

HOW TO MAKE INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS WITHOUT ALL THE LINGO

BY JASON LEE AND BOB CONNOLLY

When the subject of interactive CD-ROM production comes up with clients, most developers discuss the type of *Director* productions with which they are familiar. Do you need simple scripting or advanced lingo? Is there database work, or search engines involved? QuickTime or AVI video? Internet web links? Will you need to launch PDF files for extensive use of content?

Productions that require all of the above are usually very expensive and require extensive skill sets, especially in *Director* Lingo programming. But I recently discovered another method of interactive CD-ROM authoring, using tools with which most desktop publishers are familiar, but which haven't yet been explored very much at all.

A PROJECT TRES DIFFICILE

Our story began when Tourisme Quebec approached us to produce a CD-ROM that would be used for a wide variety of purposes. They wanted to present Quebec on a computer for large screen presentations to be distributed to travel industry professionals, such as wholesalers and tour operators.

They came well prepared, with "content" consisting of ten videos, hundreds of slides and Photo CDs, a printed reference manual, and additional text. They were hoping that we would also include some of our Virtual Reality QTVR panoramic photographs from our stock library.

The scope of the project was daunting but not unusual. The real challenge for us was the amount of text that needed to be incorporated. Their printed reference manual included hundreds of e-mail addresses and web links for car rentals, attractions, events, associations, regional tourism offices, etc. They wanted the CD-ROM to contain detailed searchable text descriptions that could be printed; web links to launch a web browser and the clients' email application; and full-length videos and Virtual Reality panoramic photos. Not a simple task for our usual CD-ROM authoring application, *Macromedia Director*.

After speaking to our "lingo guy extraordinaire", he advised us on several *Director* Xtras which are available to search text and launch web browsers. But the formatting of the text would be dif-

ficult. Although we could launch PDF files for formatted text, we found the RAM requirements to be a little challenging. It would require the client's computer to run a *Director* projector, QuickTime, *Acrobat Reader*, and *Netscape* or *Internet Explorer*—all at the same time.

Then we thought—could *Acrobat* do everything we need? *Acrobat Reader* has a built-in search engine, it loves QuickTime and AVI video, it launches Web links and it loves text. But how do we assemble the data without using *Director*?

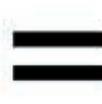
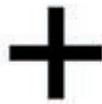
The original Tourisme Quebec reference manual was created using *QuarkXPress*, so they would be able to supply us with the original XPress files. We attempted to build a prototype, using XPress, but the difference in layout tools between *Director* and Quark was like night and day. We were accustomed to displaying the page layout in *Director* with high quality pictures and text. *Director*'s strength is multiple layers for text and graphics but Quark has no layers. What we really needed was a simple way to produce *Acrobat* PDF files.

I asked our publisher Dan Brill his thoughts on our predicament. It seemed to him that *Adobe InDesign* was created especially for our purpose—to produce PDF electronic documents easily. Our team had never used *Adobe InDesign* before but we decided to give it a go.

USING INDESIGN FOR PAGE SETUP

InDesign's learning curve was very short. Since we were already accustomed to Adobe's standard interface, the program was easy to learn using the simple tutorial in the manual. We noticed a huge difference between *InDesign* and *QuarkXPress*—most notably the use of layers. Layers in *InDesign* are similar to those in *Illustrator* and *Photoshop*, where multiple objects can be stored on a layer and moved from front to back as desired, and which can be used to organize text, background images, titles and pictures in a page layout.

One of the strengths of *Acrobat* is its ability to resize the document to fit any monitor resolution. This is different than *Director*'s limited stage size, where you have to adjust the computer



ADOBE ACROBAT 5'S NEW FEATURES COMBINED WITH ADOBE INDESIGN'S LAYOUT AND EXPORT ABILITIES NOW ALLOW YOU TO CREATE FULLY INTERACTIVE PRODUCTIONS THAT RIVAL EVEN FULL SCALE MACROMEDIA DIRECTOR PRESENTATIONS.

screen resolution to fit the size of the presentation. Because the photographs are bitmap images, it is important to make sure that if the presentation is enlarged to maximum resolution (such as 1024x768) the dimensions of the photographs are equal to or less than the largest aspect ratio so that the images will not pixelate when enlarged.

