

Flash Basics

What is Flash?

Flash is a vector-based animation and authoring tool for creating rich media sites on the web. Flash is made by Macromedia (www.macromedia.com). What does it mean to be *vector-based*? Vectors are shapes that are mathematically defined and remembered that way, unlike a collection of pixels on a grid as it's handled in *bitmap* applications like Adobe Photoshop. Because Flash is vector-based, file sizes are generally very small. Moreover, it is *resolution independent*, meaning that scaling (zooming up or down) of animations can be done without losing resolution or increasing file size, and *anti-aliasing* (the "softening" effect to smooth out jagged stair-stepped appearances) occurs on the fly. These are the reasons why Flash is well-suited for Internet delivery.

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Standard Flash files have an extension of ".FLA". These are the editable source files that we will be working on. When you finish an animation, you publish a compressed file called a Shockwave Flash file that has an extension ".SWF". (sometimes pronounced "swif", to rhyme with "gif").

- You can view the SWF file within the Flash application, within the Flash player that comes with the Flash application, or within a browser (see the first branch in the figure below).
- When you want to deliver your animation over the web, you will publish an HTML file along with your SWF file and upload both to your website (see the second branch in the figure below).
- You can also create a stand-alone, self-executable file that will play your animation without a browser or the Flash player. On Windows, they have the end suffix ".EXE" and on the Mac, they are called projectors. (see the third branch in the figure below)