separated Material
Commercial software, ephemera, and media items were separated from the main collection. The software includes Typing Intrigue, Forethought PowerPoint (1987), Forethought FileMaker Plus (1986), and various versions of Microsoft PowerPoint. The Ephemera and media include a PowerPoint mouse pad, buttons, badges, and Desktop Publishing on VHS. To view catalog records for the separated items please search CHM's online catalog at
http://www.computerhistory.org/collections/search.

Related Collections at CHM
Austin, Dennis oral history, 2015-03-31, Lot X7445.2015, Catalog number 102740062

Beginnings of PowerPoint: A Personal Technical Story, 2009, Lot X6511.2012, Catalog number 102745695

Kramlich, Dick (C. Richard) oral history, 2015-03-31, Lot X7447.2015, Catalog number 102740064

PowerPoint demonstrations and panel discussion : Dennis Austin and Thomas A. Rudkin, 2015-03-30, Lot X7444.2015, Catalog number 102740061

Rudkin, Tom (Thomas A.) oral history, 2015-03-31, Lot X7446.2015, Catalog number 102740063

Collection Contents
Series 1, Forethought, Inc. records, 1984-1987
This series contains the business, design, and development records of Forethought, Inc., the company that first created PowerPoint before it was known as PowerPoint. Also included are records surrounding the initial design and development of the presentation software, first titled "Diagram," then "Presenter," and finally "PowerPoint." The records in this series most closely associated with the design of the software are written by Dennis Austin and other employees of Forethought, including Peter Bishop, Tom Rudkin, and Robert Gaskins. These records involve the general planning of the software as well as more specific design elements like user interfaces, slide design, specifications, cutting and pasting within Presenter, and drawing tools – including some of the source code associated with these topics. This series also includes some administrative records from Forethought including a business plan, product proposals, training sessions, and a letter from Apple Computer, Inc.'s Developer Technical Support team confirming Forethought's registration for the new file type and extension: .ppt. This series is arranged chronologically.

Series 2, PowerPoint source code records, 1985-1988, bulk 1988
This series contains PowerPoint source code documents for Apple Macintosh dating from 1985 to 1988, with the bulk of materials from 1988. Code languages include 68000 assembler and Pascal. Of particular interest are programming conventions, an explanation of the internal structure of PowerPoint in Macintosh Programmer's Workshop Pascal units, and notes on testing of Microsoft Windows modules. This series is arranged chronologically.

Series 3, PowerPoint versions, 1987-1994
This series contains software development and design records organized by the different versions of PowerPoint. Most of the records in this series are written by Dennis Austin and appear in the forms of design drawings, software specifications, program and feature descriptions, correspondence, release schedules, and presentation materials. The series begins with records leading up to the release of PowerPoint 2.0 for the Apple Macintosh in 1988 and ends with the PowerPoint 4.0 releases for Windows and Macintosh in 1994. For the records covering the first release of PowerPoint in 1987, see Series 1, "Forethought, Inc. records." Many of the design notes for PowerPoint 2.0 focus on a more dynamic use of color in the software. PowerPoint 2.0 was also the first version of the software to be released for the Microsoft Windows operating system in 1990 (two years later than the version 2.0 release for the Macintosh). This shift to Microsoft Windows is also reflected in both the administrative and design records surrounding PowerPoint 2.0. A major feature represented in the PowerPoint 3.0

records is PowerEdit – the text editing engine used in PowerPoint. In the PowerPoint 4.0 records, the bulk of the records are milestone and review documents created within Microsoft's Graphics Business Unit (GBU). This series is arranged chronologically.

