10 STEPS TO MAKING A MOVIE: FROM SCRATCH TO FINISH

My Note: This was kinda a tough page. This is the way that I create movies (some aspects of it). It doesn't mean you have to do it the same way. It's merely an informational page, and just might help you to get a little more organized when creating a flash movie. There are not any tutorials or screen shots here. Just read and absorb :) Now that that's done let's get on with it :)

1) SHOULD I USE FLASH?

For starters, you need to see if you actually need a Flashed web site. Don't use Flash just because it's Flash. Some of the best sites are a good mix between HTML and Flash.

I'm coming from the point of view that I do most of my web browsing at work. Unfortunately the plugin does not work although I've tried downloading it like 50 times. It really 'irks' me to go to a site that opens up to just a blank page that should have Flash but I can't see it. They have no alternate HTML version -- nothing.

And also, Flash tutorial sites for example? What good does it do to have a Flash tutorial that the user can't even print out??? This is where people have placed 'good looks' over functionality.

So, think about this really hard. And always try to have an alternate version if possible.

2) GET YOUR INFORMATION TOGETHER

So, you've decided you need to use Flash. Get your information together, just as if you were building a normal website. Here is a checklist:

- _____ Figure out how many buttons you will have on your home page to link to your topics.
- _____ Think about if the main buttons will have 'submenus' or not.
- _____ What type of 'feel' do you want your site to have?
- _____ Do you want it to have an introduction page then go into the main menu's and stuff?
- _____ Will it be a large site -- does it need a preloader?
- _____ Does your site have TONS of information that will need to be updated regularly? If so you might want to keep those pages HTML based and just link from Flash to them :)

3) DRAW A ROUGH DRAFT OF WHAT YOU WANT

I personally don't do this because I'm more of a 'on-the-fly' type person. I'll sit there and stare at the stage until my idea comes then I just flow with it. But hey? Isn't that a form of rough draft too? * grins *

Whether you draw the look of your site out on paper... or fiddle with Flash until you start getting ideas, you're just working on a rough draft. It doesn't mean anything is set in stone.

If you're designing your rough draft in Flash and you find yourself getting the idea. STOP. There are certain steps that you should take that will make your work a little easier in the long run, so you don't have to jump back and forth. It just takes 5 minutes to take a breather and then really get started on the project.

4) SITE NAVIGATION?

The first and utmost importance of ANY site (Flash or HTML) is content. Give people an easy way to navigate your site so they can find the information they want quickly and efficiently.

Before taking the plunge into your movie figure out (like earlier) how many topics you have. How will this navigation be built? Build your movie around your navigation. I would advise against building the whole movie then coming back in and adding the navigation.

Whenever you see good Flashed sites you notice that these are the usual parts:

- Preloader
- The movie introduction
- The main first frame of the movie with the buttons to choose from.
- Click a button and it either 1) pops out more buttons to pick from 2) plays a small movie then gives you information.

So in essence start with Navigation first as a building block to the rest of your movie.

5) GETTING THE SMALL THINGS OUT OF THE WAY -- BUTTONS

Face it... you're gonna have buttons. Why not design these first so you don't have to worry about it later. PLUS you need them for your navigation. PLUS it will help you test your movie better as you can add a few actions to the buttons along the way to help you play the movie through.

Or anything else that you know you can blow out of the water real quick. Just make it a symbol... and then hey?, when you are ready to use it just pop it into your movie. Don't break the flow of thought to have to worry about a button?

After you have the buttons made build your navigation a little. At least start to get a functioning Flash movie and then add the graphics.

6) TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME :)

After you have your navigation thought out, some of the buttons are done... man .... your movie is coming along fairly well, just take it one step at a time...

What do I mean? I mean, don't try to do everything at one time. If you click on one of your menu buttons and it's supposed to animate a little scene then give you information.. well work on the particular area. Work one area of animation at a time so that you can be done with it as you work.

Chances are if you try to do everything at once... you will miss some aspects and ending up coming back and trying to fix it later on.

Keep working these individual sections until you've got the whole movie done they way you want it. The animation is flowing, you've got the groove going :) .. heh.

This section includes Preloaders and Introductory movies.   Just do it one piece at a time. Eventually it will ALL come together :)

7) TEST THE MOVIE & ACTIONS

Now, just in case you weren't finishing the Actions as you went test your movie. Actually hopefully you were testing it all along *smiles*

Make sure there aren't things going on that you don't want to happen. Like looping frames, big pauses in the movie, buttons that don't get HTML pages, and so forth.

Test & Fix. That's my motto. Get it the way you want it. And just because you are not sure how to do something don't give up!   Ask for help. There are so many Flash resources on the net!

8) PUBLISHING THE FILE TO THE WEB

Ok, you've got your Flash movie all ready to go.   The Preloader is done, then your Introductory scene plays. Your nice buttons pop up - user clicks and they play scenes perfectly!

Well... how do I get it to the net? This is where Aftershock (comes with Flash) program comes in hand.

Let's hypothetically say you have just 1 exported shockwave file which contains your entire movie. Well, all you would need total to load up to the net is that 1 Shockwave file + 1 Corresponding HTML page. That's it!

Use Aftershock to generate the code to include your Shockwave movie on the HTML page. After that is done technically you can just transfer them both up to the server and type the URL of the HMTL page and it should play your shockwave file :)

10) ASKING FOR HELP

NEVER be afraid to ask for help. I know I have :)   MANY TIMES! How do you think I write all these darn tutorials... doh!! hehe

Use all the resources you can get your hands on:

- Talk to people
- Post to bulletin boards
- Download and analyze .FLA's to see how they did their movies
- Read books and the manual
- BE PATIENT!

Flash can be pretty difficult at first. And most of all it can get frustrating... arghhhh. So just keep your head on straight. If you find yourself getting really pissed off cuz you've been stuck for 7 hours now.... get up and leave the computer if you can. If you can't start pulling those resources in my friend!

© Amanda Farr
Last Updated 04/11/1999