

Review of Adobe Flash CS3 Professional

By Pam Raisanen

Installation was done from the downloaded 30 day trial version that had been burned to a CD. It installed smoothly on my desktop computer which is a Pentium 4, 3 GHz, with 2 GB of RAM running Windows XP Pro.

Adobe's Flash CS3 Professional is a program that creates Flash movies to add to websites or presentations. The Flash movies can be as simple as a button that changes color when rolled over to a full size interactive web page.

Before starting to work with Flash, I did quite a bit of reading and watched the excellent video tutorials that Adobe provides. As I hadn't worked with either drawing or movie programs before, my progress was a bit slow at first. I worked by constantly referring to books, the videos and the help files.

The first thing I did was look at the user interface and tools. The default in Flash is set up with the main menu bar at the top. The timeline where the movie is laid out in frames and layers is beneath the menu bar. The drawing tool bar sets on the left and additional panels, which can be opened or closed from the Window Menu, are on the right. Adobe's Property Inspector is at the bottom. It works contextually, giving access to the tools needed for whatever is being worked on. It's my absolute favorite tool panel. At the center of the screen is the stage which is the work area where the scenes are created. The stage can be sized to fit what is being built, from a button or banner to a full web page.

The most basic way to create a Flash movie is by drawing the pictures for the scenes you're creating. I did all my drawing with a mouse but intend to purchase a graphics tablet for future use. Adobe provides a full range of tools and methods for implementing this process. Tools allow you to draw straight, curved, or freehand lines, plus a variety of shapes. Lines or shapes can be altered by distorting, scaling, rotating, skewing, or flipping. Choice of line color and width is available as well as fill color. Fill colors can be solid, gradient, and varied from two colors to a rainbow, opaque to transparent or added from a graphic file. Scenes can be drawn frame by frame similar to the flipbooks we used as kids or done in segments allowing Flash to fill in the motion in between, called tweening. Once scenes are created they must be

added to the Timeline to be animated. Keyframes mark the start and stop of the animation points. Animation can run once or loop and also may be set with controls so users can start or stop the play. Flash will tween action as motion or morph shapes or colors. Effects can be added such as blurring, expanding, drop shadows, and even exploding.

Drawings can be done in layers so individual parts can be edited, animated or make use of the many built in effects. All or portions right down to a simple line can be saved as an instance and reused innumerable times. This enables the creation of detailed drawings to be very small file sizes. When uploaded to a presentation, an instance loads only once even though it may be used numerous times cutting down the time it takes to run on a website. Elements can be also saved to the library. Instances can be used in different movies where library items can only be used in the same movie.

Graphics, sound and video can be imported in a large variety of formats. If pictures are added from Adobe Photoshop, layers are maintained and can be edited within Flash. Unless a video is very short, it is best to do all the editing before incorporating it into a Flash movie. Sound files are often large so load times need to be considered and can be a bit tricky to set up. They must be timed exactly with the portion of the movie they are to run with.

Flash includes a built in programming language called ActionScript. It's the way to write programs that run the movies and enable the audience to interact with your animations. It's how to tell a Flash movie what to do if, for instance, someone clicks a button. To write custom programs, ActionScript language must be learned. However, in lieu of having to write scripts, many actions are included in the Behaviors Window and can be created with the wizards Adobe provides.