Chapter 7 Continued

Text Editing and Word Processing Tools

A word processor is usually the first software tool computer users learn. From letters, invoices, and storyboards to project content, your word processor may also be your most often used tool, as you design and build a multimedia project. The better your keyboarding or typing skills, the easier and more efficient your multimedia day-to-day life will be. An office or workgroup will choose a single word processor to share documents in a standard format. And most often, that word Processor comes bundled in an office suite that might include spreadsheet, database, e-mail, web browser, and presentation applications.

Word processors such as Microsoft Word and WordPerfect are powerful applications that include spell checkers, table formatters, thesauruses and prebuilt templates for letters, résumés, purchase orders, and other common documents. Many developers have begun to use OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org) for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, graphics, databases, and more. It can be downloaded and used completely free of charge for any purpose and is available in many languages. It can read and write files from other, more expensive, office packages. In many word processors, one can embed multimedia elements such as sounds, images, and video.

OCR Software

Often a scenario exists in which one will have printed matter and other text to incorporate into a project, but no electronic text file. With OCR software, a flatbed scanner, and a computer, one can save many hours of rekeying printed words, and get the job done faster and more accurately than a roomful of typists. OCR software turns bitmapped characters into electronically recognizable ASCII text. A scanner is typically used to create the bitmap. Then the software breaks the bitmap into chunks according to whether it contains text or graphics, by examining the texture and density of areas of the bitmap and by detecting edges. The text areas of the image are then converted to ASCII characters using probability and expert system algorithms. Most OCR applications claim about 99 percent accuracy when reading 8- to 36-point printed characters at 300 dpi and can reach processing speeds of about 150 characters per second.
The limitation of this software is in reading poor copies of originals where the edges of characters have bled and in reading poorly received faxes in small print which may yield more recognition errors than it is worthwhile to correct after the attempted recognition.

Authoring Systems

Multimedia authoring tools provide the important framework you need for organizing and editing the elements of your multimedia project, including graphics, sounds, animations, and video clips. Authoring tools are used for designing interactivity and the user interface, for presenting your project on screen, and for assembling diverse multimedia elements into a single, cohesive product.

Authoring software provides an integrated environment for binding together the content and functions of your project, and typically includes everything you need to create, edit, and import specific types of data; assemble raw data into a playback sequence or cue sheet; and provide a structured method or language for responding to user input. With multimedia authoring software, you can make

- Video productions
- Animations
- Games
- Interactive web sites
- Demo disks and guided tours
- Presentations

- Kiosk applications
- Interactive training
- Simulations, prototypes, and technical visualizations

Starting with a Multimedia Project

Consider the following tips for making your production work go smoothly:

- Use templates that people have already created to set up your production. These can include appropriate styles for all sorts of data, font sets, color arrangements, and particular page setups that will save you time.
- Use wizards when they are available—they may save you much time and pre-setup work.
- Use named styles, because if you take the time to create your own it will really slow you down. Unless your client specifically requests a particular style, you will save a great deal of time using something already created, usable, and legal.
- Create tables, which you can build with a few keystrokes in many programs, and it makes the production look credible.
- Help readers find information with tables of contents, running headers and footers, and indexes.
- Improve document appearance with bulleted and numbered lists and symbols.
- Allow for a quick-change replacement using the global change feature.
- Reduce grammatical errors by using the grammar and spell checker provided with the software.
- Do not rely on that feature, though, to set all things right—you still need to proofread everything.
- Include identifying information in the filename so you can find the file later.