



Flash Author Jen deHaan Talks About New Animation Book

Jen deHaan is the Macromedia Press author responsible for the best-selling *Flash MX 2004: Training from the Source* (0-321-21342-4) and the soon-to-be-released *Animation and Effects with Macromedia Flash MX 2004* (0-321-30344-X). When not writing books, she writes regularly for Macromedia's Developer Center and for Macromedia itself, where she crafts product documentation as well as examples and applications for Flash MX 2004. We recently spoke with Jen about her work with Flash MX 2004 and the growing use of Flash for animation.

Q. Although Flash has long been a popular tool for creating Web animation, more designers are using it to create animations for broadcast. How do you explain Flash's leap from Web to TV?

A. It probably varies from user to user, but Flash's ease and availability for developing content are definite advantages. There are a lot of Flash users out there, and Flash is comparatively inexpensive and easy to use for creating animation. Many parts of Flash can be complex—but learning animation isn't too bad!

Additionally, there's a lot of third-party software that integrates wonderfully with Flash to extend its animation capabilities. You can, for example, use third-party software to add "camera" movement to your animations, which helps simulate the feel of 3D space; other programs enable you to create 3D effects. Because Flash is so widely used, there's a lot of supporting software out there that you can use to beef up the animation. Couple that with Flash's scripting abilities, and you have a very robust piece of software that animators find attractive.

Q. Can you point out any well-known commercials, programs, or films in which Flash animation is being used today?

A. To my knowledge, there are several cartoons on WB, Cartoon Network, and the Disney Channel that use Flash, such as "Mucha Lucha," "Fosters Home for Imaginary Friends," and the "Mr. Dink Show." Many of the studios that use Flash will also integrate other programs, such as Illustrator or After Effects, to produce a final result. Because of this, we see a wide variety of results—sometimes Flash doesn't even look like Flash after they're finished!

Q. Do you see any other Flash animation trends emerging in the near future?

A. The 2004 release made a lot of advancements for developers in particular, but that doesn't mean animators and designers were left out in the cold. Improvements in

Flash MX 2004's coding language enable designers to write more effective ActionScript for their effects.

Notably, 2004 added built-in Tween classes to ActionScript that allow you to add programmatic movement—including easing—using very little code. This is great for adding "realistic" movement to your animations and characters, particularly if you don't like to script! The problem is that Tween classes weren't documented, although they are described and used in a couple of projects in my upcoming Animation and Effects book.

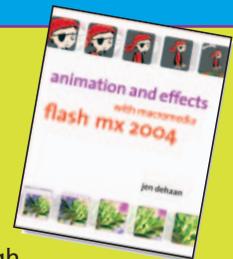
About the Book

Animation and Effects with Macromedia Flash MX 2004

by Jen deHaan

0-321-30344-X • \$39.99

By walking you through 15 real-world projects, author Jen deHaan provides a thorough grounding in all of Flash's effects and animation fundamentals. Each chapter represents a single project with simple step-by-step instructions for re-creating cool Web elements, including a short logo animation with various types of motion tweens, an animated banner, a "speaking" animated character, video floating over Flash content, a Flash interface that uses transitions to "page" through different areas of a site, navigation and graphic effects, and more. The book's companion CD includes the lesson files and sample software necessary to start using what you've learned immediately.



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Q. Why would you encourage someone interested in animation to use Flash as opposed to 3D programs?

A. I wouldn't really encourage them to use Flash instead of 3D, but either in conjunction with 3D or as an introduction to animation before tackling 3D. Flash doesn't replace 3D entirely, because it's technically a 2D animation program without built-in 3D support. However, many animators produce 3D animation with Flash by importing content or exporting .SWF files from other programs. It is possible to "spoof" 3D with Flash, but it is a very time-consuming process that might be accomplished better using other software.

That said, Flash is also a great learning tool. It is far easier to learn how to animate (the principles of movement and design) in Flash than it is in 3D software. At least, it clearly was for me! Flash is also the best for presenting animation on the Web.

Q. Do you have any animation tips or tricks for developers working with Flash MX 2004?

A. The first tip is that developers don't have to draw on or work with the Timeline to create animation. It's possible to make interesting projects mostly with ActionScript.

It's relatively easy for developers to create basic character drawings by only drawing and placing shapes on the Stage. It might take a tutorial, a bit of patience, and trial and error, but it's certainly do-able because you don't have to draw. Animating in Flash can mean many things, from using ActionScript to animate to importing other people's designs to creating them yourself with basic shapes or by drawing on a graphics tablet. Developers have a variety of options to create basic mock-ups or finished animation quite easily, and without having to select that Brush or Pencil tool.

Q. This new book takes a different approach in teaching than your Training From the Source book. Why do you think this project-based method works well for teaching animation fundamentals?

A. Animating and creating effects is generally a very hands on activity, however many books and tutorials don't provide step-by-step directions for creating an entire animation-based project. But the single "uber-tutorial" format of *Training from the Source* wasn't appropriate for animation, which can take so many different forms. Way too hard to try and incorporate it all into a single Flash document!

I thought it would be a nice change to provide a variety of tutorials to show the many different techniques and types of animations and effects you can create with Flash and even ActionScript. I think it works pretty well because it shows you how to create complete projects, from an animated robot to an animated menu effect, instead of the typical "bouncing ball" exercise.

Q. So what gets you thinking about a niche book like this? Do you get feedback from users, study trends, see them in your dreams, or all of the above?

A. A little bit of everything, I suppose. There's definitely a gap in the market when it comes to designer/animation books—there haven't been any written lately. When I was investigating the market, most of the books I found were from a couple of versions back. While the drawing tools and Timeline animation hasn't changed much, there is a whole other ActionScript-based side to creating effects with Flash that has changed a lot. I've heard so many requests for animated menus, navigation systems, picture galleries, and those Tween classes that I thought putting tutorials together into a single book might be a good idea.

About the Author

Jen deHaan is a free-lance Web designer/developer based in San Francisco. She has been

involved in writing, contributing to, and editing many computer books on Macromedia Flash, ActionScript, digital video, and ColdFusion. She has co-authored three books on ActionScript, and is the author of the best-selling *Flash MX 2004: Training from the Source*.

