Macromedia Authorware

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Macromedia Authorware (now part of Adobe Systems) is an interpreted, flowchart based, graphical programming language. Authorware is used for creating interactive programs that can integrate a range of multimedia content, particularly e-learning applications. The flowchart model differentiates Authorware from other authoring tools, such as Flash and Director which rely on a visual stage, timeline, and script structure.

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History

Authorware was originally produced by Authorware Inc., founded in 1987 by Dr. Michael Allen. Allen had contributed to the development of the PLATO collaborative learning system during the 1970s.

Originally titled Course of Action (CoA), it was a Macintosh-only program. It produced runtime programs for DOS. Authorware came later and produced DOS runtime versions until the release of the first Windows version.

Authorware Inc. merged with MacroMind/Paracomp in 1992 to form Macromedia. In December 2005, Adobe and Macromedia merged, under the Adobe Systems name. The most recent version of Authorware is 7.02; version 7 was released in 2003.

It was generally known in the Authorware development community that version 8.0 was in production prior to the merger between the two companies, with 4 beta versions released to external testing shortly before the merger was completed. Among several other features slated for the new version, the ability to publish to Flash's SWF (ShockWave Flash) was at the top of the list. Once production shifted to Adobe's off-shore development facility in Bangalore, India, the free-flow of information that had been enjoyed between Macromedia’s engineering team and its beta testers was curtailed. On Friday, August 3, 2007, after several years of keeping the development community in limbo, Adobe finally announced its plans to discontinue development of Authorware.
Usage & Features

Authorware's distinctive style revolves around a central icon: the Interaction Icon. The structure of the authoring environment encourages rich interaction; complex user feedback is not only possible but somewhat suggested by the software, rather than suggesting the usual media diffusion. This Interaction Icon allows various forms of user feedback (move object to, along a line, click an object or hot-spot; plus the usual text-entry, keypress, etc.)

The original strength in education of Authorware could be linked to its roots in pedagogical models based on constructivist views.

Authorware programs start by creating a flowline, which is a flowchart showing the structure of the developer's program. The developer can add and manage text, graphics, animation, sound and video; develop interactivity and add navigational elements such as links, buttons, and menus. Macromedia Flash and Macromedia Director movies can also be integrated into an Authorware project. Xtras, or add-ins, can also be used to extend the functionality of Authorware, which is similar to HyperCard's XCMDs. Authorware's power can be even better utilized with the use of variables, functions and expressions. Authorware can interpret both its built-in proprietary scripting language and JavaScript version 1.5.

Over time Authorware has lost its specificity: graphical design, interaction, integration as more scripting was added, more power was gained, but Authorware's special interaction-centered, clean simple design was lost along the way.

Authorware programs can be distributed as stand-alone executable files, or over the web which requires a proprietary Authorware Web Player.

Use in E-Learning

Authorware is particularly well-suited to creating e-learning content, as it includes highly customizable templates for CBTs and WBTs, including student assessment tools. Working with these templates, businesses and schools can rapidly assemble multimedia training materials without needing to hire a full-fledged programmer. Intuitively-named dialog boxes take care of input and output. The flow chart model makes the re-use of lesson elements extremely straightforward. Being both AICC- and SCORM-compliant, Authorware can be used to deliver content via any AICC- or SCORM-compliant Learning Management System.

Moving beyond the templates, however, requires either the importation of interactive Flash or Director movies, or scripting, which can be done either in Authorware's native scripting language or in JavaScript.