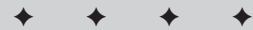# What Is Macromedia Studio MX 2004?

Macromedia Studio MX 2004 is a powerful suite of Web development tools. The applications that make up the Studio include Dreamweaver MX 2004, Flash MX 2004 (optional Professional version), Fireworks MX 2004, FreeHand MX, and ColdFusion MX developer edition.

With the introduction of Macromedia Studio MX and now Macromedia Studio MX 2004, I realize just how far Web development tools have come. I recall building my first Web pages using Netscape Communicator and Arachnophilia. I quickly learned that the code was horrible and I didn't know how to fix things, so I learned basic HTML and started using Notepad. When Dreamweaver 1 first became available, I thought it was like heaven. I still used Photoshop for my images, Debabilizer for Optimization, nothing for drawing, and no animation. Through the years, great new tools such as Fireworks — made designing Web graphics easier and faster than competing applications; plus it had great optimization built right in.

All the Web pages were built separately, and updating was extremely and painfully slow. One of my very first sites was a horse game for children that I used to practice my new skills on. Every time I added a section, it required a new link. The site had grown to over 200 pages and was getting over 250 e-mails a day. It was so popular, and the time to maintain it so demanding, that I had to close it down.

As the Macromedia products improved each year, we kept seeing great new tools and capabilities that wowed us, such as being able to make objects move across the screen in Dreamweaver. Then came Flash and it's widely popular capability to deliver moving graphics in a small file size. Today, with the release of Macromedia Studio MX 2004, we realize a new trend — productivity and workflow. How can we do our job and do it more efficiently? The focus starting with Macromedia Studio MX has been on productivity. With this newest release of Macromedia Studio MX 2004, a lot of performance-enhancing improvements have been added, as well as even tighter integration of each of the Studio applications. The interface is designed to make finding and using the tools you need more accessible and intuitive. And moving among the various applications many times is as easy as the click of a button.
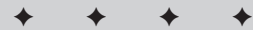
There are great new tools such as the capability to crop and resample an image in Dreamweaver without ever leaving Dreamweaver or the new Auto Shapes in Fireworks or the Effects Timeline in Flash. In FreeHand MX, you have over 40 new tools and enhancements. Flash MX now has two flavors and is using ActionScript 2. You get the point — each application has added functionality.

Cross-Reference
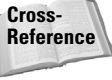
See Chapter 2 for a more comprehensive list of new features for each application.

This book focuses on the integration of how to use the Studio applications in conjunction with each other. The book stays true to the Bible format, so you'll get the reference-based information on many of the core features of each application and exercises on how to use the tools. But a new level has been added to this particular book — a project to demonstrate the interaction of the Studios applications.

The books project isn't necessarily a step-by-step, do-everything type of project. Instead of generic examples to teach how to perform a function, major portions of the sample site (Habitat Alert) are used as the teaching tool. Because you'll probably be accessing the various exercises via different chapters, each chapter has an exercise folder so you can perform the exercises in that chapter without completing previous chapters. However, exercises within a specific chapter usually build upon themselves, using the exercise files.

You may be familiar with some of the Studios applications but not others. As you learn the strengths of each application, you may want to delve into a particular application in more detail. There are entire Bibles for most of the applications in the Macromedia Studio MX 2004 bundle. Two entire Bibles have been written on Flash, and it would be impossible to cover all the intricacies of Flash in this type of book. If you have a real interest in Flash, you should consider picking up the Flash MX 2004 Bible. Each section of this book was designed to give you enough information to begin using all of the applications in a real-world situation — enjoy!

FreeHand MX

FreeHand is a drawing program that uses vector graphics (line drawings rather than photos). Its strength lies in drawing tools and print production. Illustrators and artist frequently use FreeHand to create line drawings. In Chapter 11, you'll see how to create the image shown in Figure 1-1.
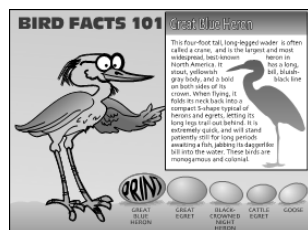
Figure 1-1: This image was totally created in FreeHand, including both graphics and animation.

