

VIDEO PRODUCTION WITH SOUNDSLIDES

About Soundslides

Soundslides is a program used by many journalists to make multimedia content for the web. It is cross-platform (PC or Mac), easy-to-use, and has an easy subtitling feature, which is great if you're making stories that require translation. It also has good documentation on its web site and an active user forum, where you can easily get technical and even artistic advice. Finally, it's very stable and works just fine on older and not-very-powerful computers.

The program's main drawback is that while it's great for making stories with photos and audio, it does not import video footage. It's also fussy about file formats, accepting only .mp3 audio files and .jpg images. Soundslides also only has one audio track, which means you must mix your voiceover and audio in Audacity prior to bringing it into Soundslides. A related limitation is that you cannot leave any empty space in its tracks or trim/edit audio in the project, so you have to plan ahead a bit more than you might with video production software.

There are two versions of Soundslides: regular and Plus. Plus is more, but better. The advantages of Plus for digital storytelling are that it allows for pan-and-zoom movement on images and subtitling. Each license allows for one user to install on two machines. There are also volume discounts for 5 or more licenses; you can send an email to the help address for information on volume pricing.

CREATING A DIGITAL STORY IN SOUNDSLIDES

STEP 1. ORGANIZE YOUR PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

1. Before opening Soundslides, you should first put all of the photos you wish to include in your story into a folder. These must all be in .jpg format. If you've been following the workflow/file management protocol outlined in this manual, you should have an original images folder within your desktop story folder.
2. Edit your voiceover in Audacity and mix it with music if you wish. **Be sure to leave approximately 5 seconds of quiet or fading-in music before the storyteller's voiceover kicks in, which will leave room for a title slide, and approximately 10 seconds of fading-down music after the voiceover ends, for credits.** Export from Audacity as an .mp3 file. Note: Soundslides only imports .mp3 audio files.

STEP 2. CREATE SLUGS FOR TITLE AND CREDITS SLIDES

1. Because Soundslides won't allow you to leave any gaps in the timeline, we recommend creating several black "slugs," which are .jpg images filled with black. You can place these in those spots where you don't yet have an image, and later replace them. You can create slugs in a number of ways, including, 1) Make a 854x480 image in Photoshop Elements, and fill it with black, Save as... and select .jpg, 2) Open a new PowerPoint presentation, Format > Slide Background, set color to black, File > Save As... set Format to JPEG. You'll find the .jpg file in a folder created by PowerPoint, which contains each slide exported as a separate .jpg.

STEP 3. IMPORT YOUR MEDIA INTO SOUNDSLIDES

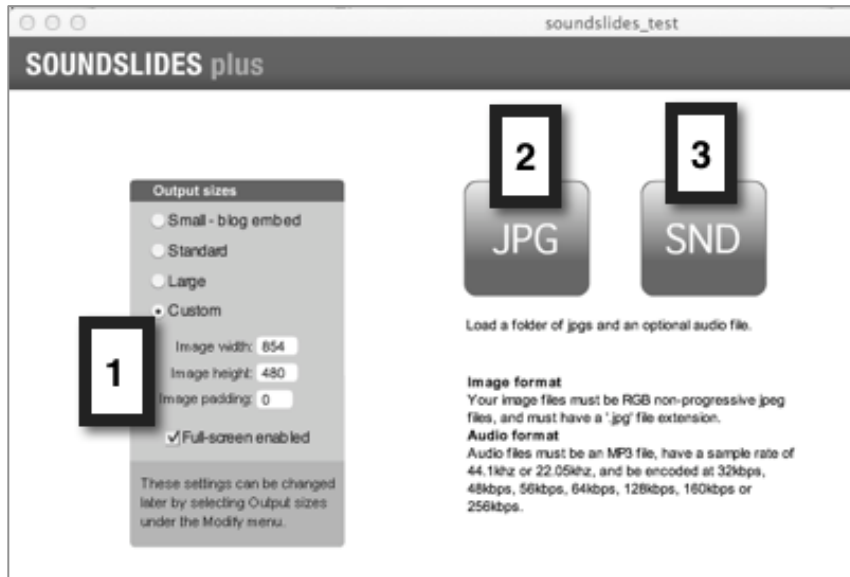


Figure 1. The Soundslides settings page

1. Open Soundslides. Click the “NEW” button.
2. Set the Output size to a Custom size of 854x480 (Fig. 1, 1). This will create a wide-screen video, suitable for uploading to Vimeo or YouTube. Also be sure that the “Full-screen enabled button” is checked (Soundslides Pro only).
3. Click on the “JPG” button (Fig. 1, 2), navigate to your folder of images, and import. All images must be JPEGs.
4. Click on the “SND” button (Fig. 1, 3), navigate to your audio track, and import.



Figure 2. The Soundslides interface

STEP 4. ARRANGE AND SYNC

1. The editing in Soundslides happens in an interface that includes a Preview Window (Fig. 2, 1), a set of tabs (Fig. 2, 2), and a timeline (Fig. 2, 3).
2. Begin by clicking on the SLIDES tab (Fig. 7.2, 2) and dragging your photos into the order you wish them to appear. If you need to import additional images, you can do so by clicking the +ADD IMAGE link at the bottom of the slides area. If you wish to remove images, drag them into the Bin. Import the black slug and use it to fill gaps in the story, to be replaced later with photographs.
3. Adjust the timing by listening to the project play and dragging the slide markers between photos (Fig. 2, 4), to change the end point of each photo.

