

WEB WARRIOR TOOLKIT

Making Web Video that Sells

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Screencasting

Everything Needed to Make Elegant Screenscasts





Screencasts are effective marketing tools as they allow the potential customer to see the product in action, before making the purchase.

Part of the [Making Web Video That Sells](#) toolkit¹

One of the most effective uses of video on the Internet today is the screencast. Screencasts are simply videos that demonstrate how to do something step-by-step on a computer, but showing the computer screen or the application window, and recording all of the mouse movements and other interactions, typically while the screencaster is explaining what he or she is doing every step of the way.

Screencasts are effective as tutorials--it's so much easier to just show a user how to do a particular task than it is to explain it with words or even with words and pictures. Screencasts are also very effective marketing tools, because your potential customers can see your product in action. This helps them get a much better feel for how easy (or difficult) it is to use your product, and helps them anticipate how they might use it.

As we've mentioned already, Apple has done an amazing job using screencasts to promote their iLife and iWork software suites. Many other companies and organizations are using screencasts as tutorials, and as effective demonstrations of what their products can do. And the cool thing is that screencasting is easy, and inexpensive to produce.

¹ <http://webwarrior tools.com/ebook/making-web-video-that-sells?freebook>



Screencasting software

The key piece of the screencast puzzle is the software you use to produce the screencast. The appendix lists several software options that you may wish to try--most are available as downloadable demos that you can try out for as long as you like, though the demo version typically places big "DEMO" words on the video you produce, or allows you to produce only very short screencasts until you actually pay for the software.

For our purposes, we're going to use a Macintosh screencast application called [ScreenFlow](#)¹. All of the screencasts that are included with this Web Toolkit were produced with ScreenFlow, and viewing those screencasts will not only help you understand the procedures and techniques we have demonstrated, but will also help you see what sorts of things you can accomplish with a screencast.

¹ <http://www.telestream.net/screen-flow/overview.htm>



You can record a screencast in a single take, for a more "candid" feel.

Planning your screencast

Producing a screencast is much like producing any other video, which means that you should take some time to plan your screencast carefully before you begin. When you produce a screencast, you can edit the video just as you would edit any live-action footage, but it is also possible to produce an entire screencast in just one take (one unedited recording session).

Although you can produce a screencast of almost any length, consider keeping your screencasts as short as possible, or break a longer screencast into several shorter ones of three to ten minutes in length. This eases the load on network bandwidth a bit, and it allows your users to view just the parts they need. It also keeps your video files to manageable sizes.

Unless you are really experienced and skilled with explaining things off the cuff, it's a good idea to prepare a script or outline for the screencast before you begin recording it. This will help prevent the "uh" and "ah" and "er" problems that many of us have with impromptu speaking.



Recording the audio of a screencast separately is a great way to improve the audio quality.

You may wish to record the audio and video portions of your screencast separately, for a variety of reasons. If you stumble over words as you are demonstrating something on-screen, or if you make mistakes or give incorrect instructions, your screencast suffers. Recording the audio separately from the video gives you more control over what you say while things are happening on the screen.

Another practical reason to record audio separately is to improve the audio quality. Every screencast software application will allow you to use the built-in microphone on your computer to record the audio, but this doesn't always result in good audio. And if you are recording the screencast on a laptop computer, fan noise can degrade the quality of your audio recording--if you record the audio separately, after you have recorded the video demonstration, you can use a better microphone, and you can edit the audio to match the video more precisely. An alternate approach to this would be to record the audio track first, then listen to it and let it guide you as you record the screencast.

In any case, a good screencast script ought to be part of your planning process. Lay out every step that you wish to demonstrate, and practice the procedure several times before you make your screencast recording.



Enhancements to your screencast

A good screencasting application will provide several options for enhancing your screencast. For example, you may be able to enable options to highlight every mouse click, so that the user can see easily where the mouse is at any given time. Some screencast software allows you to choose to magnify a small area around the mouse when you click. This option is great for cases where the video frame is small, making icons and text and buttons hard to read, or when the video compression renders the image a bit too fuzzy to see clearly.

Some screencast software will allow you to enlarge an area of interest on the screen, "zooming in" on a portion of the window where you are doing something that you want your users to be sure to see.