Since this presentation was to be viewed on a monitor, page size setup was important. Most PDF documents are set up for printing, and you have to scroll through and zoom in to read the document. Choosing a document size targeted at 600x800 is safe since most monitors (in the PC world) are set to that resolution.

Text layout should be clearly readable without having to zoom into the page. If the page needs to be printed you can print in landscape mode. The nice feature about PDF is that you can go font-crazy without having to worry about what it will look like on other people's computers. And vector art will be razor sharp at any size, so use lots of it.

InDesign does not retain alpha channels created in *Photoshop* because it automatically flattens any multi-layered file. However, if the image contains a clipping path, *InDesign* enables the clipping path to work like an alpha channel. This allows objects to be superimposed over a background or have text wrapped around the image, and naturally these all remain isolated on separate layers for fine tuning. You can edit the *Photoshop* PSD file at any time, and because *InDesign* and *Photoshop* are tightly integrated, the page will be updated immediately.

When a large number of pages has to be given a consistent look and feel—such as with navigation buttons, bookmarks, menus—a Master page must be created. This allows every page to have title sections and buttons that you can make interactive using *Acrobat*.

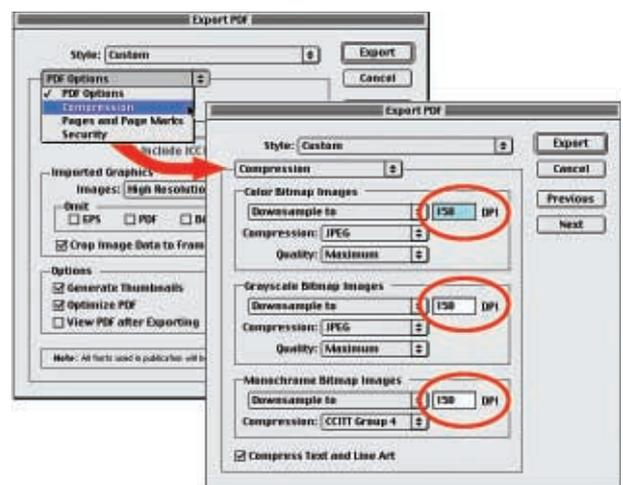
One thing that is nice about working with *InDesign* is its capability to work with images in full resolution mode instead of jagged, low-resolution placement pictures. This is handy since you want to see what your final product looks like as you build it. However, when large hi-res images, intended for printing (at 300 dpi), are placed into *InDesign*, they may slow down your comput-

er. To avoid this, each image can have its layout preview resolution changed from high quality full resolution to low quality draft mode. When the PDF is exported, the screen display setting given to a picture in *InDesign* is not retained—a high quality image is always rendered when exported to PDF.

InDesign has a PDF Export function built into it that resembles *Adobe Acrobat Distiller*—you can quickly export your document and open it up in *Acrobat* to check on the progress of the production. The exported PDF file from *InDesign* should be set at a resolution of 150 dpi (not 72) so that when the end user magnifies the page, the pictures and text will remain clear rather than being pixelated.



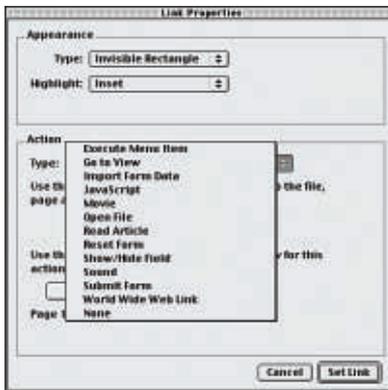
InDesign's image resolution for display is selectable.



Adobe InDesign has PDF Export built into the application.

