Chapter 1: Getting to Know Adobe Flash

In This Chapter

- **Understanding how Flash differs from other Web technologies**
- **Exploring the Flash environment**
- **Introducing Flash tools**
- **Exploring the Properties inspector and panels**
- **Customizing your Flash workspace**

Vive la différence! That's the expression that Web site designers and users have long used about Adobe Flash (formerly Macromedia Flash). In an environment in which standards-based solutions (HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, for example) have long been insisted on and proprietary technologies have been shunned, Flash stands alone. It's proprietary. It doesn't do much with HTML or JavaScript or CSS. Yet, because of its ability to play multimedia over the Web and provide a great user experience, Flash movies are as much a part of the Web as HTML is.

It's time, therefore, for you to jump on board and embrace Flash to help you create your Web site. You can use this chapter as a jumping-off point. We start by taking you on a guided tour through the various parts of the Flash development environment.

Like Dreamweaver (see Book IV), Flash is available for both the Microsoft Windows and Mac OS X platforms. The screen shots in this book are from the Mac version, but all the instructions are for both operating systems.

A Matter of Timing: Making the Mind Shift to Flash

The expression *Vive la différence!* is not only appropriate for Web site visitors but also suitable for you as you design and create Web sites. Flash is definitely much different from the other technologies you explore in this book.

HTML is designed to display content on the Web. CSS comes alongside and helps you present that content in a user-friendly manner. Enter JavaScript. It can be used to perform certain interactive actions when an event on the page is triggered. However, even though each of these technologies, when added together, form a more complex solution, they are all fairly linear in how you create them.

Flash, however, introduces you to the added dimension of time. Everything in a Flash movie that you work with is coordinated with time. Animations, movie loops, sound effects — each of these elements is introduced in a Flash movie based on a timeline you manipulate.

Much like a motion picture, a Flash movie is a series of frames that are displayed rapidly in succession (often, 12 frames per second), giving the appearance of animation or motion. Suppose that you place an image in a different position for each frame of a movie. When the movie is played back, the image gives the illusion of being in motion.

This added element of time is a factor that you need to wrap your mind around as you begin to work with Flash. For many people, this concept takes some getting used to.

Introducing the Flash Workspace

When you first launch Flash, you see a Welcome screen, like the one shown in Figure 1-1. From this screen, you can get started in creating a new Flash file, opening an existing file, or creating a new file based on a sample.

By default, the Welcome screen appears every time you start Flash. To bypass this window, however, select the Don't Show Again check box before proceeding.

Click either the Flash File (ActionScript 3.0) button under the Create New section or any other option you want to select. The new file is created inside the Flash workspace (see Figure 1-2).

You compose and design layers for your Flash movie by drawing or inserting objects into the Stage, which is a drawing area. (See Chapter 2 in this minibook for more on the Stage.) These layers are then added to the Timeline as frames. Each panel that surrounds the Stage window is used in the development of your movies.

Figure 1-1: Welcome to Flash. We hope you enjoy your stay.

