

Captivat-ing Library Instructional Services

by

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Presented as part of the program "Developing Online Tutorials."

Conference Program Abstract: "Captivat-ing Library Instructional Services" will examine the development of online tutorials using Macromedia's Captivate software. Formerly called RoboDemo, this software development tool allows for relatively easy interactive Flash applications and can be used to develop general research tutorials, database specific tutorials, and even to enhance software instruction.

Academic libraries have turned increasingly to online tutorials to meet the instructional needs of both on-campus and remote users. Moving beyond simple web pages outlining search strategies, today's online tutorials utilize a number of active learning strategies, which often require access to more than simple web authoring software. This article will examine the use of one example of online tutorial software, known as Captivate.

Designing an Online Tutorial

After reviewing the literature, [Bianco](#) (2005) offers the following fourteen tips for good online tutorial design.

1. State objectives clearly.
2. Teach core concepts that go beyond database mechanics.
3. Incorporate a technology check and state system requirements.
4. Don't lose the user through links to external sites.
5. Provide clear navigation clues and offer frequent feedback.
6. Develop short pages that are easy to scan.
7. Keep readability in mind when selecting colors and using white space.

8. Use linear navigation only in selected circumstances.
9. Update links as needed.
10. Provide alternative access for visually impaired users.
11. Develop pages that load in a minimum amount of time, even for dial up users.
12. Appeal to multiple learning styles through the inclusion of simulations.
13. Keep the user engaged through interactive sections.
14. Edit screen shots so that only pertinent information is retained.

The Macromedia tutorial software, known as Captivate, can assist librarians in developing online tutorials that meet many of these guidelines.

Captivate

Macromedia's Captivate, formerly known as RoboDemo, is an online tutorial software which allows tutorial designers to develop "movies" with Flash applications. Just as web editors such as Dreamweaver create HTML code behind the scenes, Captivate provides a user friendly interface for designers to enter content, which can then be converted automatically to a Flash file. As [Green](#) (2005) notes, the software is easy to learn, offers a number of unique features, and is easy to implement. As discussed below, any librarian familiar with PowerPoint should be able to use Captivate to design interactive database tutorials.

Figure 1 shows the opening screen of Captivate. From here, there are several ways to create a Captivate file (or "movie"), including recording a movie, creating a movie from scratch, and importing PowerPoint slides.

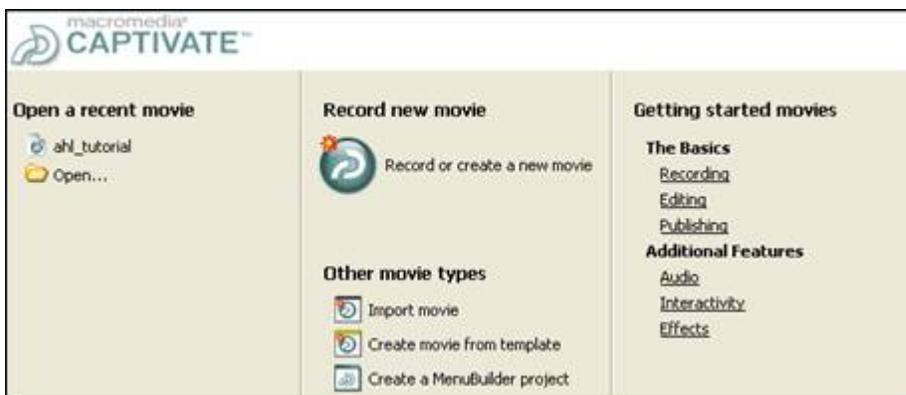


Figure 1. Opening screen of Macromedia Captivate.

Recording allows the designer to capture the activity displayed on the screen. So if you wanted to teach a particular database, you could open that database and enter sample searches, and Captivate would record every movement of the mouse, every scrolling movement, and every letter typed. Once you have demonstrated everything you wanted, you could then add timed annotations to explain the search procedure. Captivate will then "publish" the tutorial as a Flash file, and tutorial users can see the database in action. There is also an option to play the file in simulation mode, which would require the user to follow all the steps demonstrated in the tutorial.

Mississippi State University Libraries has used Captivate to create a tutorial for the database America: History & Life (available at <http://library.msstate.edu/content/templates/?a=877&/>), and there are plans to develop others in the near future. The goal was to provide a tutorial that would provide students with convenient, guided, and interactive learning experiences. Although most database providers offer interactive tutorials for their products, there are practical limitations to their usefulness. For example, at Mississippi State, students are often confused about the how our link resolver, SFX, can be used to get the full text of articles. Tutorials prepared by database providers cannot show these and other custom features.

While the Record mode seemed like the obvious way to go about this, it was ultimately decided to create the movie from scratch. Using Record mode can lead to very large file sizes, and we did not want to overly burden students who were using dial up connections. Also for this reason, we chose not to add sound to this particular tutorial, although Captivate makes it easy to add sound to each slide.

Figure 2 shows various slides that make up the America: History & Life tutorial. As you can see, this has a very similar look and feel to Microsoft PowerPoint, and anyone who can add images, text boxes, and callouts in PowerPoint should be able to get started with Captivate in a short time. Menu items such as File, Edit, View, and Insert will also be familiar to PowerPoint users.