INTERACTIVITY PROVIDED BY ACROBAT

I have talked to many people who didn't know that *Acrobat* has the capability to make an interactive CD-ROM—it does much more than allow navigation via linked bookmarks. *Acrobat 5* has many new tools and features that allow you to manipulate a PDF document, resulting in an interactive adventure rather than just a simple book.

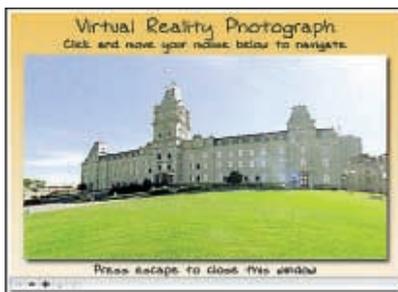


Every tool on the top menubar can be activated interactively in the Acrobat document using the Link tool.

The Link tool on its own allows many attributes to be added, such as creating Web links, playing audio files, opening external files or programs, running Javascript, adding form commands, and even taking advantage of any function on the menu bar. The Movie tool incorporates QuickTime movies, QuickTime VRs, and AVI movies to either play as embedded links in a page or pop up in a new window.

Acrobat does not pop up new windows for still images (such as JPEGs, PICTs, etc.) as it does for movies. However a common feature shared by both programs that we found useful was to have a key word launch a related picture in a new window. Using *InDesign* we underlined the word; in *Acrobat* we launched a new window when the word was selected. For a picture to pop up in a new window, we simply converted it into a QuickTime movie containing one frame, using *QuickTime Player*.

To close the pop-up window, *Acrobat* forces you to press the escape button, but not everyone may know this. To get around this, we used *Photoshop* to insert the message “Press Escape to close window” at the bottom of the pictures. For the pop-up QuickTime movies and VRs, however, a QuickTime authoring program can be used to add text instructions. We used *Adobe GoLive 5* to add a background image (created in *Photoshop*) to the movie for some extra flair. You can even add the sort of animation that is so popular in *Director* by using QuickTime wired sprites; rollover buttons can now highlight an action and you can use QuickTime effects for transitions between still pictures.



Using applications such as Adobe GoLive 5, you can combine still images and QuickTime VR into one “.mov” file.

Duplicating the look and feel of *Director* by using QuickTime is quite achievable.

One feature that enhances navigation is the floating bookmark palette. Normally, when a PDF is viewed in *Acrobat Reader*, bookmarks display on the left side of the screen. This causes the PDF document to be resized smaller to accommodate the bookmarks palette. When a PDF is viewed in full screen mode (View>Full Screen) there is nowhere for the bookmarks to appear, except in a new floating palette. This is a convenient way to navigate through a document because the palette does not go

away after the first click of the mouse—it will remain up until it is closed manually. The floating bookmarks palette can be resized and moved around the screen to accommodate easy viewing and navigation. Searching the document is a breeze because it's built into *Acrobat*. Using *Director*, this would have been a major programming job.

A CD-ROM THAT WAS MAGNIFIQUE

Our *Tourisme Quebec* CD-ROM had hundreds of web links from the printed resource manual, and *Acrobat* did a marvellous job of automatically converting the text web addresses into live web links (provided that the URLs began with “http://”).

After adding all the e-mail addresses, movies and buttons on a page, making simple modifications to text can be done within *Acrobat* itself. If more complex changes are required, you can change the original *InDesign* document, and export the single page which can replace the selected page in the original PDF. The new page will retain all the web links, movies, and buttons made previously so you don't have to recreate all the added features from scratch (hot spot areas can be repositioned over the text, if necessary).

Preferences for how the document will display when opened in *Acrobat* can be set under File>Document Properties>Open Options. These preferences include Open in Full Screen mode, initial magnification, hiding user interface tools (menu bar, toolbar, etc), page layout, and more. This allows the PDF to emulate a *Director* presentation, displaying the document on a black background in Full Screen mode, edge-to-edge on your screen.