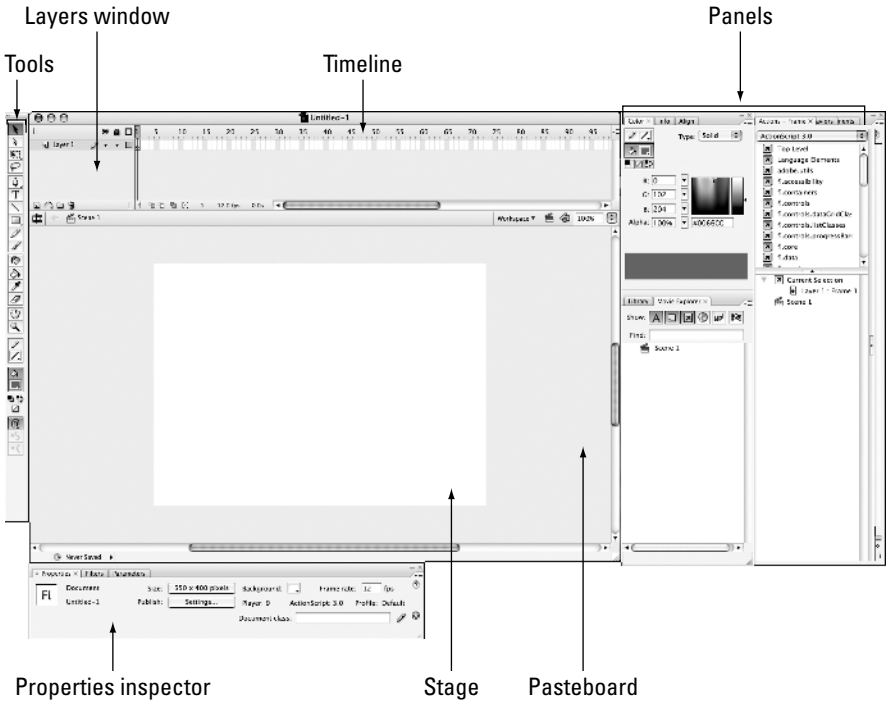

Figure 1-2: The Flash development environment is tailored for designing and animating movies.

Exploring the Flash Drawing Tools

To create or modify drawings, images, and text in the Stage, you work with the drawing tools in the Tools panel (shown in Figure 1-3). Some buttons have drop-down arrows that display additional tools. When you select a tool, the Options section at the bottom of the Tools panel is updated to provide options for the selected tool.

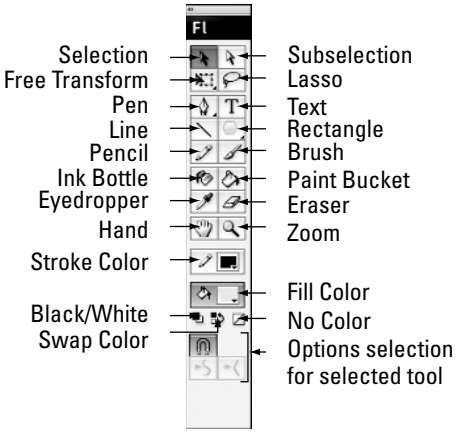

Figure 1-3: The Tools panel gives you many selection, painting, and drawing tools.

Table 1-1 lists the available tools and describes what they do.

If you have worked with Adobe Photoshop, you have a head start. Many Flash tools are similar to what you've already used in Photoshop.

Table 1-1 Flash Tools

Tool	*What You Use It For*
Selection	Select an object in the Stage.
Subselection	Select, drag, and reshape an object by using anchor points and handles.
Free Transform	Transform (scale, rotate, skew, or distort) an object.
Gradient Transform	Transform a gradient or bitmap fill object.
Lasso	Select an object by drawing a lasso around it.
Pen	Draw straight lines and curves.
Add Anchor Point	Add an anchor point for drawing.
Delete Anchor Point	Remove an anchor point.

Tool	What You Use It For
Convert Anchor Point	Convert an anchor point for drawing.
Text	Create text.
Line	Draw straight lines.
Rectangle	Draw rectangles.
Oval	Draw ovals.
Rectangle Primitive	Draw primitive rectangles.
Oval Primitive	Draw primitive ovals.
Polystar	Draw a polygon or a star.
Pencil	Draw lines and shapes.
Brush	Paint brush strokes.
Ink Bottle	Change the color, width, or style of lines or shape outlines.
Paint Bucket	Fill a closed shape with a solid color or gradient.
Eye dropper	Copy the color of an object and apply it to another one.
Eraser	Erase strokes, lines, and fills.
Hand	Move the entire movie area in the Paste board.
Zoom	Change the magnification level of the Stage.

Exploring the Properties Inspector

The Properties inspector, shown in Figure 1-4, displays the properties of the document or the selected object in the Stage. The Properties inspector contains these three tabs:

- **The Properties tab** sets the commonly accessed properties of the selected object.
- **The Filters tab** is used for applying special-effect filters to text, movie clips, and buttons.
- **The Parameters tab** is used only when working with components.