Figure 2. Slides in America: History & Life tutorial.

Figure three shows slide nine of the America: History & Life tutorial. Again like PowerPoint, thumbnails of the slides appear to the left, and the active slide is enlarged. Using the Insert menu, you can add a number of items, including captions, highlight boxes, rollover captions, click boxes, and text entry boxes. To create this slide, a screen shot was taken of the relevant part of the database. Adobe Photoshop was then used to crop the screen shot and save it as a small file size. The image was then imported into Captivate as an image slide. At this point, captions and other elements mentioned above were added to provide explanatory notes and interactivity.

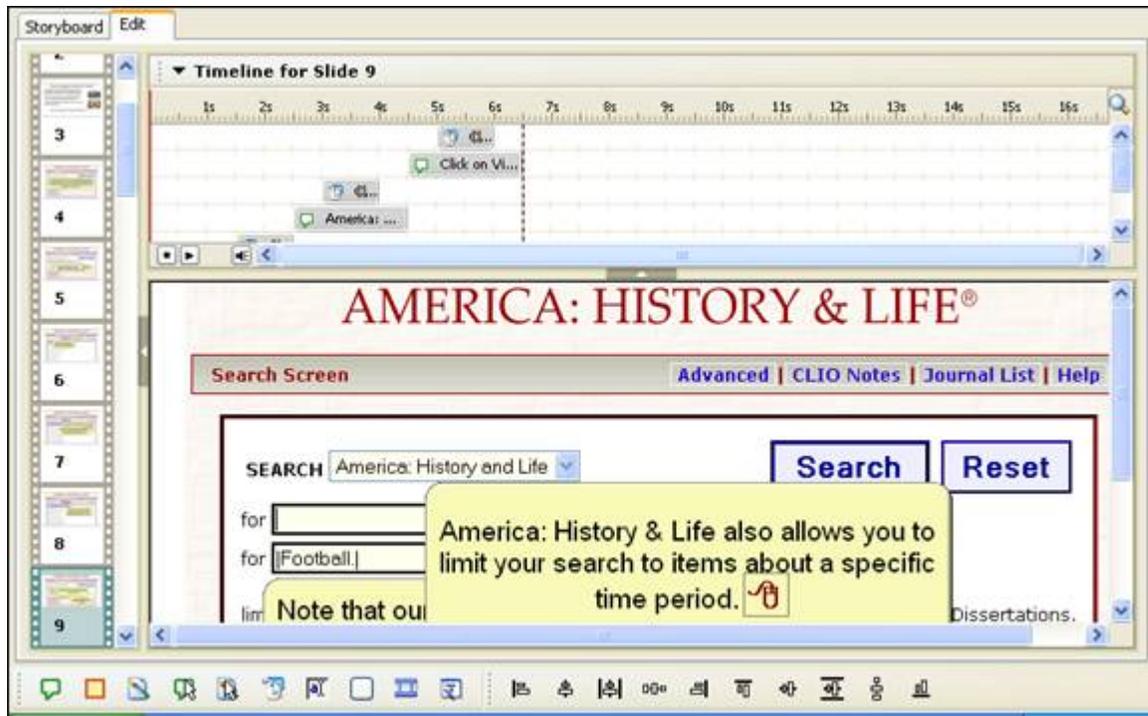


Figure 3. Example of timeline and slide layout in Captivate.

The timeline that appears at the top of the active slide allows the designer to incorporate dynamic features into the tutorial. We wanted to provide some explanation about this part of the database, but we did not want all the text to appear at once. So a callout was inserted with a couple of explanatory sentences, followed by a mouse icon, . A click box was then placed over the mouse icon so that the tutorial user can click on it when they are ready to go to the next callout. This interactivity allows tutorial users to proceed at their own pace.

Click boxes and text entry boxes are especially useful for database tutorials. The America: History & Life database, especially with the new interface, requires a lot of clicking to use features like the subject index and the time period index, and these are not necessarily intuitive in the interface. To show users how to use the subject index, a click box was placed over the subject look-up icon, and a callout was provided to tell the user to click on that icon. This leads to the subject look-up screen, and it is here that text entry boxes are especially useful. A text entry box was placed over the subject search field, along with a click box over the search button. At that part of the tutorial, users are prompted to enter a specified search phrase and click on the search button. When they do this, they are taken to a new slide in the tutorial that displays a screen shot of the actual results of the search. They are prompted to click the box of the specified search term

and then click on the "Add Checked Terms" button. This takes the user to the next slide, which is a screen shot of the main search page with the subject term already filled in. Similar steps are used to show how to limit searches to journal articles and how to use SFX to get the full text. Altogether, the tutorial uses 42 slides, and it takes around twelve or fifteen minutes to work through the tutorial.

Captivate (and similar programs, such as Camtasia) allows librarians to start creating interactive tutorials in a very short time. At Mississippi State University Libraries, we have only begun to explore the possibilities provided by this software, but we hope to use it to reach parts of the university community that may currently be falling between the gaps. For more information about Captivate or to download a trial version, visit the Macromedia website at <http://www.macromedia.com/software/captivate/>.

References

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Green, Tom. 2005. *Macromedia Captivate for Windows*. Berkley , CA : Peachpit Press.