



TRAINING MEDIA REVIEW

UPDATED BUYERS GUIDE TO AUTHORING TOOLS: USERS TELL YOU WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T, AND WHY

OBJECTIVE REVIEWS AND RESEARCH @ WWW.TMREVIEW.COM

02
08 **IN THIS REPORT**
Introduction by Patti Shank
Ratings and Costs

09 **REVIEWS**
Adobe Acrobat Professional
11 Articulate Studio
14 Atlantic Link
17 Authorware
18 Brainshark
21 Camtasia Studio
22 Captivate 3
28 Director
29 Dreamweaver
31 Design-a-Course
32 Elicitus Content Publisher
36 Flash
38 Flashform Rapid ELearning
Studio Professional
42 Gameshow Pro
45 iSpring Pro
48 LeaderGuide Pro
50 Lectora Professional Suite
53 Mediasite
56 Noah
58 Outstart Trainer
61 PowerPoint
63 RapideL Enhance
66 Raptivity Standard Version
71 ReadyGo WCB
74 SmartBuilder
77 ToolBook Instructor
80 Unison
83 VoxProxy
86 Wildform Flair

89 About the Reviewers

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHORIZING TOOLS REPORT

by Bill Ellet, Editor, wellet@tmreview.com

Trainers are subject to a glut of advice about teaching materials and technology. Some of the advice has value and some of it does not, or at least it can't be trusted enough to rely on. Vendors exert a powerful influence on the field, and some of that influence is designed to attract favorable notice in the media and from "advice-giving" companies. That effort is fair. Companies need to sell their wares, and marketing is a necessary thing in a market economy. If you don't trumpet your goods and services, someone else will draw attention to theirs.

But like the financial markets, training doesn't have much transparency when it comes to market influence on experts and "objective" sources of opinion. When relationships are transparent, you can assess whether a source is worth listening to. But trainers generally don't have the information needed to make that assessment because of the lack of transparency.

PRACTITIONER REVIEWS

The individuals who review for TMR are practitioners. Their primary motives for reviewing are to learn about training materials and technology and share what they learn with their peers. They don't have a reason to say anything other than what they think. An evaluation needs relevant criteria, and they need to be used by everyone who assesses the same type of product. We provide our reviewers with standard criteria tailored to the medium. In her Introduction to this report, Patti Shank, an internationally recognized expert on authoring tools, walks you through the criteria that all reviewers consider when they write their reviews and decide on an overall rating for a product.

BECOME A SUBSCRIBER

If you find this report useful, consider becoming a subscriber to Training Media Review. Our website (www.tmreview.com) offers new reviews of training-related technology, DVDs, online courses, books, and certain live events and a significant database of published reviews, all by practitioners.

You can begin a search for training products in a few minutes and not waste time trying to sort through vendor sites and find information—like a price, for instance. TMR provides the information, the review, and links to the vendor. You'll start faster, develop a short list faster, and have a better chance of finding quality at a reasonable cost. That's a good combination in a time of financial distress.

TRAINING MEDIA REVIEW publishes practitioner reviews and ratings of training content (online, software, video, print) and selected training technologies such as authoring tools.

WWW.TMREVIEW.COM
EMAIL editor@tmreview.com TEL 617.489.9120
SUBSCRIBE www.tmreview.com/join_renew.asp

©2009 by TMR Publications. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced by any means without the written consent of the publisher.



ARTICULATE RAPID E-LEARNING STUDIO '09 PROFESSIONAL

★★★★

Articulate

800-861-4880

www.articulate.com

List price: \$1,846

Total cost of ownership:

Reviewed by Richard Karel

I know a guy who's been a one-person e-learning department for the last eight years who was up against a four-hour timeline to put together an online training demo. Having seen the earlier TMR review of Articulate Presenter (2006), he decided to use Articulate Studio '09 to beat the clock and impress those university administrators who didn't know it could be done in-house.

That guy is me and—after reading the vice chancellor of finance's glowing email to my dean—all I can say is: Just in time for Christmas!

How many of us one-person online learning departments understand the need for reliable, rapid development software? That is integrated with a familiar tool like PowerPoint? That is useful to beginners and to advanced developers? That is capable of creating advanced learning objects by inputting text? And, of course, does not break!

I kept expecting Articulate's integration of software applications to break—to *not* do what it was supposed to do—and I was happily disappointed. It was as if the software was staring me in the face and asking, "What would you like me to do next?"