FreeHand was originally developed as a vector drawing program and has grown to be arguably the best program on the market for the production of pure vector art. Over the last 15 years of continual change and improvement, FreeHand has become an extremely versatile program for anyone in the graphic arts community.

FreeHand MX has the same type of workspace as the other MX applications and nearly 50 new tools and enhancements that weren't available in previous versions. These tools include Output Area, Extrude, Action, and Connector. Beyond the capabilities these new tools give you, the main thrust of the upgrade is the way you can apply multiple strokes, fills, and effects to a single object. Draw an object once, and add squiggly lines, drop shadows, Gaussian blurs, and glows. But perhaps the biggest change that users of the environment will see is the introduction of the MX workspace. The workspace is flexible and integrated and has docking capabilities for grouping, collapsing, or expanding panels as needed. The new interface simplifies the ability to customize the workspace for working more efficiently.

In addition, rounded corners are easy to create with the tricks you can perform on rectangles using the Subselection, or Subselect, tool, and ellipses can have precise sections of their arcs removed. Polygons are now extremely editable. You can make changes in stars or straight-sided polygons live on the object, or through options in the Object panel.

You can import a SWF (pronounced "swiff") file and make it part of your FreeHand document; then export the document with the SWF embedded in it. You can then distribute your document Flash movie to all of your clients. If you want to edit the SWF file (Flash movie) you imported, you can click a button to open Flash, where you can modify the SWF file. The file is then automatically updated in the FreeHand document.

Cross-Reference

You'll learn more about creating Flash movies in the Flash section of this book.

Fireworks MX 2004

Fireworks MX 2004 is an integral part of the Macromedia Studio MX 2004 Web development workflow. Fireworks is the graphic editor. It's used to edit any bitmap image (such as photos), as well as to apply special effects such as shadows, blurs, changes in color, and tons more. You can fade images into backgrounds or put them into custom shapes. The image composition shown in Figure 1-2 is done in Chapter 17.

Figure 1-2: A Fireworks-created image composition.

Fireworks excels at vector shapes and drawing. You can make all kinds of custom shapes, as well as add shadows, bevels, blurs, patterns, textures, and more to your graphics. There are many tools built in to speed up your workflow, such as the Button Editor, where you can make button symbols complete with rollover states. After you make a symbol, it can be used over and over again. Edit the symbol, and all instances (or copies) are updated. You can use styles that are presets of effects, or you make your own styles. Commands are another powerful feature, allowing you to record frequently used steps so you can replay the steps with just a click.

Fireworks also excels at optimizing images — making the file sizes as small as possible and still having them look good. Along with Fireworks' superior optimization capability is slicing. You can slice an image into different "pieces" and apply different optimization settings to each, making Fireworks the premier tool for optimization. You'll learn how to slice, optimize, and export your images in Chapter 21.

Fireworks exports your images into quite a few different formats depending on how they'll be used. For example, you can export as GIFs and JPEG for use in Dreamweaver and Flash, export as CSS layers for use in Dreamweaver, or even export as Dreamweaver Library Items. (For more on this, see Chapter 36.) You can use the native Fireworks PNG format and use it in Flash, or export your Fireworks layers and frames as files, which you can then import into Flash to use as frames (see Chapter 24).

Cross-Reference   For a full list of new features, see Chapter 2.

Flash 2004

Flash is one of the fastest growing technologies on the Web today. Flash is used to make Web movies. It used to be that developers used Flash to create useless but cool splash pages, but Flash and the Flash community has grown and matured a great deal. More focus is now devoted to usability and accessibility. Flash interfaces now can be more engaging and useful. They can connect to databases so users can shop, register, get and receive live video feeds, and much more. These are advanced features of Flash and won't be covered in this book, but it's important to understand that Flash is no longer a cool toy — it's an extremely powerful part of Web development.

If you haven't used Flash before, you'll get a hands-on feel for how to use it and do some common tasks such as make reusable symbols and animate a movie. You'll learn how to add sound and explore some of the components (prepackaged interface tools) that ship with Flash. For the more experienced Flash user, there is a chapter on Flash Remoting, where you connect the book's sample sites e-card interface built in Flash to a ColdFusion server. When a user clicks on a card, the information he or she fills will be sent to the database. The cards themselves will be pulled from the database. Figure 1-3 shows the e-card interface you'll use to pull the cards from the database.