These options vary from one package to another, so when you select a screencast application to use, be sure to try before you buy, and make sure your application has all the bells and whistles you want.



Using ScreenFlow

ScreenFlow (<http://www.flip4mac.com/screenflow.htm>) is an excellent screencast application for Mac OS X 10.5 and later, and it is relatively inexpensive at \$99. Here are a few of the features:

RECORD EVERYTHING

ScreenFlow records the entire screen, meaning that you don't have to pick an area to record. After you've finished recording, you can decide whether to show only certain portions of your screen. It can also record live video from your built-in iSight camera or another video camera while you are recording what's happening on the screen. This, for example, allows a simultaneous presentation of content from the screen, as well an inset video of the presenter. If you have a Powerpoint or Keynote presentation to record, you can do this while recording yourself live as you give the presentation. ScreenFlow also records not only the audio from your built-in or external microphone, but also the computer audio.



HIGHLIGHTS

ScreenFlow tracks your mouse movements and clicks during capture, and after the capture you can add video and audio highlights to clarify exactly what's going on.

CALLOUTS

With ScreenFlow, you can highlight or focus in on the mouse or the frontmost window on your screen.

MOTION

You can add zoom and pan effects to your clips, or change the audio levels at various points during your screencast.

EXPORT OPTIONS

ScreenFlow allows you to control nearly every aspect of the exported file, including the resolution of the screen and the type of video and audio encoding. ScreenFlow records at very high quality and large size, and you can scale this to whatever size and quality you need.



EDITING

With ScreenFlow, you may not need any other editing software--the editing features are powerful enough to allow you to import additional recordings, add additional audio, add images, and add other effects, right in the application.

One drawback of Screenflow is that it does not export directly to Flash video, but this is not a big problem--if you need Flash output, there are several ways to convert your video, and those are discussed later in this document. But one more caveat: ScreenFlow will not run on any version of the MacOS earlier than OS X 10.5 (Leopard).

ScreenFlow is fairly simple to use, but you will want to take some time to watch the tutorial screencasts on the Web site (<http://www.flip4mac.com/screenflow.htm>). Not only are they very helpful for learning how to use ScreenFlow, they were also produced and exported directly from ScreenFlow--a great example of how this technology can be implemented on a Web site. (For another example of ScreenFlow in action, you need look no further than this Web Video Toolkit--it includes a ScreenFlow screencast demonstration of how to upload a video to YouTube.)



Converting your video file to a suitable format for uploading

YouTube, as we've seen, prefers to see your movie in MPEG-4 format, ideally, but YouTube will convert your video from .avi, .mov, .mpg, .wmv and other formats. If you wish, you can simply upload your video to YouTube and let YouTube worry about the format conversion. If you wish to host the video file on your own Web server, or if you will be uploading your video to some other video sharing service, you may wish to do the conversion to another format yourself. You can do the conversion on your computer using software for file format conversion, or you can use an online format conversion service, such as Media Convert (<http://w17.media-convert.com>). This service can convert video files of up to 150 MB from almost any existing format to almost any other format, and the service is free. Simply follow the instructions to upload your video to the site, choose the desired output file format, provide an e-mail address for notification, and when the conversion is completed, you will receive an e-mail message with an address from which you can download your converted video. Your video will be stored at that address for 24 hours after the conversion is completed.



Videos converted in .mov (QuickTime) by us looked significantly better on YouTube than when YouTube converted them automatically.

In our experimentation, a video that was produced and exported to QuickTime .mov format looked significantly better on YouTube when we allowed YouTube to do the conversion directly than when we converted from .mov to .mp4 using Media Convert online. The fewer conversions you do to your video, the better your end results will be--each conversion results in further compression, and the cumulative effect of even two compressions can degrade the video quality appreciably.

If you prefer to do the conversion on your computer rather than online, you'll need to obtain a suitable format conversion utility. A list of available format conversion software is included in the appendix.

Aside from learning more about how to create excellent video and screencasts, you'll also learn how to market these videos to sell more products and gain more attention with the [Making Web Video That Sells Toolkit](#). Check it out today and start [making better video!](#)