

## Macromedia Flash MX Leads Transformation of Web Pages

Lou Latham

With its new version of Flash, Macromedia has taken the lead in the movement to change Web graphics from bitmaps into smart objects.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 4 March 2002, Macromedia announced Macromedia Flash MX, the latest version of the Macromedia Flash development environment. The new version adds support for video as well as enhanced workflow and a customizable workspace. Flash MX will become available on 15 March 2002 and will sell for \$499. Macromedia will also offer an upgrade kit for \$199.

### Analysis

Macromedia has turned its attention from the presentation layer to the application integration layer. The vendor has thus started to transform a product for creating Web pages into a development tool that makes possible richer, more dynamic sites. To do so, Macromedia has expanded the scripting capabilities of its previous versions with the programming tools it acquired with Allaire. By making it easier for developers to integrate content with executable code, Macromedia has enhanced the programmability of Flash objects, thereby making Web sites more interactive. For example, a mortgage calculator could perform its calculations on the user's desktop and not have to go back to the server and call up a new page to present the results from each new set of figures entered. Thus, the user could change parameters on the fly so that he could easily review and compare all his options.

The enhancements go beyond "smart graphics" to address some broader issues that have frustrated Web developers. Traditional application development technologies, including Java and dynamic HTML, have failed to provide PC-quality application interfaces on the Web. Flash offers the interface richness that Microsoft and the Java development leaders (e.g., IBM, Oracle and Sun Microsystems) have not delivered through the browser. Macromedia can expect partnership offers from some development houses that already appreciate Flash graphics as a "nice-to-have" but now can get additional value much closer to their core needs.

Not surprisingly, Macromedia isn't the only one eyeing the possibilities of turning Web graphics into smart objects. Flash MX comes in part as a response to the emergence of other formats and products for creating next-generation Web graphics. The rivals include MPEG-4 and Adobe Systems' Scalable Vector Graphics. Nevertheless, Macromedia has a head start. Both of the challengers are much newer and have little market awareness whereas most Web browsers already have the Flash decoder installed. Moreover, MPEG-4's proponents have proposed charging a fee for the use of its player, a suggestion that puts it at odds with the proprietary streaming players, Microsoft and RealNetworks, and will surely slow adoption.

Flash has always had a steep learning curve, and while Macromedia has made Flash MX easier to use than previous versions, the new development tools bring the complexity back up to historic levels. Nevertheless, the new features make it worth learning. Enterprises wanting to improve the interactivity of their Web graphics should consider upgrading to Flash MX or developing a Flash competency if they have not used it in the past.

**Analytical Source:** Lou Latham, Internet Strategies

### **Need to Know: Reference Material and Recommended Reading**

- "Adobe's GoLive 6.0 Points to Future of Web Authoring Market" (FT-15-2447). In the long term, the importance of capabilities such as wireless support depends on how the market as a whole evolves. **By Mark Gilbert, James Lundy and Michael King**

- “Keeping Score: AD Tool Vendors and Technology Evolution” (M-15-2714). Enterprises are increasingly concerned with the future of application development (AD) languages and tools that were once leading technologies but have now approached a legacy stage. These include Visual Basic, C++, Natural, COBOL, RPG, ColdFusion, PowerBuilder and Delphi. **By Joseph Feiman**

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