Flash Essay, Research Paper

Flash

Although Flash has its place on the Web, current Flash technology has usability problems for three reasons: it makes bad design easier, it breaks the Web’s standard interaction style, and it consumes resources that would be better spent enhancing a site’s core.

Splash pages were an early example of abusive Web design. Luckily, almost all professional websites have removed this usability barrier. However, we’re now seeing the rise of Flash intros that have the same effect: They delay users’ ability to get what they came for. On the upside, most Flash intros feature a “skip intro” button. However, their very existence encourages design abuse in several ways.

First, flash encourages abusive animation: Since we can make things move, why not make things move? Animation has its place in online communication, but making simple text move across the screen a waste of the users time.

One of the Web’s most powerful features is that it lets users control their own destiny. The users goes where they want, when they want. This quality is what makes the Web so usable, despite its many usability problems. Unfortunately, many Flash designers decrease user control and revert to presentation styles that resemble television rather than interactive media. Websites that force users to sit through sequences are boring, regardless of how cool they look.

“Think of your web page as a vehicle that must traverse the Information Superhighway, complete with potholes, roadblocks, detours and rough gravel roads, to reach your customers. A racy sports car will be turned back more often than a utilitarian four wheel drive truck. If your message never makes it to your customer, does it matter how flashy it is? “

(http://www.hypbus.com/solution/flash.htm)

Designers can design usable multimedia objects that comply with the guidelines and are easy to use. The problem is simply that current Flash version makes bad design easier.

The second set of issues is the Flash breaks the standard interaction style between the browsers and there users.

“as flash developers, we must still face the reality that flash is not installed in all browsers. according to macromedia’s whitepaper on flash penetration, flash is now a part of about 90% of the world’s browsers. that may seem like a very high percentage, but population percentages tend to obscure individual people. for instance, if you get a million visitors a month to your all-flash site, you turn away 100 000 of them. and depending on which version of flash your site requires, the amount of people you exclude can be even greater: in june 2000, the flash 4 player was listed as available in 71% to 76% of browsers. again, that translates to roughly 300 000 people turned away from a site that gets a million hits a month. don’t forget that percentages translate to real viewers.”

(http://www.moock.org/webdesign/lectures/ff2knyc/)

Because Flash uses a plug-in rather than standard web technology, some of the the most useful options become useless.

“Flash animations do not respond to your browser’s Stop button or your keyboard’s Esc key, so they cannot be easily turned off. Users must resort to either covering the offending animation with their hand, or, more likely, leave the site altogether.”

“Flash sites render useless the browser’s Back button and address bar, and make bookmarking pages inside a Flash site impossible. Printing Flash pages from your browser doesn’t work, nor does intra-page keyword searching. Finally, Flash sites eliminate HTML links’ visited and unvisited colors, and that color-changing feature is the Web’s single most important navigational cue.”(http://www.dack.com/web/flash\_evil.html)

Flash reduces accessibility for users with disabilities, because of its inability to give access to text.

1. “Screen magnification: Software blows up the image on a standard or auxiliary monitor. May also change the onscreen colours or move text from left to right in an inset window.

2. Screen readers: Software and hardware that reads Web pages out loud in a computer voice. On the net, most modern screen readers sit on top of standard Web browsers. You usually control a screen reader by keyboard, not mouse.

3. Braille displays: Despite the common misconception, very few blind people read Braille, and it’s a somewhat inefficient way to handle text-dense Web pages. Braille displays can produce a single line of Braille or many lines.”

( http://www.alistapart.com/stories/unclear/)

The “Find in page” feature does not work. In general, Flash integrates poorly with search engines.

“There is some hope. Macromedia has announced that they are making an effort to improve certain usability aspects of Flash through the Macromedia Flash Accessibility Developer Kit. The kit will contain guidelines, Smart Clips, and sample code to support development efforts. Future enhancements to the Macromedia Flash Player are also planned, allowing access to underlying data within a Macromedia Flash (SWF) file, permitting the text within to be interpreted by assistive devices, a much needed change of direction from a company that has led developers down a dark path for so long. “

(http://www.flazoom.com/news/scapegoat\_11012000.shtml)

Perhaps the worst problem with Flash is that its use consumes resources that would be better spent enhancing the website’s core.

“We, as designers who like to use Flash, need to get a better understanding of our visitors. They do not have high speed access (and 60% of your visitors will still be using a modem for the next four years) and due to an overwhelming number of poorly created Flash sites, visitors are not going to sit through a 100k+ download to be disappointed.”

(http://www.flazoom.com/news/cancer\_06012000.shtml)

Identifying better ways to support customers by task analyzing their real problems (Flash is usually created by outside agents who don’t understand the business)

“The best way to combat the stereo-types that are developing is to be smarter about how we use Flash. Think about the problem that you are trying to solve before you open Flash and start working. Is Flash the only solution for that problem? Is Flash the most effective solution? Can you solve the problem with HTML? Think about the work you do and remember that what you put on the web is not for you, but for your visitors. “

http://www.flazoom.com/news/cancer\_06012000.shtml

Most of the time, the presence of Flash on a website creates a usability problem. Although there are rare occurrences of good Flash design (it even adds value on occasion), the use of Flash typically lowers usability. In most cases, we would be better off if these multimedia objects were removed.

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