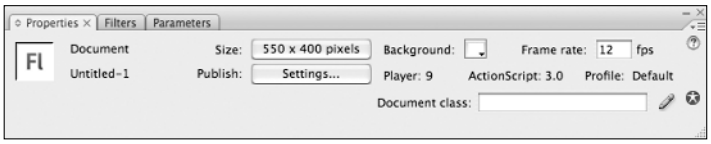

Figure 1-4: The Properties inspector.

Exploring the Flash Panels

Surrounding the Stage and Timeline window are several panels that are used for a variety of tasks in the movie creation process. These panels can be displayed in their own floating windows or grouped together into panel groups. A panel that's docked with a group appears as a tab inside the panel group window. You can access each of these panels from the Window menu.

Each panel has a drop-down menu on its right side that displays various available commands related to the panel.

Flash has more panels than you can shake a stick at. The following sections describe the ones you most commonly work with, organized by purpose.

Media components and elements panels

The three panels used for working with assets of a movie are described in this list:

- **Components:** The Components panel (shown in Figure 1-5) is used to add various user interface, multimedia, or data controls to your movie.

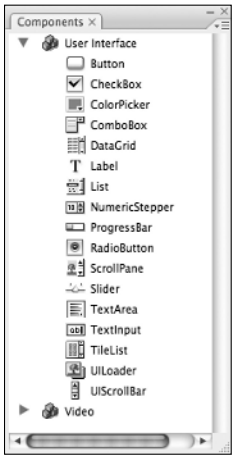

Figure 1-5: Drag and drop your component onto the Stage.

- **Movie Explorer:** The Movie Explorer (see Figure 1-6) provides a visual hierarchical tree display of your movie showing the various elements (text, buttons, movie clips, and graphics, for example) that are in use. The Movie Explorer can be a handy way to take a big-picture look at a Flash movie (to see all the elements included in it) or as a way to search for a particular element.

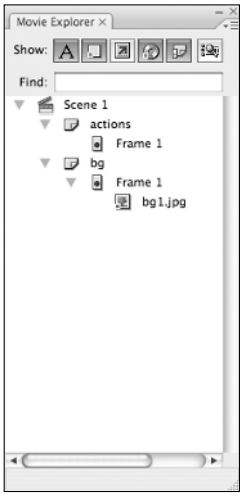

Figure 1-6: The Movie Explorer gives you a big-picture view of your movie components.

- **Library:** The Library (see Figure 1-7) contains media assets (movie clips, sounds, graphics) that you either create or import. It can also contain *symbols*, which are graphics, buttons, or movie clips that you create once and then reuse. You can use the Library to manage the assets.

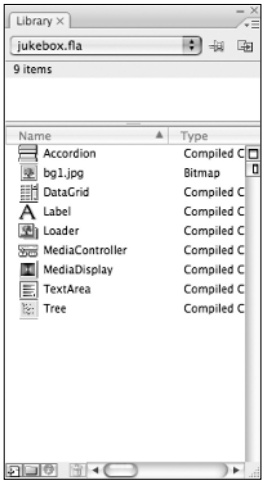

Figure 1-7: The Library stores your media assets.

Design panels

Five main panels are used as aids in the design process (see Figure 1-8):

- **Color:** The Color panel is used for setting the Stroke or Fill color.
- **Info:** The Info panel provides size and *x,y* position information about the selected object.
- **Swatches:** The Swatches panel helps you manage color sets.
- **Align:** The Align panel is used to align, distribute, and match the size and spacing of selected groups of objects.
- **Transform:** The Transform panel is used for rotating, skewing, or scaling the selected object.

