

Best Practices on Including Animations into Online Centra Sessions

Embedding animations in online lessons is a common need when delivering training sessions related to meteorology. There is often the need to show to the students animated loops of satellite or radar images as well as numerical model outputs.

In the following some practices on how to embed such animations in **Centra online sessions** will be presented.

There are several ways of embedding animations, each with their own weaknesses and strengths.

In this document the following method/format will be handled:

- Animated GIF
- Flash animation
- MOV/Quicktime/AVI
- Application Share
- File to Download

In the final chapter “Conclusion” the best practices are highlighted.

1. Animated GIFs

Make out of your images an animated GIF (you can use software like “Easy GIF animator” available as 30 days trial version; UNIX environment also offers the possibility to realize animated GIFs).

Start by clicking the “Import” icon in the Agenda section of the Centra session interface. A dialog box will pop up: select your animated gif from your hard disk and choose “All allowed files” under “Files of Type:”. Click Open and you’re done (see figure 1).

The animated GIF will be placed at the end of the existing Agenda in a separate slide. If you need to place it in the middle of the Agenda slides, you shall use the Agenda Builder, which is a separate application offered by Saba Centra.

Strength

Old-fashioned method but guaranteed to work. It allows markup and annotations, for example the presenter may address some specific details of the running images though the laser pointer!

Weakness

To be avoided animations of large size, preferably not above 3 MB, as some slow connections may take more than a minute to load the animation, causing interruptions in the rhythm of the online lesson.

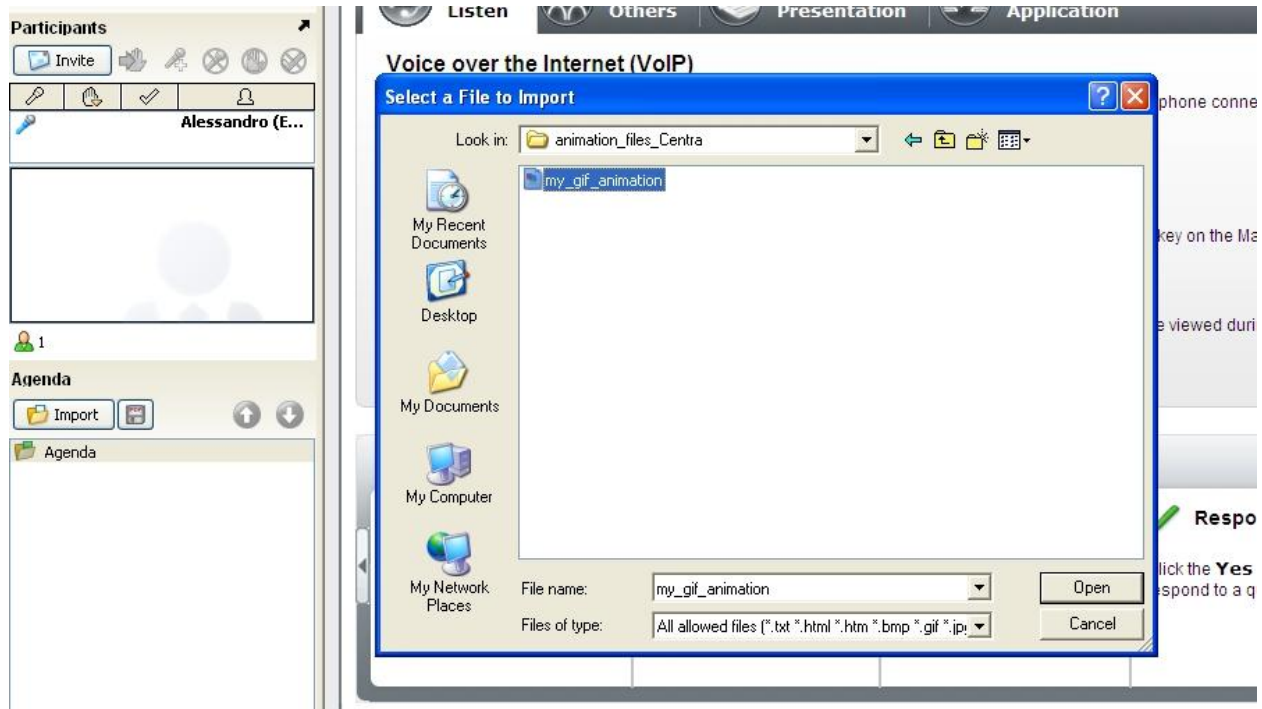


Figure 1. Inserting an animated GIF into the Centra Agenda of a running session.

2. SWF animation

If the presenter has the animation as a swf file, he/she might try to run it in Centra using the same “Import” procedure explained in Animated GIFs.

Strengths

SWF is a fantastic animation format to create rather long animations in a relatively small file size. While sharing the page in Centra, participants can individually use the animation controls (if the swf author has included them in the animation).

Weakness

It is never 100% sure it runs on every end without problems and it does not allow annotations, i.e. the presenter won't be able to point on some details in the animation.

SWF does not allow annotations

3. Other animations

The presenter might wish to include mov/qt/avi files containing the animations directly into the Centra agenda. Again the procedure is similar to the one explained in Animated GIFs.

Strengths

Changing existing mov/qt/avi files to swf-format or animated gifs can be elaborate. This method saves time to use them as they are.

Weakness

The presenter shall remember that the user's PC will try to open any of these file types with a default player and that can cause a different outcome for each user; they may get a dialog box asking which software to use for this format, etc. Annotations will not be possible on animations.

4. Application Sharing

The presenter might choose to show the animation through the Application Sharing tool, i.e. by sharing with the other connections the application running the animation on his/her own PC (for example MediaPlayer, QuickTime, etc).

Strengths

The animation is shown directly from presenter's desktop – no viewing software needed at participants' side.

Weakness

This method is not recommended because the effect can look bad with presenter PC trying to transfer consecutive frames to all participants while the old frames are not yet loaded completely at participants' end. Outcome can be really messy.

5. Download by users

The presenter can embed the animation files, whatever is their format, during the Centra meeting (or in the planning phase with Agenda Builder) by selecting

File > Insert File to Download. This will then allow people to download your animation file and run it at their PCs.

Strength

Centra will remain free for progressing with the presentation as the animation load elsewhere in external application.

No time wasted during the session for waiting the animation to appear on every screen, as in case of direct inclusions (see points 2 and 3).

It allows transfer of large animation files.

It will allow people to Save the animations locally.

Weakness

It requires to user to have the right software to open the animation-file. The presenter has to choose a common format.

Conclusions

The presenter willing to add an animation file in the online lesson is suggested to use the following practices:

- A. For animation files below 3 MB, GIF animation and direct inclusion in Centra Agenda.
- B. For large animations above 3 MB (but also small animation as well), inclusion in the online session as “File to Download”.