Flash 4 –Subtly Awesome
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Macromedia's Flash 4 has only been out 30 days and it's already proven invaluable to multimedia web publishers. Improvements range from subtle time-saving interface enhancements to full adoption of totally awesome technology including MP3 and QuickTime. This overview and technical presentation is based on information directly from Macromedia as well as local professionals' experiences using Flash since its first beta.

Presentation Highlights:
Macromedia Positioning—

Flash 4 is a significant upgrade. Macromedia added both technical features and productivity enhancements.

"Why Flash?"
High production value—that is, producers can efficiently reach a wide range of users with a consistent product. The result is a better web experience for the users.
And finally, Flash has been widely adopted as **the** vector standard.

Not only is the Flash "SWF" file format "open", but now the player source (runtime/plugin) is free!

Flash 4 is a result of customer feedback… Macromedia listened and has given us:
high-fidelity streaming audio,
significant workflow and usability enhancements, and
through its popularity, a truly ubiquitous file format.

Distinctive	Experience	Everywhere
Distinctive features of Flash which produce high-quality web sites with consistent design include: Natural drawing tools, conventional animation features, enhanced bitmap support[4], editable text fields[4], sophisticated interactivity[4], and synchronized MP3 compressed audio[4].	The user *experience* is better because the delivery is fast and a quality experience instills a better impression. Since it's rendered live, graphics and text are anti-aliased. Since it's vector full-screen playback is possible while files size is small. Flash streams the playback without special server software. Stand-alone projectors are a browserless distribution method (which now support web-linked "load movie" and "getURL"[4] as well as cross platform delivery—without needing to buy two copies of Flash![4]).	The broad reach and distribution of Flash means it will be, literally, *everywhere*! Broad adoption from "partners" include such cross-breeds as Flash in your PDA (and that's just the start).

[4] = new features for Flash 4

New Feature Tour—

Interface enhancements: Standard "shift-drag" behavior; Dock-able timeline; Library hierarchy (folders); Border/Fills default; Curved corners on boxes; Custom colors loaded from file; Hex values for colors.

Animation enhancements: Layer properties to force "guide", "mask", "guided" or "masked"; "Snap to Guide" in keyframe properties; Automatic keyframes; right-mouse motion tween; timeline magnification.

Audio enhancements: Scrub-able sounds (for synchronization); MP3 export settings and preview.

Editable text: "Fields" are a new type of text block; properties include password and custom associated variable; user can copy/paste; "Action Scripts" can modify text content at runtime.

Enhanced interactivity: "Action Scripts" ("Flingo", if you will) provide simple scripting; new actions including "drag movie clip", "get" or "set" variables or properties (like graphic screen location); logical "if-then", "loop", and "call" (for subroutines); and form "GET" and "POST".

New "Publish" feature: A replacement to "Aftershock". It's a well-designed interface to create multiple file formats and associated HTML for consistent publishing (templates are possible).

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Advanced Features—

QuickTime 4 Export: QuickTime 4 supports Flash 3 as a media layer; now Flash 4 can be used to assemble QuickTime videos with a layer of Flash (on top) with interactivity (such as "go to frame"). Scrubbing is possible although the soundtrack is not audible.

JavaScript: The new "Action Scripts" provide sophisticated programming possibilities. With the exception of form GET and POST, Flash can not "talk" to the browser (and the browser can't "talk" to Flash)—unless you channel everything through JavaScript and the "FSCommand" Flash object properties. (For more on this topic see: www.teleport.com/~phillip/ucon99/presentation)

Resources:

Flash Courses:

Pacific Northwest College of Art:
http://www.pnca.edu/htmls/pro/ce/courses/Flash_Animation_for_WWW.html

University of Oregon – Portland
http://web.uoregon.edu/elect.html

Portland State University:
http://www.extended.pdx.edu/mmedia/

QuickTime Information:

Snowboard example file:
www.apple.com/quicktime/overview/flash.html

Scant information from Macromedia:
www.macromedia.com/software/flash/qt4

Resources related to Quicktime:
http://www.apple.com/quicktime/authoring/resources.html

Flash Information:

Bertoflash:
www.bertoflash.nu/

Flash Zone:
www.flashzone.com/

Flasher ListServ:
http://www.chinwag.com/html/mailing_lists_0.html

The Flash Academy:
http://www.enetserve.com/tutorials/

Flash Central:
http://www.flashcentral.com/

JavaScript Demo:
http://www.macromedia.com/support/flash/how/subjects/javascriptdemo/

Scripting with Flash:
http://www.macromedia.com/support/flash/how/subjects/scriptingwithflash/

Moock>>web>>Flash:
http://colinmoock.iceinc.com/webdesign/flash/

Web Monkey:
http://www.hotwired.com/webmonkey/multimedia/

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