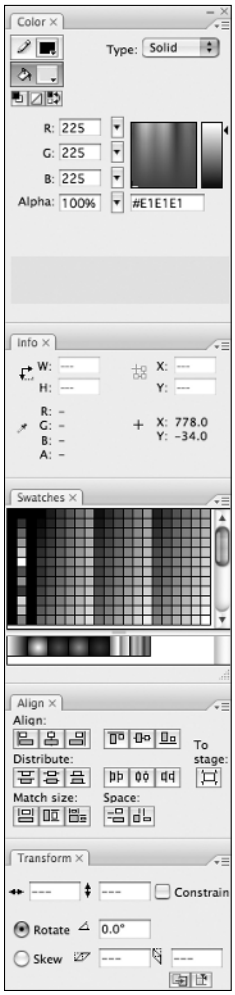

Figure 1-8: Design panels help you as you're creating your movies.

Scripting panels

Two panels are related to scripting your movie:

- **Actions:** The Actions panel (shown in Figure 1-9) is used for working with ActionScript scripts within a movie.
- **Behaviors:** The Behaviors panel contains predefined scripts that you can use to add animation to your movie.

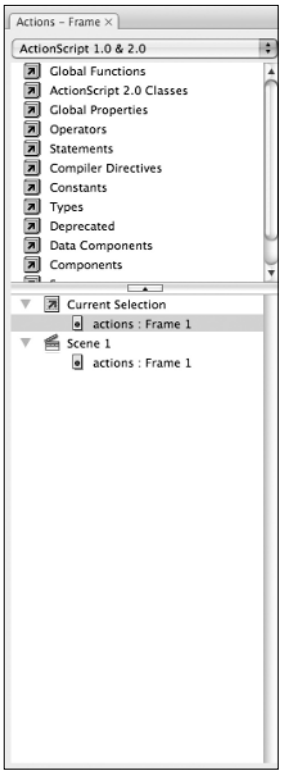

Figure 1-9: ActionScript can add power and interactivity to your Flash movie.

Customizing Your Workspace

The sheer number of various panels and windows that you can work with in Flash can make your workspace difficult to manage. However, like Dreamweaver (discussed in Book IV), you can use Flash to customize your working environment to position windows just the way you like and then to save your workspace for future use.

Showing and hiding a panel

You can access all the panels from the Window menu. You can show or hide a panel by selecting its menu item from a list. You can also hide a panel that's open by clicking its Close button.

Pressing F4 toggles the visibility of all panels and inspectors. This shortcut is useful when you want to eliminate distractions as you create, test, or preview your Flash movie.

Adding a panel to (or removing a panel from) a panel group

Each panel can be combined with others to form a panel group. A panel group can be arranged as tabs, such as the panel group shown in Figure 1-10. To add a panel as a tab, simply drag the panel on top of another panel. When you release the mouse, Flash adds the panel as a new tab.

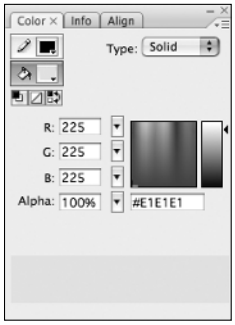

Figure 1-10: Use panels arranged as tabs you minimize screen real estate.

Alternatively, you can arrange panels on top of each other (such as the design panels shown in Figure 1-8). To add a panel above or below another panel, drag a panel onto the second panel's top or bottom border. When you release the mouse button, the panel is docked in the new position.

To move a panel from a panel group, drag the panel's tab and drop it in a new location.

Undocking and docking a panel group

In the Mac version of Flash, panel groups always float. However, in the Windows version, panel groups are normally docked at one side of the application window. To undock and create a floating panel group, simply drag the group into the Document window. The panel group undocks and floats on top of the workspace.

To redock the panel group, drag it to the side of the application window that you want to dock. Flash then redocks it.

Saving a workspace layout

After you arrange the workspace the way you want, choose Window➪Workspace➪Save Current from the menu. In the Save Workspace Layout dialog box, give your new, customized workspace a name and click OK. The new layout is added to the Workspace list.

To use a workspace, choose Window➪Workspace and select a layout from the list.