

A button for everything except your belly

by Lerrick Starr

Creating interactive rich media PDFs using the tools available in Adobe Acrobat Professional or InDesign is both fun and an intellectual challenge—and it’s also bound to be a key element in the future of online publishing. A good working knowledge of the Quark/Photoshop/Illustrator triumvirate used to be sufficient to earn a living in DTP. Not any more. But rich media PDF brings owners, artists and technical people in the graphic arts industry a new business and creative opportunity.

THE FUN PART

PDF provides a special programming environment. Adobe’s version of JavaScript powers all the magic you see—but no one has to master it. Through clever use of the built-in options available in the interface, you can build beautifully interactive artwork without facing the daunting prospect of learning JavaScript programming.

By its nature, a rich media PDF file contains elements derived from outside the traditional print process. Working with movies, slide shows and other rich media PDF bits will require designers to broaden their knowledge base with applications like QuickTime Pro, iPhoto, iMovie, iTunes (all low or no cost), Macromedia Flash, Acrobat, InDesign (if you’re not there yet), or (for the dedicated) Apple’s Final Cut Pro. Competent use of the first four apps will come quickly to experienced hands—the others will take more time.

If you have a thirst for programming, visit [Acrobat SDK Documentation](#) where you can download a number of free JavaScript programming guides and other resources.

Since PDF is familiar to everyone—and there are countless PDFs in circulation begging to be enriched like white flour—that’s where we begin.

An orderly approach and a plan of execution is required to generate a complex PDF such as this magazine. Most of the functionality in the interface is built in before pages are designed, and links and thumbnails are then added.

Before you begin, take a look at the recommended settings for some important Acrobat Preferences (Cmd- or Ctrl-K)—mouse over each of the five buttons to display an Acrobat screen shot for each Preference in the space below:



THE LOWLY BUTTON

Creating and Using a Button (below) is a tutorial (in rich PDF only) on the creation and programming of a button.

Creating and Using a Button (2:53)

Rectangular buttons are created with the Button Tool; when you click and drag to marquee an area, the button initially has no visual attributes—it appears in red, since that’s the default color used for the selected button. Viewing the various properties, we can add stroke and fill color, adjust the line weight, and apply certain effects, like bevelled, dashed or inset. Type can be created inside the button in any color, size and typeface—but it isn’t pretty.

Most important, Actions can be associated with the button so that with a mouse click, dynamic events will occur in the PDF. The lesson, utilizing a landscape letter-size page, introduces Mouse Enter and Mouse Exit as triggers for an event. Mouse Enter means the event is triggered when the mouse travels from outside the button area to inside; Mouse Exit is the opposite. The event being triggered is the appearance and disappearance of another button.

Not a big deal, until you consider the things you might put in the second button. For example, a client supplies a PDF with a map that shows a location relative to major highways but with no detail on local streets. Suppose that you create a small trigger without any attributes, essentially making it invisible, and place it over the little star on the map noting the location. In the second, featureless, “hidden” button, you place the image of an enlarged view of neighbourhood. Enter the trigger and you get an enlarged view of the area.

In, out, in, out. Now you see it, now you don’t.

The navigation page in this magazine is almost entirely button-powered. Main headings are designed as buttons that are always visible, and a Mouse Enter on any of them triggers

the appearance of another series of buttons (individual layers can be set up to show or hide groups of buttons). These buttons are set up in pairs—one containing a thumbnail image for an article, rich media feature, advertiser, or special feature, and the other containing its description, both linked to a destination page in the document.

Clicking on a selection sends you to the selected page or article, but on the way out, your mouse click also causes all the “revealed” buttons on the navigation page to reset their state to “hidden”. This prevents you from returning to the navigation page to find your previous list of items still hanging open.

The *Graphic Exchange* interface is designed and executed in InDesign, but out of necessity it started in Acrobat, since any rich media added to InDesign is a static object until the PDF is created. It takes too long to prototype and test complex button assemblies in InDesign, whereas anything created in the PDF goes live with the selection of the Hand tool. Lessons learned in Acrobat are largely transferrable to InDesign, so the point is: prototype in Acrobat, then build it in InDesign.


WHERE TO WORK

InDesign and Acrobat feature overlapping rich media toolsets, although the choice of available options differs.

InDesign is a comfortable rich media environment for people with artistic leanings which allows artists to control the look and feel of the rich media elements right from the beginning of the creative process. Any rich media element can be designed, from the shape of a button to the typeface and layout of the type inside it. But because the rich media toolset in InDesign is not as robust as Acrobat, you will usually want to finish the pages in Acrobat Pro.

Of course, if you’re not an InDesign user, you’ll follow the traditional print production model, where pages and elements are assembled in Quark or CorelDraw, exported to PDF, and then enriched in Acrobat.

One way or the other, playing with buttons is fun—and if this magazine just opened for you in Acrobat Pro, then what else could you be waiting for?

Another button that says  ?

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