

# Flash basics

*Flash is all over the place on the web, and used for everything from making small graphics or animations that just take up a small part of a page to full-page animations with snazzy sounds. Chances are you see several things done in Flash every time you go to the web, but don't know it. The help system in Flash will help you get started - go to "Help/Getting started in Flash". You can use this section to learn with tutorials and also as a reference when you get stuck on something.*

## INTRODUCTION

Since Flash was introduced years ago it has grown from a simple little web animation tool to a full-featured program that allows you to make multimedia graphics that will play in about 90% of the web browsers out there.

Flash's growth has not been a beautiful thing, however, and the improvements and design of the program seem governed more by corporate politics and the marketplace than by common sense and ease of use. So if you get to feeling really dumb working in it... it is not your fault.

Still, the program offers so many advantages over HTML (Dreamweaver) that it is almost a necessity for a designer working on webfodder. You can do almost whatever you want in Flash - type, images, and graphics can fade in and out, move across the screen, twirl and dance at your command. You can add flashy buttons, sounds, and everything can get bigger or smaller when the browser window is resized so your designs stay intact almost just the way you want them (although this presents problems with photos).

The program does so many great things you may wonder why anyone would want to do that HTML stuff. There are reasons, but right now you don't need to know them.

## DRAWING

Being a vector based program, Flash is a lot like Illustrator in the way it handles graphics. You have layers just like in Illustrator (and Photoshop) and also fills, strokes, lines, etc.

But unfortunately, someone was bored when they designed the way the tools behave in Flash, so they can behave quite a bit different than in Illus-

trator (even though they are essentially the same). The good in this is that for some things the tools actually work better than the ones in Illustrator. Just for some things.

## SYMBOLS

When you make a graphic - be it a little pac-man or a fully-rigged schooner - Flash really wants you to make it a symbol by pushing F8. Please oblige it. That way Flash can store it and reuse it. You can still scale it, move it, and rotate it. You can even still edit it by double-clicking on it. Just look to the top of your main window to get back to your movie (scene) after this editing.

## KEYFRAMES

The working metaphor for Flash is a movie, and just as a movie has frames (separate images that appear to move when flipped through), so does Flash. You generally start with the first frame in the timeline, design or import some graphics or type, make it a symbol, then go to the next frame, define it as a keyframe (F6), change the graphics a bit, do it again and so on until you have an animation or a set of pages.

## TWEENS

It is a lot of work to design a separate frame for every page in the animation, even though Walt made a good living doing it. Fortunately Flash has a shortcut.

Let's say you have a circle that moves from the left of the screen to the right. You can put the circle where you want it to start, then add a keyframe where you want it to end. Flash is smart enough to know that you probably want to have it slide across the screen from the first frame to the keyframe, and if you define an intermediate frame as a motion tween, it will do just that.

If you want the circle to move to the right, then back to the left you will need three keyframes. One keyframe to tell it where to start, one keyframe to tell it how far to the right to go, and a last one to tell it how far to the left to go.

You can use these motion tweens to make changes in position, size, and rotation. To make changes in shape you need the twixt tween, which is called a shape tween. It is much like a shape blend in Illus-

trator, but it moves instead of repeats on the same page. By the way, if you make a tween and you get a dotted 'tween arrow', undo and try again. Chances are you didn't make your graphic into a symbol.

## ACTIONS & BEHAVIORS

The movie that you make will merrily play from frame 1 to the end unless you add an action. There are two types of actions.

The first type is an action attached to a frame. The most common action is *stop*, since that is what you want the playback head to do so it can wait for something (like a button push). To attach it, just highlight the frame where you want it, go to the Actions palette, open Global Functions, then Timeline Control, and double-click on Stop. Added.

The second type of action is called a behavior in Flash 8, even though it is really an action, just one attached to a button. The most common one here is one which will send the playback head to a certain frame which starts a new animation, goes back to frame 1, or whatever. To add one of these dohickies, click on the button symbol you want to activate the action. Then in the behaviors palette click and hold + to find *Movie Clip/ Goto and Play at Frame or Label*. Type in the frame you want the button to send the playback head to. Added.

## TESTING

Test your movie often. Hitting the return key will play the frames, and you can turn actions on or off. However, the best way to test your movie is to hit the command and return keys. This method opens the movie in a player that will show you exactly what you will get if it is shown in a browser. Shows you the bugs better than a picnic in July. If things go really haywire toss and remake layers.

## SWF FILES

The final step in making your movie is to export it as an .swf file. This file is not editable, but will play in a flash player, and even in most browser windows - just drag it into an open browser window. Or you can place the .swf file into an HTML page (using Dreamweaver) just like an image, put it on a server, and the whole world can see your wonders.