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Add some flash Video Presentations Bring Your Site to Life

Easy-to-use Flash software helps you create Web-based presentations that run like videos.

BY MICHAEL RUSSER

Dear Mr. Internet:

I have a HomeFeedback.com button on my site that allows my sellers to log in, enter, and view showing information on their listed property. Oftentimes, my sellers forget how to use this powerful tool and we get calls for "help," which can be time consuming. Is there some way to provide easy-to-follow automated help on my site for this kind of situation?

Brian Hickox

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage
Franklin, Mass.

Dear Brian:

Powerful interactive tools like Homefeedback (for showing feedback) certainly make our Web sites and services more valuable in the eyes of our clients and prospects. However, as your question suggests, there often is a learning curve and we end up becoming our clients' "Help Desk" in using these tools. That becomes an expensive use of our time!

Fortunately, there is a very cool and interactive way to offer help 24/7 for any of your Web site tools while freeing you and your staff up from this time-consuming task.

Multimedia Help in a Flash!

There are several tools available that allow anyone to create highly interactive and engaging "Help Tutorials" that can be displayed on your Web site using Macromedia Flash, the Web's most widely used multimedia platform. Two in particular, [Camtasia Studio](#) and [Captivate](#) (from Macromedia), allow you to show your clients step-by-step instructions on how everything on your site works incorporating both voice and text information.

Camtasia Studio works by recording a video of anything on your screen, including all mouse movements, clicks, and text input. Once the raw video is made, you can go back and edit it by adding text and voice comments. The finished video can easily be converted to Flash format and saved on your Web server. By providing a link to your Flash video on your site, visitors can access the help they need when they need it (it is estimated that more than 98 percent of personal computers in use today has the ability to play Flash files).

Making these videos is fairly straightforward—you simply turn the Camtasia recorder on and then go through whatever process you want to demonstrate. You can even combine several instructional videos to create a centralized help page. For example, I made five short voice-annotated clips on how to use several aspects of HomeFeedback using Camtasia and combined them into one help page. [Click here](#) to see my sample help page.

When creating video clips using Camtasia, it is best to keep them short; otherwise, visitors with

dial-up connections may become annoyed with the downloading delay. You may not have this problem with Captivate. This product takes a series of screen shots and then simulates mouse movements and entering information into text fields. While it may not look as smooth as Camtasia, Captivate is able to keep its file sizes smaller and, as a result, have faster loading times.

More Than Just Help

Since these tools record anything on your computer screen, they can be used to create much more than just help tutorials. Here are some ideas:

- Prelisting presentations
- Special multimedia marketing pieces
- How-to tutorials on financing, disclosures, negotiating, etc.

Both Camtasia and Captivate are fairly straightforward to use. However, there is definitely a learning curve before you become proficient. As an alternative to purchasing the software and spending time learning it, you might want to consider hiring a "pro" who already has extensive experience with either of these tools. You can find them at Elance.com and Guru.com, resources for outsourcing and free-lance help. Also, if you want to add a higher degree of "polish" to your Flash videos, consider hiring professional voice-over talent from the same sources.

Any time you provide tools that make the lives of your clients and prospects easier, you look good and stand out from your competition. However, when you also provide them with easy access to 24/7 help to use these tools, you're defining a whole new category of professional service.

[Ask Mr. Internet Main Page](#)



Mr. Internet is the alter-ego of Michael J. Russer, an Internet speaker, trainer, author, and consultant. Send your questions to help@askmrinternet.com