

# Successfully Managing Interactive Multimedia projects

by Peter Feighner

The process of developing interactive multimedia presentations requires a great deal of teamwork and cooperation from a number of people performing many different tasks. Arriving at and maintaining an agreed-upon project proposal, while keeping a project on schedule and within budget, can be very tricky business.

In this article I will discuss four powerful tools I use to assist me in the management of interactive projects. These tools form the foundation of a predictable and consistently successful development process.

## Production Milestones

Production milestones form the backbone of the interactive production process. Each milestone contains a series of carefully defined deliverable items that lead to the completion of a given project. These milestones are:

- Project Analysis
- Preliminary Design
- Intermediate Design
- Final Design
- Prototype Development
- Production
- Distribution

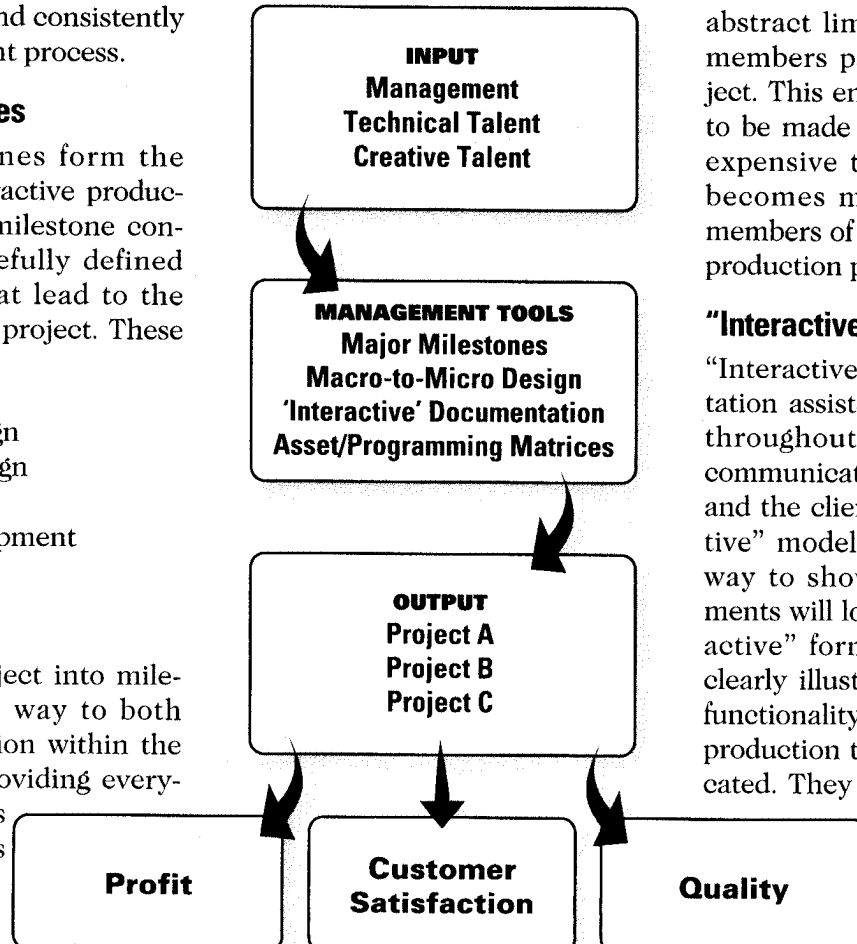
Breaking down a project into milestones is a powerful way to both improve communication within the design team while providing everyone with a context as to where the project is in the design process.

## Macro-to-Micro

## Design

As each of the major milestones outlined above are completed the level of design moves from broad sweeping to finely detailed design. Another way of saying this is that the people involved, resources, budget and time expenditure should increase proportionally with the detail of design. There are a number of benefits

## Effective Management Of Interactive Multimedia Development



derived from organizing the development flow in this manner:

1) When a production schedule and budget are laid out in the beginning, time and money can be assigned to the completion of each milestone. If delays occur or the budget requirements change, the production manager has time to make the appropriate adjustments to bring the project back in line before the issue becomes critical.

2) The ability to maintain design flexibility is another key feature. When the design is at its most abstract limit the number of team members participating in the project. This encourages bigger changes to be made when they are the least expensive to make. As the design becomes more solid, bring more members of the design team into the production process.

## "Interactive" Documentation

"Interactive" production documentation assists the development team throughout the design process in communicating between themselves and the client. Many times "interactive" models are the only effective way to show how proposed treatments will look and feel in an "interactive" format. These models can clearly illustrate design options and functionality before large amounts of production time and budget are allocated. They are also an ideal way to

show progress throughout the design process. Let's look at some instances of "interactive" docu-

mentation as they are encountered chronologically in the design process:

**Existing Samples:** Completed work can be viewed by the client and design team to communicate "ball park" likes and dislikes. This can include particular pieces of functionality or treatments that appeal to the client.

**Navigation Flowcharts:** Flowcharts are used to create a shell or framework of what the completed presentation will look like. Elements identified in a program's content outline are hung in these flowchart diagrams before final scripts are written. This technique helps to identify program imbalances early in the game where they are easier and less expensive to correct.

**Hyperlink Models:** These models create a realistic picture of a proposed project by displaying a rough presentation in a rapid prototyping tool such as Claris HyperCard or

Macromedia Director.

**Content Placeholder Model:** This model, often in video, is used to quickly generate and review a rough script which includes the order, depth and weight of content together with treatment placeholders.

**The "Style Disc":** Similar to a style sheet in the print world, the "Style Disc" shows examples of the user interface design, media assets, and programming functionality in the finished presentation.

### **Asset/Programming Matrix**

Another important tool used to manage the development of an interactive title is the media asset and programming matrix.

This tool assists the development team in finding and maintaining an optimal balance between: 1) Defining the overall design including the media assets and programming structures to be employed. 2) Creating and adhering to a realistic

production schedule and budget. The media asset portion of the matrix presents the spectrum of available media asset types together with the range of quality levels available for inclusion in a presentation. The programming portion of the matrix presents the spectrum of programming structures available for use in a presentation.

Different media types and programming structures require a varying amount of production time and therefore cost. By using this interactive matrix tool the developer and client can experiment with various media asset and programming mixes until agreement is reached that best fits the clients presentation needs, production budget and due date.

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