Quick Guide: Free Image and Screen Capture Tools

Two free screen capture tools are currently in use by instructors at the University of Maryland: Jing and Screencast-o-Matic. This document provides a step-by-step guide as well as a comparative evaluation of both tools.

Using Jing for Image and Screen Capture

Jing is a free, cross-platform tool that is a useful aid in creating images for “how-to” documentation or informal instructional videos.

Jing can be downloaded at http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html and requires the additional creation of a Screencast account. Jing can save and store up 2 gigabytes of content to the Screencast server for easy access to images and videos anytime, anywhere.

Note: The email you provide is subsequently verified, so an accessible address is necessary.

Recording an Image with Jing

When you download and install the application, the Jing toolset is made available from a “sun” icon that is found either in top right corner of the screen (Mac) or in the top center of the screen (Windows). Jing tools include: Selection icon, History icon, and Preferences icon.
Click on the Selection icon (crosshairs) on the Jing “sun” in order to select a region of the screen. Drag the cursor to define the region on the computer screen. The selected region will be masked in grey.

A selection toolbar enables you to determine what to do with the selected region. From left to right the tools are: Capture image, Record screen, Redo (the selection) and Cancel (the selection).

Choose the **Capture Image** option. This results in the availability of an editing toolbar with which you can annotate the image. The tools, from top to bottom, enable you to draw an arrow on the image, superimpose a text box on the image, draw a rectangle, or drag highlighting through a portion of the image. In addition, you can determine the color the arrow, text, rectangle or highlighter with the color selection swatch at the bottom of the toolbar. Undo and Redo icons enable you to change your mind about the incorporation of an annotation layer on the image.
A row of icons at the bottom of the Jing editor window enables you to determine how and where to save the finished image. From left to right the options include, Save to Screencast, Save a copy to local computer, Copy image (which would necessitate pasting it before placing anything else on your computer’s clipboard), or Cancel. When saving to Screencast or locally, you can also provide a filename in the Name: field. By default the file name includes a random number and the day’s date.

**Recording Video with Jing**

With the **Record Screen** tool you can capture screen activity as well as provide narration of the unfolding events. Start the video capture process by clicking on Selection tool. Drag the cursor to select the region of your computer screen within which action should be recorded.

Click on the Record Screen tool to start recording. Jing will then alert you that the microphone is on and count down from three. Any action performed in the selected area will be recorded to shockwave video format (SWF).

While you are recording, a set of tools at the bottom of the screen enables you to Finish, Pause, Mute (the microphone), Redo the screen selection, or Cancel. In addition, you can
track the length of the recording through the elapsed time field. There is a maximum time limit of five minutes per recording. In order to preview the file you must have Adobe Flash player installed. Save the file using whichever option is appropriate to your needs.

Using Screencast-o-Matic

Screencast-o-Matic is free screen capture software for the Mac operating system that can be downloaded at http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/. SOM does not require the creation of an account and can be used immediately upon download completion. This software can be used to record brief videos.

Recording video with Screencast-o-matic

You may be prompted upon opening SOM to “Enable Pro Features” by purchasing a more robust version. This is not necessary and all of the functions shown in this tutorial can be accessed by clicking the “Use Free Version” button on the bottom right of the window.

Once you successfully download Screencast-o-matic, the recording window opens automatically. You can change the camera source, microphone source, or resolution with options along the bottom of the window (highlighted in red). To change the size of the
window, you can drag the white squares in the corners of the screen in the desired direction. To begin recording, click the red icon, the button furthest to the left.

Select Record to start a three second countdown to begin recording the contents of the selected area. Cursor movement inside of the frame is highlighted with blue and yellow marks in the final recording, so erratic movement should be avoided. Additionally, as soon as the image recording begins, microphone recording starts as well and narration can be added. Your cursor movements are tracked with additional special effects for emphasis. SOM has a 15 minute video recording limit.

Select the Done icon on the bottom right of the window to end the recording session. You will automatically be redirected to a review window, where you can preview what you
have recorded and choose how the file will be saved. Publishing to Screencast-o-Matic allows you to upload the video to the cloud, but requires that an account be created with SOM. Similarly, publishing to Youtube enables you and others to access the content online, but also requires a Youtube account. Finally, publishing to Video File allows you to save the file locally in an MP4, AVI, FLV, or GIF format. Select “Done with this recording” to delete the video clip.

SOM will close once the file has been saved or uploaded. In order to record another video, the program must be reopened.

Additional Features:

Pausing: To pause a recording, hold “option” and “P” at the same time. Recording is restarted by selecting the red record button again.

Captioning: Captioning can be accomplished one of two ways. First, you have the option of creating a .txt file that specifies the time at which you want the caption to display. This would be represented by the number, a comma and a space, and the second number (0, 8). On the second line, you would provide the text for the caption. This can be repeated as a new line for every caption, and it is attached to the file just before the file is saved under the “caption” subheading. The second option is to add a note at the desire time; this function is also found in the menu just before the file is saved, under “note,” and it requires no external file.

Disabling functions: To remove the highlighting done to emphasize cursor movement, select “advanced options” at the final menu before you save and uncheck all of the annotations you do not want. Here, you can also remove either the video or the audio from the file.
Screencast-o-Matic Vs. Jing

Screencast-o-Matic:

Pro:
✓ User can upload directly to Youtube
✓ Includes visual representation of mouse clicks so viewer can see what is occurring onscreen
✓ Enables user to review video immediately
✓ Allows user to choose video quality at time of recording
✓ 15 minute record time

Con:
✓ Unpolished user interface
✓ At times difficult to minimize
✓ Prompts user to “Enable Pro Features” with every use, can be irritating
✓ Pro features cost $15 /year
✓ Closes after recording review, must be manually reopened
✓ Can be difficult to move recording box, as the edge must be clicked precisely
✓ No help services of any kind

Jing:

Pro:
✓ User friendly interface
✓ Easy to install, download directly from site
✓ Requires user to choose microphone source, no confusion
✓ Easy to follow tutorial videos
✓ “Help” services genuinely helpful

Con:
✓ 5 minute record limit
✓ Does not allow user to choose resolution
✓ Requires Flash to review video without saving

Conclusion:
Screencast-o-Matic is a more powerful tool because it offers more choices in creation and in publication. However, Jing is more intuitive and is mature and supported software. Jing would serve the casual or new user better because of its robust graphical interface and helpful support. For a users that requires additional functionality, the longer record times and resolution options of Screencast-o-Matic may be worth the occasional frustration.