

Flash 5 Unveiled!

Multimedia | Internet Developers Group (16 August 2000)

Overview: _____

To say Flash 5 is a major upgrade is an understatement. It's impossible to encapsulate everything new on a single sheet of paper or in a 90 minute presentation. The new version has an entirely new programming language based on JavaScript, enhanced drawing capabilities, and productivity enhancements such as shared libraries and "smart clips". This presentation will touch on aspects most interesting to 4 local beta testers.

Outline: _____

James Penberthy:

Flash introduction and overview (including statistics for the Flash Player growth and penetration).
Overview of new interface in Flash 5 including: Panels and Customization.

Phillip Kerman:

New Actions panel, Shared Library, External Scripts, and Smart Clips.

Beta users samples: scriptable color, sound control, clock, HTML text inside Flash, custom cursor.

Credits: Chris Glaubitz, Answerthink, London, chrisg@flash5.com

Samuel Wan <http://samuelwan.com/publicf5/>

Branden Hall FigLeaf Software

Darrel Plant:

Clip instance scripts. Functions. Compare to Director "behaviors" ("this" vs. "me").
Future need for Director

Kim Markegard:

Built in objects (like Date and Sound). Homemade Objects. Inheritance. Sockets.

Other topics to be covered:

New timeline, new defaults (including Movie Clip), and Movie Explorer.

Tools including new Pen Tool. Loading native Freehand 9 files and "Edit original" feature.

New Features: _____

Compatible

- Interface matches Dreamweaver/Freehand/Fireworks where applicable.
- Native Freehand 9 file import (also, both Illustrator 9 and Freehand 9 can export .SWFs).
- Launch and edit original media files.
- Dragable guides.
- Standard color selection.
- Pen tool.
- Stage zoom.
- Both .PCT and .BMP import (w/QuickTime).

Revolutionary

- Smart Clips (like Director's behaviors).
- Custom UIs for Smart Clips.
- HTML text.
- Movie Explorer for "whole file" viewing.
- XML interchange.
- Sockets.
- "Dashboard" makes Flash connected to community.

Improved

- New defaults:
Go To and Play; view anti-aliased text; Movie Clip
- Direct import of MP3.
- No recompression necessary for imported media.
- New timeline similar to Director's (can disable).
- Script window:
Resizable; colored text, Normal/Expert modes
- Customizable interface:
Save panel sets; reassign quick keys.
- Player performance improved.

Finally

- Shared Libraries (including shared fonts).
- External Scripts.
- Debugger.
- Create clips at runtime (not just Duplicate Clip).
- ActionScript a real language:
Dot syntax; objects; functions; Sound control;
ECMAScript standard;

What does it mean?: _____

Pen tool: This welcomed addition is unlikely to cause a migration of Illustrator and Freehand users.

Dragable guides: People who don't know about Guide Layers will love it, others will be unimpressed.

Programming: On the one hand non-programmers will feel alienated--but they shouldn't! While you do need to unlearn funky things like TellTarget, the time invested will be returned in time savings. The new programming makes things easier. Where before you had to be super creative to achieve complex tasks, now there are multiple routes to the same destination--meaning you can use whatever solution makes sense. In addition, you can benefit from others' code--either the new programmers coming to Flash 5 or all the existing JavaScript code and resources.

Clichés: Just like many trends caused by creative Flash 4'ers... there will be many with Flash 5. My predictions: the new "hide mouse" (and _xMouse, _yMouse properties) will mean custom cursors--many of which will be animated. The new ActionScript control over color will mean everyone will have dynamically colored clips. There will be more...

Is this "curtains" for Director?: _____

Not quite. Currently people use Director when they could (possibly more appropriately) use Flash. Considering Flash for jobs previously suited for Director will increase. Consider the following comparisons.

Real programming: Flash 4 had limited programming capabilities. You could do cool stuff, but you'd have to be creative--almost sneaky. Director has been increasing its programming capabilities for years to the current state with dot syntax, object orientation, and behaviors. Flash 5 almost blows this away as they've practically written a language from the ground up. Based on the ECMA standard (same as JavaScript) no one could argue Flash 5 can't "do programming".

Web ability: The Flash player is ubiquitous, Director's Shockwave plug-in isn't as popular. That aside, Director and Flash are comparable in web support. Director, however, can import Flash media.

Raster support: Raster graphics (like .JPG, .GIF, .BMP) can look good in Director or Flash--provided you don't scale the image. In either tool, you can control compression. Raster graphics tend to look bad in Flash, but this has more to do with the author and the situation. Director, however, can display raster graphics faster.

Scalability: Flash movies scale to any window size--so does Director Shockwave. The fact is, people tend to avoid this feature as it can remove your control over the aspect ratio of a window--affecting design and layout. When done effectively either tool is comparable. Vector media looks great in either. Raster graphics look poor.

3D: Neither Flash nor Director support runtime 3D. However, Intel and Macromedia have demonstrated new 3D technology in Shockwave. It's high performance and has scalable quality.

The bottom line: It's fair to say only Director is appropriate for the following: Stand alone applications which have to "talk" to other applications or read and write data to the user's hard drive; anytime you need video (Flash doesn't support video); and, linking to external media formats (as Flash can only support .SWF media dynamically). There are probably a few other esoteric and specific situations. Obviously, other considerations need to be made like whether legacy code exists or people who know one tool over the other are available.

Smart Clips: This will be major. Not only can you create ad hoc Smart Clips, you can build a library of SCs to recycle. Also, others will provide SCs (with or without the custom UIs). SCs are to Flash what Behaviors were to Director--a big deal.

Shared Libraries: Deep inside, this feature is nothing more than "LoadMovie". But it's designed in a way that multiple team members can use a consistent design to effectively utilize templates. Previously, you'd have to create a pretty sophisticated solution, specific to the situation, and each team member had to be careful not to break it.

Debugger: Just makes me feel warm inside. This means the trace window and dynamic fields (to hold variables) are no longer "tricks of the trade". It doesn't mean you'll create bug-free code. You'll just find solutions much quicker.