One month after starting, 300 PDF pages were now interactive. The CD included over an hour's worth of video, hundreds of pictures, and QuickTime Virtual Reality Panoramas—all made interactive in one 75 MB PDF. We even used *InDesign* to create the printed packaging materials for the CD-ROM.

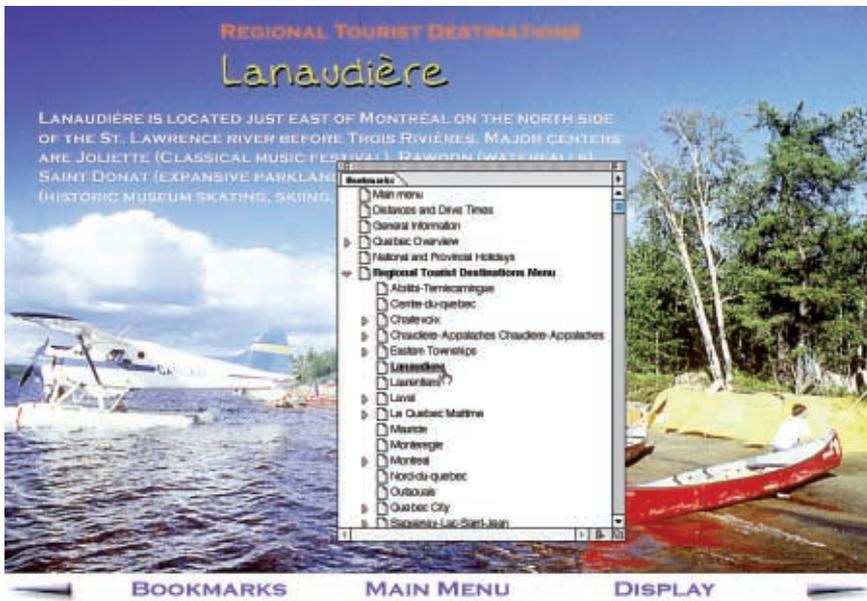
Our company rarely prints materials, except when we need packaging for DVDs, CD-ROMs and the odd promotional flyer. However I think *InDesign* will now replace *QuarkXPress* for our printing needs. In fact, the use of *InDesign* and *Acrobat* for our future CD-ROM titles or Internet downloads will probably even replace *Director* as we become more experienced with its Javascript capabilities.

Why would we switch to *Acrobat*? We love the ability to perform Full Screen mode playback on any computer. The final file size is so small you can download it over the Internet. The text is razor sharp at any size. The fonts are embedded in the file, so we can forget about how they will look on other computers. The RAM requirements are also virtually nil.

And *best of all*: you don't have to buy Mac and Windows versions of *Director* to create Projectors for Mac and Windows playback. The final production was imaged to disc using *Toast 5*, allowing for a MacOS/PC Hybrid CD.

Working on the *Tourisme Quebec* PDF CD-ROM project

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In the full screen mode, you can launch your bookmarks to display in a pop up window.

also opened up a few other avenues of thought.

Why not version an entire website using *InDesign*? You can make an HTML version and a downloadable PDF version that includes all the printed promotional material that your company might have. Go crazy with big fonts, blends and vector art and

then provide links to bandwidth-intensive rich media files such as video and Flash. Why wait for each HTML page to download? Just download all the high quality searchable text in one shot and then go online and link to the related pictures, video, VR, etc. It works like a charm.

In speaking with many of my colleagues who are experienced with *QuarkXPress*, most believe that *InDesign* will have a tough time getting established as a desktop publishing tool because *XPress* is so entrenched. This may be true, but using both programs showed me that *InDesign* is much easier to use when creating electronic documents. I believe as the world of e-books becomes more familiar to the general population, the use of *InDesign* and *Acrobat* for interactivity will grow exponentially—especially with a new generation which has never used *QuarkXPress* and is mainly concerned with delivering electronic data, particularly PDF documents, via the Internet. 🌐

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