

What's New in Adobe Flash CS4

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When you open Flash CS4 for the very first time, you may feel like you're standing on your head. The new default workspace in Flash has been given a complete overhaul, and none of the panels are in the same location as in previous versions. The Timeline is now located at the bottom of the screen, and the Properties Inspector is now on the right. Looking for the Library? You will find it docked underneath the Properties Inspector. And even though your eyes will undoubtedly move to the left side of the screen when you are ready to select a new tool, now the Tools panel is located on the far right.

While this new look may appeal to some, those who prefer to revert back to a more classic interface can easily do so by using the new workspace presets. Located in the top right corner of the screen, just to the left of the Search box, you will find the new workspace menu. Adobe has coined their new workspace arrangement, the "Essentials" view, but with a quick click, you can revert back to the "Classic" view. If neither of these arrangements suits your needs, you can also choose from Designer, Developer, Animator, or Debug views. You can also create and save your own custom workspaces.

New Animation Engine

Adobe didn't just rearrange the interface and slap on a new name. There are other drastic changes as well. Flash CS4 has a brand new animation engine that totally changes the way motion tweens are created and edited. The process is now object-based, not

frame-based, and it is possible to animate multiple attributes of an object within the same layer. Creating a motion tween is now a simple matter. You don't even have to create keyframes ahead of time. After selecting the item you are animating, you need only tell Flash to apply a tween, and then move the object where you want it on the Stage. Flash automatically creates the needed keyframes.

The new animation engine has also made it much easier to work with motion paths. When a tween is applied to an object, a motion path is automatically generated on the Stage. You don't have to add a new motion layer to the timeline or draw a new path with the pen tool. To edit the path, you simply press and drag the points on the line, and since the new motion path is based on a Bezier curve, you can then use the Bezier handles to fine-tune the path.

Even though this new tween process is much easier and more intuitive than ever, Adobe knows that not everyone likes change. Consequently, if you prefer to create motion tweens the old way, you can still use the "Create Classic Tween" option that is available in the menus.

The Motion Editor

Each attribute of a tween is now tracked separately in the new Motion Editor, which is docked behind the Timeline at the bottom of the screen. The graph-style format utilized in this new panel provides a frame-by-frame guide for fine-tuning every aspect of an animation. You now have complete

control over a tweened object's position, rotation, shape, scale, color and transparency.

Easing is another attribute that can now be controlled via the Motion Editor. Not only can you add Simple Eases, whereby a motion path gradually speeds up or slows down, but you can also add several new preset easing behaviors that were only previously available to programmers. Included in the new presets are Stop and Starts, Bounces, Springs, and Waves. You can also create and save custom eases for later use.

Motion Preset Panel

After using the Motion Editor to perfect your animation, you may want to save it for later use. The new Motion Preset Panel makes this possible. Flash developers and designers will now be able to create libraries of reusable animations that they can use again and again. They can also choose from a list of 30 common preset animations, such as smoke, pulse, fly-in-left, fly-in-right, zoom-in-2D, and more. Like all other panels in Flash, the new Motion Presets panel can be accessed via the Window command on the File Menu, and then saving your selected animation is as easy as clicking on the icon in the bottom left corner.

Kuler Panel

We can't talk about new panels without mentioning the Kuler panel, which is now available in Flash, Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign, and Fireworks. This innovative feature was first included with Illustrator CS3 and designers loved it so much that they begged for its integration into the other Adobe applications. It's really not so much a tool as it is a portal to an online community. It enables you to access groups of colors, or themes, created by an online community of designers, and then download selected themes to edit or include in your own

projects.

You can also use the Kuler panel to create your own custom themes, based on your own photographs or images. So, the next time that you find yourself struggling to create the perfect color combination, click on Window in the File Menu and select Extensions. From there, click on Kuler (you must have an Internet connection). The default panel opens with a list of the highest rated color combinations that are currently available from the portal. If you still don't see anything that inspires you, click on Browse to search for more combinations or Create to begin developing a harmonious theme of your own.

Improved Library Panel

It is now possible to search for assets in the Flash CS4 library. You can also sort new assets into new or existing folders and set properties on multiple assets at once. While small improvements, these tweaks will save users time and effort.

New Tools

Flash CS4 also comes with several new impressive tools. While the Deco and Spray Brush tools may do little more than create a fancy "wallpaper-like background," the 3D Rotation and 3D Translation tools are already getting rave reviews. When working with older versions of Flash, it was difficult to create the illusion of depth when working with objects on the Stage. Now users can use the 3D Rotation tool to make skew and perspective changes and the 3D Translation tool to move objects along the x-, y-, or z-axis. With a little practice, designers will be able to combine these tools with tweening to create fairly realistic 3-dimensional animations without using any ActionScript.

Flash CS4 also has two new tools that make it pos-

sible to animate a set of objects so that all elements in the group will move together. This animation method, called Inverse Kinematics, or IK, is not new. In fact, animators and artists have been using it for years, but up until now, trying to mimic this effect in Flash was time-consuming and complex. Now, with the Bone tool you can link several objects together to create a chain-like effect. In Flash CS4, these new Bones allow symbol instances and shape objects to move in realistic ways with a minimum of design effort. This new process allows users to create character animation, such as arms, legs, and facial expressions quickly and easily. You can then use the new Bind tool to adjust the relationships between the bones and control points of shape objects.

New Media Encoder

The Video Encoder that came with previous versions of Flash has now been replaced. The new Adobe Media Encoder is a video and audio encod-

ing application that lets you convert files into the most sought-after new formats, including FLV, F4V, H.264, MPEG-1, MPEG-2, Apple QuickTime, and Windows Media.

New Video Format

Since the new F4V video format has emerged as the format of choice for embedded video on the web, it is not surprising that Adobe has adopted it. This new format supports MPEG-4 video and AAC audio and encoding using the h.264 codec. F4V also supports HE-AAC audio. Now users can import and export files that can be posted on YouTube, Yahoo! Video, Google Video, and other popular websites without using third-party applications.

More Information

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