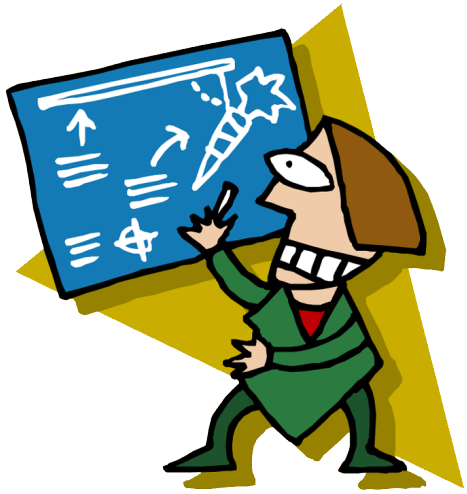


Chapter 6: Project Planning & Production

After completing this module, you'll be able to:

- plan a Flash project.
- consider design issues in producing a Flash project.
- package and publish a Flash project.

Although it's fun to jumping into the production of Flash project, planning is important when building effective information and instructional experiences.

Planning Flash Projects

Audience

Begin by focusing on the audience. Ask yourself:

- For whom is your project aimed?
- What are the characteristics of your learners or patrons?
- What are their ages, developmental level, socio-economic status, geographical location, and other demographics?
- What are the learning styles of these people?
- How are they motivated?
- Do these people have specific interests or special needs?
- What technology is available to these people?

Purpose

Next, consider the purpose of the project. Ask yourself:

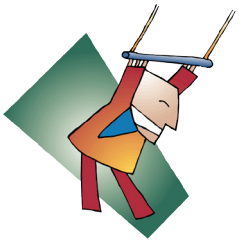
- What are the goals and objectives for the project?
- How will you know if you've reached those goals?

Architecture

Many designers use concept maps and storyboards to visualize the information architecture of their project.

- How will the project be organized and structured?
- What information will be incorporated?
- What audio, video, and visual elements will be included?
- What level of interactivity is necessary to meet the goals of the project?
- What guidance will be provided for users of the project?

Investigate



Explore **The Artist's Toolkit** and **Hands-On Crafts**.
http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/planning.htm

How is information organized and presented? What guidance is provided to new users? Create a diagram that visualizes one of these projects. What suggestions would you would provide the developers for revising their project?

Design Issues

Although you can do almost anything with Flash, it's important to consider the needs of the end user. Standards have been developed to promote consistency and accessibility in these kinds of projects. Ask yourself:

- How will visually impaired users access your Flash project?
- Are adequate instructions provided for new users?

Accessibility

Because Flash is a graphical interface and most of the text can't be read by screen readers, it's important to consider accessibility in the design. Unlike web pages, there is no way to provide alternative text for images and animations. Standard web navigation doesn't apply. Fortunately, JAWS supports Flash Player. People using Internet Explorer and Flash Player can make use of the Microsoft Active Accessibility (MSAA) standard.

Use the Accessibility Panel to incorporate text equivalents for graphic elements including buttons, navigation, and animated text. Consider using a long description for the entire movie rather than many smaller descriptions.

As you design materials, be certain that you have consider use by those with special needs. Your materials should meet the requirements of Section 508 (WebAIM Section 508 Checklist).

There are two approaches to accessibility. First, you may build accessibility into your Flash project. Second, you may create an alternative version of your project. For example, examine the Flash and Nonflash versions of Sinking City of Venice and Dirty Bomb: Sources of Radiation from PBS NOVA.

Testing and Usability

Usability testing helps developers identify how people use their projects and where they may encounter difficulty in use. Careful testing and revision can significantly reduce development, training and support costs. In addition, it can improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and appeal of web-based materials.

User Notes

As you plan for a variety of users, consider their needs.

First, provide quality directions for the user about what they can expect from the project. Also, provide a key to icons or navigation that might be confusing.

Second, remind users about the need to download the Flash Player software. Be sure to include the link.

