Brenda Huettner

Macromedia Captivate: The Definite Guide

Book Review

—Reviewed by

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Index Terms—*Developing animated computer training, Flash movie, online test creation, screen capture, software guide.*

When evaluating a user guide for a software application I am not familiar with, I always end up evaluating the software as well. In the case of Macromedia Captivate, it is fortunate that the software lives up to the expectation created by Brenda Huettner's excellent guide. The book is a useful complement to the software, and even though it is not a guide to creating interactive applications, Huettner gives enough design hints to start you off on the right path. In fact, you can buy the book, read it, and feel like you are an experienced user. The guide has 12 chapters, followed by a glossary, additional resources, and a list of shortcut keys strokes.

The book has a nice flow—after the short overview of the 12 chapters, the first five chapters are short and to the point. Chapter 1, "Installing and Configuring Captivate" (11 pages), covers the installation and activation wizards. Huettner is very thorough. She includes a phone number for activation and discusses licensing issues and deactivation. In Chapter 2, "Getting Ready to Make Movies" (13 pages), she identifies the types of movies you can create, followed by a series of planning tools you should use to prepare for your movie:

> Task List: You know what you're doing and what it takes to make it happen, but there may be other people in your company who are not aware of the specific steps required to create this project. List all the tasks that need to be accomplished and who will accomplish each one of them. Make sure you include all of the stakeholders in your project, including

the writer, editor, reviewer, tester, approver, and any other personnel who may need to participate. This is particularly important if you're going to be asking for time from people in other departments—such as a QA department or usability group. (p. 21)

It is a must for neophytes, and a helpful reminder for more advanced users. Huettner provides handy lists with short descriptions of tools, such as storyboards, and a useful planning flowchart on page 25. Chapter 3, "Creating Your First Movie" (12 pages), gives you a general feel for the application and lets you create a movie from start to finish, without stopping for the details. The chapter shows the HTML code that displays the generated Flash object. Chapter 4, "Recording a Movie" (16 pages), again guides you through the process of recording a movie, but now Huettner discusses all the steps in great detail; instead of accepting the default settings, she walks you through all options and discusses the pros and cons of each. Huettner ends the chapter with a short discussion of the different kinds of movies you can create. Chapter 5, "Working with Slides" (20 pages), covers the slides in detail. As you can see from the chapter descriptions, there is bound to be some redundancy. However, I actually like the fact that there is some repetition, because often beginners need to go through a process several times before they grasp the concept completely. Advanced users, on the other hand, will quickly understand that they can skip sections without getting frustrated by what they may consider trivial issues.

Chapter 6, "Editing a Single Slide" (53 pages), is a long chapter that covers all you can do to a single slide, from background to animation. Huettner discusses importing images and the animation gallery that accompanies the software. There is a section on text animation, and the section on cursor movement shows you how to edit the cursor icon, control the cursor speed and path, and add special cursor effects. Huettner then describes

the timeline feature and how to use it to change and refine your movie. Again, many of the parts discussed in this chapter are foreshadowed in the previous chapters. When you get to this part of the book, you say, "Hey, I want that software package on my machine!" By now, you can create a pretty nifty animation. But the best is yet to come.

The next three chapters of the book cover the more advanced features of the software. Chapter 7, "Defining What the User Hears—Adding Audio" (25 pages), guides you through the steps to add sophisticated sound to your project. Starting with setting up and testing your audio equipment, Huettner walks you through recording audio while you are creating your movie. This discussion is followed by information about recording audio for individual elements and adding recordings to existing slides. The chapter ends with a walk-through of editing an existing sound file. Chapter 8, "Defining What the User Does—Adding Interactivity" (25 pages), shows you how to add the "bells and whistles" to your application, in the form of buttons and rollovers that make your application respond to the user's actions. This chapter, like all the other chapters, has many tips on how to improve the final product, and it is a preparation for the next chapter. For example:

> Tip: For easier editing later, do not speak while you are doing actions, but instead speak and then click the mouse or choose a menu item. Remember, each slide gets a separate audio file, and each time you click usually creates a new slide. You don't want to end up with half a word on one audio file and half on the next. Although they should play seamlessly when you publish the movie, splits like this could make adding or deleting slides more difficult. (p. 141)

Chapter 9, "Creating e-Learning Content" (42 pages), shows you how to create online quizzes in multiple formats. Huettner discusses the basic decisions you need to make up front and shows you how to create quizzes in a variety of formats. The chapter ends with an overview of the Quiz Manager, which gives you tools to organize all the quiz parameters and the report options.

The last three chapters of the book cover tools, refinement, and publishing options. The Captivate application has a set of tools—spellchecker, slide notes, templates, sizing tools, MenuBuilder, and user assistance—that are fully described in Chapter 10, "Using Captivate Tools" (44 pages). Even though the guide practically eliminates the need to go digging into the help files, the chapter has pointers to online help options, demonstrations, tutorials, and support sites. In Chapter 11, "Refining the Movie" (24 pages), Huettner shows you how to make your movie into a cohesive package that you can export for viewing—how to add screens that are displayed during the loading of the application and how to add a graceful end to the movie, including credit slides and password protection options. Chapter 12, "Generating Captivate Output" (24 pages), covers the conversion of your movie to a Flash format or to a stand-alone application. It shows you how to send the result by email, or how to post and publish your movie to a Breeze server using File Transfer Protocol (FTP). The glossary and an additional resources section, followed by a listing of the shortcut keys, complete the book.

The only complaint I have about this guide—and in fairness I have this complaint about most user guides—is that the installation and configuration chapter is the first chapter of the book. I think it would be better placed in the addendum section of the book. Let's face it; you only use it once—or never, if you are familiar with installing software.

In conclusion, keeping in mind that the book is not a guide to the underlying technologies—Flash, HTML, audio coding, and the Macromedia Breeze server—and that it is not written for a technical audience, it is professional and succinct. I recommend the book for anybody who wants to use Macromedia Captivate. If you plan to make one project only, buy the book and plan your project; then download the trial software and, I can assure you, you will be able to create an exemplary interactive product. As a final note, Macromedia was bought by Adobe in 2005, and they released version 2.0 of Captivate in 2006. Nevertheless, the book is still on target. As a new user of the software, I did not encounter anything in the Captivate 2.0 trial version that was different from what was in the book, including the screenshots.