

Shockwave Plug-in vs. Flash Plug-in

-----A Choice to Make

What Are Shockwave Plug-in and Flash Plug-in?

Shockwave

Shockwave plug-in lets users view interactive Web content like games, interactive multimedia product demos, business presentations, entertainment, and advertisements from their Web browsers. However, the Web content mentioned here have to be made with one of the following authoring tools from macromedia: Director, Flash, or Authorware (<http://www.macromedia.com/>).

Flash

Flash plug-ins is the Web standard for vector graphics and animation. It lets users view the Web sites that contain cartoons, interactive interfaces, information graphics, and so forth that are made with the authoring tool – Flash (<http://www.macromedia.com/>).

Why is the difference significant?

“Plug-ins add the power of multimedia to Web browsers by allowing users to view and interact with new types of documents and images.”(Vaughan, 1998) However; the

important thing we should bear in mind is that plug-ins are just tools for users to view contents made with certain programs. Among the various powerful multimedia plug-ins, Shockwave and Flash become those few plug-ins that survive the test of time and become major concerns for the multimedia content developers. And the reason that Shockwave and Flash plug-ins become popular is largely because of the content they are able to deliver and the authoring tools that create the content. Yet, these two plug-ins differ a great deal on the content they deliver as well as the programs that create the content. Thus, multimedia developers definitely have to make a difficult decision on whether they should develop for Shockwave or Flash.

Discussion of the Pros and Cons

The Shockwave/Flash decision can be made only if we are familiar with the delivery and interactivity of the Shockwave/Flash content and the authoring tools used to create the content.

Authoring Tools

Shockwave content is authored in Director. Although an application called Shockwave can be used to “shock” multimedia projects made with Authorware

(<http://www.macromedia.com/software/authorware/>), Director is the only program that can author Shockwave content.

Flash content is authored in Flash and other design tools that save SWF format. However, Flash is most widely used program to author Flash content. It is the major concern of this paper.

Web-Oriented (Delivery)?

Director has a longer history than Flash. Thus, its original target for delivery is CD-ROMs, not the World Wide Web. Although as the dramatic development of the Web, the new version of the Director add features like stream ability and commands built into Lingo(the programming language for Director) to help manage web resources, Director developers have to work hard to get the Shockwave movie stream properly on the Web. However; with the new Director 8 Shockwave Studio, delivering Shockwave content has been streamlined for developers. It not only exports compact and stream Shockwave files, but also use HTML templates to integrate with overall site design.

Flash, on the other hand, was designed with the Web in mind. Flash content is always streaming and immediate. If you go to a Flash site, there is absolutely no download

progress bar or Macromedia ad like shockwave movie does. Moreover, Flash is vector-centric, which guarantees the small file-size of Flash movies, while Director is bitmap-centric, which results in bigger file-size of Shockwave movies (<http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/>). Therefore, Flash content is much more immediate than Director content (Shockwave movies) on the Web.

Extendibility

The recent version of Director (eg. Director 7) can easily import Flash 3 and Flash 4 movies. Also, it has a fully-developed scripting language (Lingo), which makes it possible to write complete multimedia applications. Moreover, Director can be extended with Xtras, which are written in C++. Those Xtras can extend the authoring environment for Director or allow Director to use unique types of media assets. For instance, V12 is a popular database engine Xtra. Moreover, the new Director 8 even includes Fireworks and Sound Editor. All these features give Director greater extendibility than Flash (<http://www.macromedia.com/software/director/>).

Flash, unfortunately, cannot be extended easily. It cannot import Shockwave content, and has a very limited extendibility. It is a program which is strive for immediacy and efficiency, not extendibility.

Interactivity

From the definition of Shockwave plug-in, we can see that the Shockwave content can be highly interactive multimedia application and games. The extendible features of Director such as Lingo and Xtras make it possible for Director to allow great interactivity in the multimedia programs it creates. For instance, once you go to a game store, you will be shocked by the various striking Shockwave games, not to mention the large number of multimedia applications made with Director.

Flash, however, are unlucky as for the interactivity. Although it has some basic interactive features such as rollovers, button control, editable text field (new feature for Flash 4), it is impossible for Flash to create highly interactive multimedia applications like Director does.

Price Issue

Money always matters. Although Shockwave and Flash plug-ins can be obtained for free, the price difference between Director and Flash can be a critical factor while considering developing content for Shockwave or Flash.

The new Director 8 Shockwave Studio that is coming out retails for \$999.00, and the upgrade is \$399-499 depends on the version of the Old Director you have. Flash 4, on the other hand, retails for only \$299.00. The difference, as we can see, is \$ 700.00, which is not a small amount of money.

Conclusion

From the above discussion on Flash and Shockwave content and the authoring tools created the content, we can see that each has its own individual strength and weaknesses on delivery (immediacy), extendibility, interactivity, and price. Thus, while making difficult Flash/Shockwave decision, one have to carefully evaluate the specific situations and needs of his/her unique case. For instance, do I want Flash's immediate delivery or Shockwave's superior interactivity? Do I want to create complete multimedia applications or just animations? Moreover, According to King, Brown & Partners browser survey, Shockwave Plug-in is installed on 52% of all browsers (Macromedia Shockwave White Paper), while Flash Plug-in is installed on 88.3% of all browsers based on NPD browser survey (Macromedia Flash White Paper). All these factors have to be considered before making any final choices between Shockwave and Flash.

However, the good thing is that Flash content can be embedded in Shockwave content. Thanks to the superior extendibility of Director, so that we can have the best of both worlds. What's more, with the dramatic development of technology, who can predict for sure that Flash cannot embed Shockwave content? I believe that in the future, multimedia developer will not be harassed by the Shockwave/Flash decision, for we might have a 2 in 1 program which combine the best features of both. The development of technology is just unpredictable!

Reference:

Vaughan, T. (1998). *Multimedia making it work*. California: McGraw-Hill.

<http://www.macromedia.com/>

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/survey/whitepaper/>

<http://www.macromedia.com/shockwave/whitepaper/doc/>

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/>

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/director/>

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/authorware/>

<http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/director/shockwave.html>

Good Shockwave and Flash Sites to See:

<http://www.shockwave.com>

<http://www.macromedia.com/shockzone/>

<http://www.shockrave.com/>

<http://shockwave.webreview.com/>

<http://www.flash-development.com/>

<http://www.creative-freedom.co.uk/> (Flash)

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