Third, some Flash projects will require time to load. As such, you may want to start your project with a note indicating that your Flash project is loading.

Packaging & Publishing

Much of the fun of Flash is enjoying the reaction of others. Be sure to share your projects with others!

File Sharing

Begin by thinking about the best way to share. You'll probably want to export your project as a .swf movie so that end users will only need the Flash Player to run it. You may also want to provide a link to the Flash Player software or provide instructions for use.

Project Presentation

Consider how the project is presented to the end user. Does your project have a title page or introductory graphic? Will people understand the purpose of the project or is some explanation needed? How will users access help? Is your project part of a larger website or CD program?

Web-based. Many Flash projects are served on websites. The entire website may be Flash-based or Flash movies may be integrated as special features for specific purposes such as tutorials.

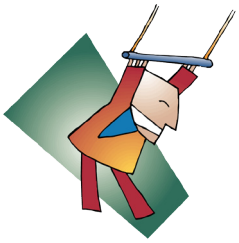
Rather than one long Flash project, consider creating a series of quickly loading movies that can be embedded on web pages.

CD/DVD. Flash projects can be shared on CD, DVD, or through network servers. Some people prefer the CD, DVD, or local server option because websites sometimes become unavailable. On the other hand, while a website is easily updated, a CD or DVD can quickly become dated.

Flash Player Detection

Some developers add the Flash components to their website, then tell users to get the Flash Player if they don't have it. Others want to automatically detect for a Flash Player. A Flash Player Detection Kit is incorporated into Flash Professional. To learn more about player detection, go to the Flash Player Detection Kit page at Adobe.

Investigate



Explore **ASPIRE Physics Labs** and **UIUC Projects**.
http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/package.htm

Notice how Flash is incorporated into the project websites. In some cases, links have been added to the page. In other cases, the Flash in embedded on the page. What approach is most effective? Why?

Learn More

As you work on projects, keep in mind the many resources available to you through print and online resources. An updated list of resources can be found with the online materials for each chapter of this book.

Evaluation	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/evaluate.htm
Basics	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/basics.htm
Animation	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/animation.htm
Interaction	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/interaction.htm
Multimedia	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/multimedia.htm
Planning	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/planning.htm
Issues	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/issues.htm
Packaging	http://www.eduscapes.com/flash/package.htm

Also, keep in mind that the Adobe website at http://adobe.com/flash updates their resources as new versions of the software are introduced.

Although you can find many books in your library on the topic of Flash, seek out materials that match your version.

AIM Your Project with Flash: Project Planning & Production

Your Flash project should be useful, purposeful, and substantial. The guidelines are flexible enough to meet the professional needs of most students. Although there are many applications, it is suggested that you focus on one of the following areas:

- Digital Tutorial
- Digital Collection
- Interactive Exhibit
- Electronic Book
- Sophisticated E-card
- Simulation
- Website Component Makeover (splash, headings, advertisement, ecard)

Although the final product is flexible, you must include the following elements:

- Website page linking to the required components
- Project Report
  - Visual plan/storyboard
  - Written plan highlighting:

  + design (i.e., audience need, goals, purpose, context for use)
  + features (i.e., text, graphics, layers, animation, interaction/ActionScripts, multimedia)
  + user interface (i.e., considerations to address user needs, accessibility)
  + formative evaluation (i.e., usability testing, at least 3 outside evaluations)
  + personal reflection (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, desires, frustrations, wishes)
  + convincing argument for Flash use for this task
- Published, web-based .swf file
- Original .fla file burned to CD or uploaded to web space

Project Evaluation

- Project report
  - o visual plan/storyboard
  - o design
  - o features
  - o user interface
  - o formative evaluation
  - o personal reflection
  - o convincing argument
  - o professionally presented
- Basic Elements (i.e., effective use of text, graphics, layers, symbols)
- Animation
- Interaction
- Multimedia
- Properly exported and linked to website

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