SWiSH© IT - CREATING MULTIMEDIA ON THE WEB

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As more classes are offered online and instructors revise traditional classroom materials for use on the Web, instructors must begin to think visually and consider ways to illustrate key concepts. The focus of instruction in an online class shifts to visual presentations, which must engage the learners. Taking time to develop good visual media will enhance the quality of the learning experience. Visuals provide a concrete reference point for students and help them to simplify information. A visual that breaks down a complex idea into its components can show relationships that might otherwise be confusing. Visuals serve to provide positive redundancy in the learning process and help to solidify understanding of topics.

If instructors go a step further and plan visuals that encourage interactivity, the benefits will be maximized. By developing course-specific, interactive visuals, the instructor guarantees the accuracy of the information and adds to the motivational quality of the online presentation. Flash has quickly become the technology of choice for creating rich, interactive multimedia content for the Web. Three factors have greatly contributed to the technology's popularity:

- The .swf format can compress both images and sounds.
- The format allows developers to include vector formats, which are scaleable graphics with very small file size.
- Because of its advanced streaming capabilities, the Flash player preloads images and sounds into the visitor's browser cache and the remaining material continues to stream while the animation plays.

The Flash player is included in all of the major browsers such as Internet Explorer and Netscape. Most visitors to websites use dial-up services to access the Internet and the Flash format performs well with slower connection speeds.

SWiSH2© is an inexpensive program that creates flash animations without the steep learning curve that Macromedia Flash© requires. SWiSH2© is easy to use yet produces complex animations with text, images, graphics and sound. SWiSH2© has tools for creating lines, rectangles, ellipses, Bezier curves, motion paths, sprites, and rollover buttons, all in an easy-to-use interface. SWiSH2© exports the .swf file format used by Macromedia Flash©, so animations will play on any computer that has the Flash player

installed. SWiSH2© animations can be incorporated into a web page, sent in an email, embedded in a Microsoft PowerPoint© presentation, or included in a Microsoft Word© document. SWiSH2© can be purchased online at www.swishzone.com and has an educator discount.

The animation created is called a movie. Within each movie is a collection of scenes. Each s cene h as a t imeline c onsisting o f m ultiple f rames. D uring t he t imeline o f e ach scene, the developer places objects, such as text and images, to which effects can be applied. These effects will start and stop at particular frames and can be controlled by inserting actions and events.

In this hands-on presentation, participants walk through the process of designing and exporting a movie animation. They create rollover buttons and menu sprites, as well as text and object animations. The completed movie will be exported in a format suitable for uploading to the Web.

Presenters:

Gwen Braun and Vivian Zabrocki are math instructors in the Academic Support Center at Montana State University - Billings. They have been working together to create animated tutorials using SwiSH2©, some of which can be viewed at http://www.msubillings.edu/asc/algebra_helps.htm.

Braun received a Master's in Education in Educational Technology (2001) from Montana State University - Billings, where she currently serves as the Director of the Academic Support Center.

Zabrocki received a Master's in Education in Interdisciplinary Studies (2003) from Montana State University - Billings, where she serves as an Academic Support Specialist in Mathematics. She also designed and is the webmaster for the Academic Support Center web page.