

## Rapid authoring tools are not what they seem

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The adverts for rapid authoring tools are appealing but creating an interactive learning program involves far more than rapidly assembling images, text, video and narration. Captivate or Storyline certainly speed the task of building interactive screens, but this part of the process will typically occupy no more than 30% of your total development time.

Here's the *real* journey in bringing a new training module from idea to delivery ...

### 1. Research

- Define the *need* - write achievable and measurable learning objectives
- Profile the learners - what's their existing knowledge?
- How will they access the module – internet/intranet, PC/iPad, network speed?
- Where and how will progress/achievements be recorded?

### 2. Specification

Write a technical specification and a detailed design document. Describe in depth the scope and content, down to individual topics.

### 3. Scripting

Instructional designers need to quiz the subject matter experts to obtain all existing materials. They'll dream up the treatments needed to achieve the learning objectives before writing the storyboard scripts. These describe what will happen on each screen, as seen by the learner and as instructions for developers.

When the scripts are signed off, *now* can you start 'rapid authoring'?

*Sorry, no.* There's more preparation work ...

### 4. Content creation

Although these systems include tools for creating/editing content, you'll get far better results using separate applications for:

- Audio – record the narration on a digital recorder (not using a computer microphone) and edit in SoundForge
- Video – edit in a specialist program such as Adobe Premiere
- Animations - create these externally. Adobe Flash is the most popular tool
- Illustrations/discreet graphics – create these in Photoshop.

If you limit yourself to the *internal* utilities provided by the rapid authoring system you'll deny yourself richness, style and quality of content. And it will show.

## 5. Now you can start authoring!

Building courses is far more efficient if you've done all your groundwork first, importing the various assets as needed. It's a good idea to produce a prototype first, with a few sample screens to get client approval before producing a complete course. The results of the authoring will be a first draft – an Alpha version.

## 6. Client reviews

After client Alpha review, the scripts and narration will change. When the Beta has been reviewed, changes made and the whole program signed off, those scripts will go to the studio for the professional actor to record them. These audio files then replace the temporary versions.

## 7. Testing

Without testing you'll have a very unhappy client. However, these systems are very good at letting you make changes quickly.

## 8. Managing the project

Running alongside every task we've listed is project management, often overlooked but essential for:

- controlling script/program versions
- chasing missing material/script reviews
- reporting on progress, highlighting delays/actions needed.

## 9. Delivery

The final stage is to publish the course and set up communication with an LMS for launching and progress tracking – all jobs that rapid authoring systems handle well.

*In conclusion, rapid authoring systems are highly productive tools, but remember they only help with a minor part of eLearning project development.*

Jane Lee 9/10/12 15:11

Comment [1]: Which systems?