Director basics

If you would like to put together a portfolio that is distributed on CD-ROM, Director is the program to use. Not only does it render photographic images better than Flash, but it is also potentially much more versatile. You can do just about anything in Director, from making simple presentations that take over the entire screen to making actual programs and games.

There are several downsides to the program, however. The most significant is that it is very difficult to successfully transfer your program to the web. Macromedia makes a free "Shockwave" player to do this, but it is just another thing for someone to download, whereas the Flash player is ubiquitous.

INTRODUCTION

Macromedia makes both Flash and Director, but unfortunately their roots are in different companies with completely different ways of working. They share some traits, but not many.

Added to this is the fact that where Flash is primarily a vector-based program (like Illustrator), Director is a pixel-based program (like Photoshop).

Still, it is not difficult to learn some of the basics of Director, and some things, like the timeline and tweening look and behave just like in any animation or multimedia program.

THE STAGE

Director works on a movie metaphor, and so the main area where things are going to happen is called the stage. A new stage opens when you open the program, but it is probably too small. Make it bigger by going to Modify / Movie / Properties. Making it 800x600 is a good idea - not many monitors are smaller than this. Look at some of the other options you have in this window (which is the Property Inspector palette).

TOOL PALETTE

To get started, draw a few shapes using the tools at the left in the Tool Palette (Window / Tool Palette). Try some type also. At this point it doesn't seem like this program does much - the tools seem to be primitive in comparison to other programs. Director likes to hide the strengths it has, so just make some basic things for now.

THE SCORE

To get anywhere in Director, you have to know the score (Window / Score). It is just about like any animation program, with time going across in frames and objects stacked vertically in layer-like spaces (top at the bottom). Each object shows up on the stage and on the timeline, and each object is called a "sprite".

When you have a sprite (object) selected (click on either in the score or the stage) the Property Inspector Palette will change to reflect the options you have for that sprite. At the bottom of the sprite tab in the inspector (you may need to expand the palette to see it), set your end frame for one of your sprites to something like 30.

Now select the keyframe at the end of that tween (did you read the Animation Basics sheet?) in the score. Go to the stage and move, rotate, or otherwise change the sprite (object). Hit the play button at the bottom of the stage and you should start to get an idea what is happening.

KEYFRAMES

You can add keyframes to your animation by selecting the tween in the score and going to Insert / Keyframe. You can also move keyframes in the score just by dragging them to the left or right. Movement is very easy to make and modify in Director. You can also break your entire tween into keyframes by double-clicking on it in the score window with the option key held down. When you do this you can drag any sprite in the score window anywhere else in the score window. Easy.

Also, you can always "scrub through" your animation by moving the scrub bar in the score back and forth. Just click and drag that red box (playback head) in the horizontal bar the frame numbers are on.

NAVIGATION

The movie that you make will merrily play from frame 1 to the end unless you add a behavior. There are two types of behaviors. The first type is an behavior attached to a frame. The most common action is *hold on current frame*, since that is what you want the playback head to do so it can wait for something (like a button push). To attach it to a frame, bring out the library palette. Change the library group to navigation (pop up menu in the upper left of palette). Drag the "hold on current frame" button to the space above the frame numbers in the score window (this line is reserved for frame behaviors).

Now that we have the playback stop here, we need a way to get it to go back to the start (frame 1). Choose the 'go to frame x' library item and drag it over a sprite in the score. Make sure you drop it on the same frame you put the hold behavior on. Now that object is a button. When clicked it will send your movie to the frame you specified. You can have multiple buttons that send the playback head either forwards or backwards.

To test your button, make sure the stage window is selected (click on title bar) and hit play.

THE CAST

If you open the cast window (Window / Cast), you will notice the things you made with the toolbox are part of the cast. Drag some jpeg files to the cast window and now you can use them in your movie. Just drag them from the cast window onto either the score or the stage.

MORE

You might have noticed there are many more behaviors in the library that you can add to either frames or sprites. If these are not enough, you can also script them yourself - it is generally not too difficult, and you can do just about anything you can imagine. You can have hundreds of sprites moving different directions at the same time as moving over hundreds of frames.

PROJECTOR

A projector in Director is a self-running program (you don't need a program to open it in). After you finish your movie and save it, go to File / Create Projector. In a rather stupid way, Director needs you to find the movie file you saved (read the boxes carefully) and it will then make a projector which you can double-click to run. Making a projector that will also run on Windows is more complicated.