Series 4, Notes and correspondence, 1985-1996
This series contains Dennis Austin's notebooks relating to PowerPoint's design, the administrative records of Microsoft's Graphics Business Unit (GBU), legal documents relating to a patent application, and general writings on software features that are not tied to specific versions of PowerPoint. The notes in this series are mostly handwritten or drawn by Dennis Austin in bound notebooks or loose, undated pages. These records also contain short program descriptions and email correspondence on topics including the use of AppleShare, an early file server and network service at Microsoft's GBU offices, and other writings on general principles of user interface. Of particular interest is a 1996 patent application for an invention by Dennis Austin and Anders Kierulf for a method of black and white printing of color documents. This series is arranged chronologically.

Series 5, Promotional material, user's manuals, and ephemera, 1984-2007, bulk 1986-1995.
This series contains user's manuals, advertisements, brochures and other promotional items, conference programs, 3.5" demonstration discs, and articles pertaining to PowerPoint from 1984 to 2007, with the bulk of materials from 1986 to 1995. The user's manuals are for both Apple Macintosh and Microsoft Windows versions of PowerPoint. Also included are manuals for FileMaker, Factfinder, and Xenix Mail. Articles in this series include Microsoft's purchase of Forethought Inc. in 1987 and reviews of PowerPoint after its releases. Of particular interest is a sales source book, which demonstrates how Microsoft marketed PowerPoint. This series is arranged chronologically.

	Catalog Number	**Title**	**Date**
		Folder List	
		Forethought, Inc. records	
Box 1	102733911	Forethought, Inc. certificates, business plan, and product proposal	1984-1987
Box 1	102733910	Forethought Presenter development	1985-1987
		PowerPoint source code records	
Box 1	102733914	PowerPoint source code	1985-1987
Box 1	102733912	Apple Macintosh PowerPoint 68k source code	1986-1987
Box 1	102733913	Apple Macintosh PowerPoint Pascal source code	1988-05
		PowerPoint versions	
Box 1	102733919	PowerPoint 2.0 development	1987-1990
Box 1	102733921	PowerPoint 3.0 development	1988-1992
Box 1 and 2	102733922	PowerPoint 3.0 development	1989-1991
Box 1	102733920	PowerPoint 2.1 schedule and specification	1990
Box 2	102733923	PowerPoint 4.0 development bugs	1992-1993
Box 2	102733925	PowerPoint 4.0 design	1992-1994
Box 2	102733924	PowerPoint 4.0 specification	1993-07
Box 2	102733926	PowerPoint 4.0 review	1993-1994
		Notes and correspondence	
Box 2	102733916	Contact lists, correspondence, and AppleShare at Microsoft	1985-1994
Box 2	102733915	PowerPoint design notes	1986-1995
Box 2	102733927	Microsoft Graphics Business Unit	1988-1996
Box 2	102733917	PowerPoint user interface notes	1990-1994
Box 2	102733918	Legal documents	1996

	Catalog Number	Title	Date
		Promotional material, user's manuals, and ephemera	
Box 3	102733930	Factfinder user's manual for the Apple Macintosh	1984
Box 3	102733929	FileMaker user's manual for the Apple Macintosh	1985
Box 3	102733940	FileMaker Plus user's manual for the Apple Macintosh	1986
Box 3	102733934	Apple Macintosh Plus brochure : did you ever imagine you could come into power so quickly?	1986-01
Box 3	102733937	Microsoft PowerPoint tutorial and demonstration	1987
Box 3	102733941	PowerPoint user's manual for the Apple Macintosh	1987
Box 3	102733932	Quick reference guide to Xenix Mail : communicating on the XENIX/UNIX multiuser operating system	1987
Box 3	102733936	PowerPoint and Forethought articles	1987-1995; bulk 1987
Box 3	102733939	Microsoft PowerPoint	1988
Box 3	102733938	Microsoft PowerPoint for Windows step by step	1992
Box 3	102733931	Microsoft PowerPoint source book	1992-09-25
Box 4	102733942	PowerPoint double-spread magazine advertisements	1992-1994
Box 3	102733935	PowerPoint promotional material	1992-2007
Box 3	102733933	Apple worldwide developers conference	1994-1995