

# DPPL

*electronic publishing*

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## Flash presentations and audio streaming

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### Overview: Flash Presentations

Flash presentations over the internet can take many shapes and forms: from simple sequences of images with commentary to sequences of images with voice-over and many types of interactivity, ranging from audience feedback forms and survey forms to mini applications such as cost calculators.

From a technical point of view, when planning a Flash presentation the most important thing to decide is the bandwidth capacity of the target audience. Flash presentations with audio are unwieldy for dialup users (unless they have a lot of patience), so at the outset one should choose between broadband or a regular dialup connection.

Even with broadband access, viewing a Flash presentation requires caching techniques, which means that a good portion of the show is downloaded to memory on the user's PC, and thus is immediately available. Without this technique one could experience dropped sound and/or dropped frames, which makes the viewing experience unpleasant.

One other thing to consider at the outset is whether the Flash presentation should be also made available for use offline – for instance by a consultant who is meeting with a client where Internet access may not be available. For this purpose, one can create a self-contained Flash movie that requires no internet browser. The size of this application (for a 10 minute Flash presentation with audio would be approximately 3.5 MB).

### Making Flash Presentations

Typically, a Flash presentation begins with a concept that already envisions bandwidth requirements and general specifications (voice, visuals, interactivity). For example, if an expert is presenting views on a subject of interest to clients, one would begin with the expert's script. The script can be elaborated with a story board before or after sound recording. Typically, the storyboard is built using existing Power Point slides or other visual material already available. Usually, all of these elements need to be adapted to a "palette" or unified visual style for the entire presentation. The style may be in part determined by a corporate style sheet that includes font preferences, logos

and preferred web-friendly colors.

Sound recording should be done in a studio. This costs typically in the region of \$300/hour and usually only an hour is required. A recording can be made in a quiet room with high quality recording material, but certain sounds encountered here (air-conditioning, fluorescent lights) may be difficult to eliminate. Although the sound quality for a Flash movie (or for streaming audio) is much below that of a CD, the quality of the original recording is important. We often use taped recordings from financial presentations. The sound quality of such live events is not as good as that from a studio, but since the user is aware of this results are usually quite satisfactory.

### **Making Streaming Audio**

Recording for audio streaming (Windows Media Player, Real Media Player) has the same constraints as for Flash presentations. We normally recommend the Windows Media format because the player is usually a standard part of the Internet Explorer which dominates corporate desktops. Also, the Windows Media Player's "codecs" are superior for streaming audio and good sound (voice) can be obtained at 16 KBPS – which means that audio streams will be available for all users.

Audio streams may be "flagged" so that they trigger web events – changing web pages for instance. And, within the Microsoft world, they may be joined with Power Point presentations to create a sort of simplified alternative to the Flash presentation.

### **Cost of Producing Flash and Streaming Audio Presentations**

A 12-minute Flash presentation may cost anywhere from \$2,500 to \$30,000 – depending on the amount of original artwork, design, and interactivity required.

Hosting such works on the internet – for typical corporate use – is not expensive, unless there is a concentrated demand during a very short period of time. The costliest web events are live ones with large followings (a pop music concert for instance), where bandwidth requirements are very large for a short period of time. Here, one must pay the carrier at continuous "burst rates" – 10 MBPS and up. However, for web sites where 20 or 30 users per day will be accessing a presentation, costs are unlikely to exceed \$100/month and are usually much less.

### **How We Cost Projects**

The absolute key to managing costs in webcasts and Flash presentation is the specifications document. The more detailed the document, the more likely the project will come in on budget, and on time, and with no surprises for the client. Often, these documents represent as much as 25% of the work involved in a project since they identify everything from the number and kind of slides in a show, the visual style to the show and the production schedule. The specifications document involves much input from the client – who can steer it towards what is precisely required. In costing a project we look at several elements: man hours for coding and design (including sound editing); art work that needs to be purchased; sometimes background music or introductory sounds not available in our royalty-free library; external voice talent (for introducing a presentation).

A very simple 12-minute Flash presentation where existing art work is recycled (e.g. from a Power Point presentation) and a recorded public lecturer is digitized and edited from a cassette can take as little as 4 or 5 days to prepare and test, and cost in the region of \$2,500. More complex presentation may take 2 months to prepare and cost \$15,000 or more.

All presentations are tested on 5 operating systems and six types of CPUs using typically 10 different browsers. We always test at least 15 clients running simultaneously.

### **About DPPL (Digital Page Publishers, Ltd.)**

The company was founded in 1994 by Thomas West, Ph.D., as an electronic publishing venture specializing in electronic formats (CD-ROM, Internet, Flash, streaming audio and video). The company is based in New York City and has a small office in Brussels and in New Jersey. It has specialized in developing corporate intranets and internets where complex databases and rich media are required. Over the last seven years, DPPL has developed or co-developed over 150 web sites and 10 corporate intranets, including those of the New York Stock Exchange

([www.nyse.com](http://www.nyse.com)), Lloyds of London ([www.Lloyds.com](http://www.Lloyds.com)), British Telecom ([www.bt.com](http://www.bt.com)), the Independent Film Project ([www.ifp.org](http://www.ifp.org)), and Marsh and McLennan Companies ([www.mmc.com](http://www.mmc.com)). Its web site is at [www.dppl.com](http://www.dppl.com). Its hosting facilities are located in Newton, N.J.

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