STEP 4B. IMPORT ADDITIONAL IMAGES/DELETE IMAGES AS NECESSARY

1. If you wish to add an image and do not want to badly mess up your audio/image timing, first add the image using the +ADD IMAGE command (Fig. 3, 1), then, rather than dragging it to another location in the SLIDES window, drag the image into the timeline in the approximate place you wish it to appear (Fig. 3, 2). The new image will fill the remaining space of the photo your cursor intersects, without affecting the timing of images to the right or left of it. Avoid, however, pulling one image into multiple places in the timeline. This will confuse Soundslides and may corrupt your file.



Figure 3. Drag-and-drop editing

1. If you wish to replace one image with a different image, drag the playhead in the timeline until the playhead is over the image you wish to replace – you'll see it has a red border around it in the SLIDES window. Click on SLIDE INFO, and click the Update Image button. Navigate to the photo you wish to insert, click Open, and the new photo will replace the old photo.

STEP 5. ADD TRANSITIONS

1. By default, there is a straight cut between photos. You can change individual transitions by clicking on the transition connector (Fig. 2, 5) and selecting another transition type. You can also change transition duration in this manner.

STEP 6. ADD PAN AND ZOOMS

1. Drag the playhead in the timeline until the playhead is over the image you wish to add motion to.
2. Click the SLIDE INFO tab.
3. Click MOVEMENT, just below SLIDE INFO.
4. Adjust the area of focus in the START and END images, by dragging the zoom bar just below each photograph. You can change the area of focus by pushing START and END images within their frames in this window.

STEP 7. REPLACE THE TITLE AND CREDIT SLUGS WITH REAL SLIDES

1. Follow the instructions in Step 4b to replace your black slugs with title and credits slides made in PowerPoint or Photoshop.

STEP 8. EXPORT AND CONVERT TO A VIDEO

1. By default, Soundslides' basic export creates a folder of files that you can upload to a web site. For your purposes, this probably isn't very useful. Instead, you'll want to export your project in a zipped file and use Soundslides' online converter to turn that file into a video file, which you can then upload to Vimeo or YouTube. Follow these steps:
2. On the Soundslides menu at the top of your screen, choose FILE > EXPORT AND ZIP. This will create a folder of materials; look in this folder and find the file called "publish_to_web.zip."
3. Go to the Soundslides online convertor at <http://video.soundslides.net/converter/>.
4. Select the Preset size of DV (854x480) 16:9. Enter your email address, and click on the CONTINUE... button. Navigate to the publish_to_web.zip file on your computer and submit it. You'll receive an email with a download link when your video is converted (this typically takes 20-30 minutes).
5. You can then upload this file to Vimeo or YouTube.

STEP 9. LEARN MORE

1. The documentation of Soundslides is useful: <http://support.soundslides.com/index.php?pg=kb.book&id=2>.
2. Also, you'll learn some useful tips if you spend some time on the user forums: <http://forums.soundslides.com/>

IMPORTANT NOTES FOR THOSE HANDING OFF FILES TO STORYBUILDERS FOR POST-PRODUCTION

WHAT FILES WE'LL NEED

Storybuilders typically post-produces stories, that is, we 'clean up' the audio recordings, crop and clean up images, and if a story is already in Soundslides, make finesse edits to timing and pan-and-zooms. We need, at minimum, the following files to do this:

1. The original .wav file of the voiceover.
2. The original images. If images have been downloaded from Flickr or Google Images, we need links to the original images or citation information.
3. A Word copy of the script, with annotations specifying which images should appear where in the story (by file name or, if the image hasn't yet been acquired, a brief description).

These files should all be in one folder, the same desktop story folder that you've been placing materials in throughout the project.

If you have a Soundslides project that we can work from, this should also be sent to us. You'll need, however, to give us not just the Soundslides file (which has the extension .ssproj), but an exported and zipped version of the project and its media. Do this by going to the top menu in Soundslides and selecting File > Export and Zip. This will create a bunch of files; the one you should send to us has

the name `publish_to_web.zip`. It would be helpful if you also sent us the original `.wav` file of the voiceover.

HOW TO SEND FILES TO LISA

You'll need to zip your desktop story folder if you wish to email it to Storybuilders, but it may, even after it is zipped, be too big to transfer via email. Zip or compress a folder by right-clicking on it and selecting the Compress option. We often use a shared Dropbox folder to exchange large file-size materials with clients; another option is Google Drive.

DISTRIBUTION

YOUTUBE AND VIMEO

Once you have exported your video file, it's easy to upload it to a video sharing service like YouTube or Vimeo. We prefer Vimeo because it's less commercial than YouTube, has a cleaner interface, and has more options to control who can access the video. However, either platform works fine.

OTHER IMPORTANT DISTRIBUTION CONCERNS

Be sure to carefully attend to legal and ethical matters related to digital stories, such as getting consent to share the video from those who created it and being sure that no one is represented in the story in an unethical way.

All storytellers you work with after this workshop should complete and sign a consent/release form, which verifies the storyteller's consent to share the story.