One of the great advantages of using Flash is that you can provide engaging content with a minimal wait time. You can reduce file sizes by reusing content, such as symbols (reusable graphics). Most multimedia formats can be integrated into Flash. You can use vector formats, such as EPS, and files from FreeHand and Adobe Illustrator. You can even use bitmaps (pixel-based images), such as GIF, TIFF, JPEG, and PNG. PNG32 files even maintain their alpha transparency in Flash. You can use sound formats, such as WAV, AIF, and MP3, as well as AVI and MOV movie formats.

Figure 1-3: The e-card interface.

New with the Studio MX 2004 bundle is the "Optional" Flash MX Professional 2004. This version has everything that Flash MX 2004 has, but it also has a lot more Flash components included. This is the application to use if you are heavy into video, deploy to devices, or build rich Internet applications (such as forms and data connectivity). The Professional version is not covered in this book.

Dreamweaver MX 2004

Dreamweaver MX 2004 is a feature-rich, professional Web design and development program. Its tightly integrated environment enables you to design, build, and manage Web sites and Internet applications with easy-to-use visual design tools and a customizable coding environment that supports current and next-generation technologies for static Web sites or server-based Web applications. Dreamweaver's features and tools are supported by panels that you can group and dock. Design and Code view options enable you to work in a comfortable environment. A single-click option lets you change views at any time. Contextual menus and panel options provide convenient access to tools and are often supported with custom keyboard shortcuts. Program preferences enable you to select specific settings for your workflow, from opening new documents to previewing work in progress. Dreamweaver is also extensible, which means you can add new objects, behaviors, and commands to include new tools, features, and functions in your application.

Dreamweaver has come a long way with its CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) style tools. Because there is no longer any HTML text formatting, new users are encouraged to use the new standard of CSS. But it's still easy for the beginner to use. Figure 1-4 is the sample site built throughout this book.
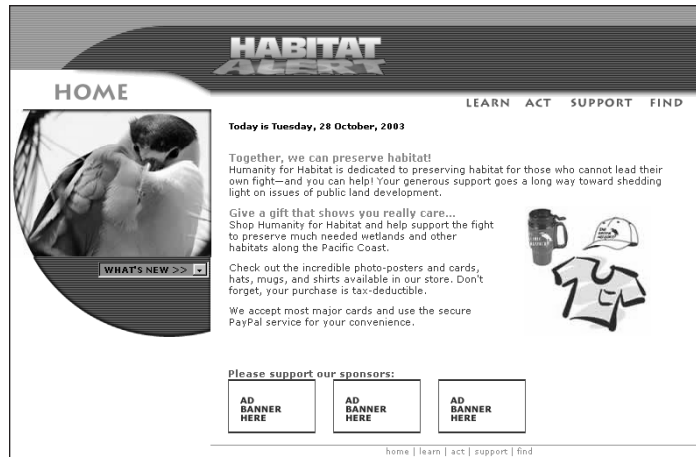
Figure 1-4: The book's sample site built in Dreamweaver.

ColdFusion MX

When Macromedia merged with the Allaire Corporation in 2001, it added this extremely powerful tool to its arsenal of design applications. ColdFusion gives Flash developers and Dreamweaver designers the ability to create technically sophisticated Web and intranet applications, and the inclusion of ColdFusion MX makes it easier and more intuitive for nonprogrammers to do so.

The relationship between ColdFusion MX and other Macromedia Studio products is now so closely integrated that it's possible you have already been using ColdFusion features in your Flash movies or Dreamweaver sites without realizing it. Dreamweaver, in particular, makes it easy to create basic ColdFusion applications without knowing much about ColdFusion Markup Language (CFML) or how ColdFusion Server works.

Summary

This chapter gave you an overview of each of the applications in the Macromedia Studio MX 2004 bundle. The new interface helps cut the learning curve of each application; after you learn the basics of one, you'll pick up the nuances of the others very quickly. You'll soon discover how powerful it is to have all the Web development tools you need at your fingertips.

✦   ✦   ✦