THE PRODUCT

Articulate Studio is a bundle of these applications:

- Presenter
- Quizmaker
- Engage
- Video Encoder

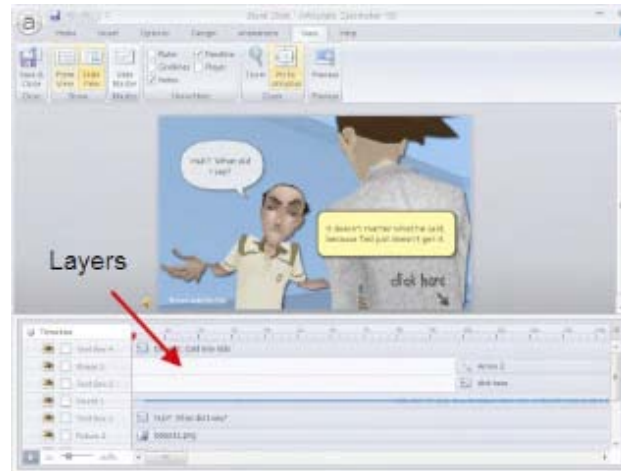
Presenter and Engage are the most tightly integrated with PowerPoint 2007—and, yes, unlike Adobe Captivate CS3, the applications *actually* work with PowerPoint 2007. They are the template and learning object development components of Studio.

With Quizmaker, one is given the tools to build just about any type of online learning assessment. Quizmaker integrates with PowerPoint as well. Video Encoder proved to be a solid digital video-to-Flash conversion tool with a bare-bones feature set. Installation of all four applications was seamless and easy.

INTERFACE

If it's not obvious by now, you will need to be somewhat proficient in PowerPoint to take full advantage of Articulate Studio's rich feature-set. In fact, expect to do much of your work in Articulate through the Microsoft PowerPoint interface. Articulate shows up as an additional tab on the PowerPoint ribbon.





Click the tab in PowerPoint, and you have access to all of the features of Engage, Quizmaker, and Presenter. But also be prepared for Engage and Quizmaker to open separate user interfaces from PowerPoint. This took me about four hours to get used to. If you're not prepared, it can seem a little disconcerting at first.

EASE OF USE

My first project with Articulate Presenter '09 consisted of downloading a random PowerPoint presentation I found on the Internet

and then converting it to web-ready form using Presenter. Would there be any problems with the use of a random presentation whose origins could have been PowerPoint 2003 or earlier? No, there wasn't.

But what about projects—or online training demos—that require intense instructional design, engaging learning activities, interactive quiz elements, and very rapid development timetables? My next project was the demo I mentioned earlier. Although community support portal and help documentation links are readily available, I had no time for them.

UNBELIEVABLE INTEGRATION

First, I opened an existing PowerPoint presentation that was completed not too long ago as a template for online learning. This template served as the basis for my short demo. But I really wanted to take advantage of the Studio features to pack as much as I could into the demo. Here is where Articulate Engage and Quizmaker came into play.

After inserting my first Engage interaction (as simple as a mouse click on the Articulate ribbon), I realized that what used to be 16 hours of development time just became 10 minutes. I copied and pasted text from a website into this reusable learning object and added another.

Now I had two very clear and concise learning objects in my demo that reflected sound instructional design. What next? How about a quiz?

Quizmaker was just as intuitive and well integrated with PowerPoint 2007 as Engage. One mouse click started the wizard-like process for entering either a quiz or survey. The available question types were diverse and, to my consternation, everything worked like it was supposed to perform. I wanted to add a multiple-choice question, then T/F, then....

Wait—I only had 30 minutes left! (Remember, I did not once use the help and support features.) I published the demo and previewed its functionality. Worked perfect, but I wanted to change the Articulate logo to the university's. This took about five minutes to figure out.

I did attempt to learn how to load Flash-based individual questions in the Articulate object "Flash Movie." This didn't work, but I attribute this failure more to operator error than Articulate. I published the demo to our Moodle LMS, and it worked just great.

Conspicuously absent is the advanced scripting found in other authoring tools such as Lectora and Toolbook Instructor. However, if one is going to learn an ECMA-based, object-oriented programming language, why not just learn Adobe Flash and forego a rapid development tool such as Articulate?



If you are a Flash programmer, you can build Community Interactions within Articulate Engage with the free Engage development kit.

DOWNSIDERS

I have only a few complaints. Some of the fields required when entering an Engage interaction or quiz are not hidden fields so what you enter will be seen by the end user. It's a little frustrating to have to guess at what text or headings will be where, but Engage gives you plenty of convenience to re-edit the interaction. You may want to type the name of the field in its blank field to see the layout of the interaction before proceeding.

Also, this program is RAM- and CPU-intensive. I tested it on both Vista Pro and XP Pro. Performance was fine on the Vista Pro machine with 8G of RAM but very slow on the four-year old XP laptop, even though it's fairly high-end and geared towards multimedia production.

But there were never any system crashes, and this says a lot to me. Articulate Studio is a well-crafted suite of applications, designed with forethought and dedicated to saving a developer like me an incredible amount of time. It's definitely worth the price tag because it ranks above most "end all your troubles" WYSIWYG authoring tools that I'm familiar with.

RECOMMENDATION

If I were purchasing an enterprise-wide license for a rapid development tool, Articulate Studio Professional would be at or near the top of the list. Its flexibility, scalability, ease of use, and astonishing performance make this an outstanding product. Unfortunately, many of us get caught up in the Adobe Captivate pricing go-round and sometimes don't allow ourselves a closer look at higher-cost products that are more affordable in the long run.

