

Mediaware Review

Authorware Models for Instructional Design

L. F. (Len) Proctor, **Editor**

Allen, Michael W. (1994) *Authorware Models for Instructional Design for Macintosh*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Available from:

Prentice Hall Canada Inc.
1870 Birchmount Road,
Scarborough, Ontario M1P 2J7
(416) 293-3621 Fax: 199-2529
Price Range: \$60.00

System Requirements:

- Macintosh IIci or later
- 8 MB of RAM memory
- At least 40 MB hard disk drive (although larger drives are recommended)
- System 7.1 or later
- QuickTime, version 1.6.1 or later
- CD-ROM drive

Software Description

Authorware Models for Instructional Design, is a package of software templates (models) for use with Authorware. Authorware is one of several products available from Macromedia that can be used as a multimedia presentation tool. The models available in this package are shells that contain the logic required to perform a specific task such as setting up a menu on the computer's screen. Each of the models can be combined with other models reused or edited without changing their original specifications. Because several files in this package are large, all files are distributed on a CD-ROM.

Basic Functions

To use this software, users must have the Authorware Academic program resident on their computer's hard drive and a drive that can read a CD-ROM.

Three types of files are available on the CD. The first file type is a demo file (19,610K). It is used to provide an overview and working example of how the models may be used to create lecture support presentations. Second, the example files which have been used to make the demo may be opened and examined to see how each of the models has been used to create the packaged demo file. Quite a few graphics, sound and video files are used to illustrate the example files. As a consequence these files are often large. However, if user hard disk space is at a premium, the example and demo files can be run directly from the CD-ROM. The third set of files on the CD are the models or template files. Once the models have been loaded (copied) into Authorware they can be pasted into any new or existing Authorware file. Users can then replace the dummy text, graphics, audio and video files without changing the logic of the original model unless they intend to do so.

Documentation

The documentation provided with the models is well written, brief and to-the-point. The main function of the documentation is to provide an explanation of the logic behind each model, instructions on how the user may enter their own content into the model and suggestions on how the model may be customized or modified to suit a user's individual purposes. Models available in this package can be used to assist a presenter in navigating through slide sets, asking questions, labeling graphics, generating dynamic models of mathematical calculations, displaying QuickTime movies and controlling the display of analog video from a videodisc source. A small section of the documentation is devoted to describing the elements of good screen layout and design.

Critique and Recommendations

While the focus of the software is on creating lecture-support materials, it is sprinkled with advice on creating interactive instruction. For example, about one-third of the documentation is devoted to explaining navigation (page turning) models. Page turning models are fine to use for stand-up slide show type presentations. Yet, in the section on guidelines of developing interactive presentations, Allen offers the suggestion that authors should avoid electronic page-turning. From a design standpoint, there is a gray area here in which the design for one instructional purpose may not be compatible with the second but the tools for achieving either are the same. Allen does not extend his advice on presentation strategies to the level of "tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them and tell them what you told them". Design decision of this type are left to the discretion of the presenter. Allen takes the approach that, once the presenter has decided on a presentation strategy, the models offered in the software should facilitate the sequencing, storage and presentation of the images selected to illustrate appropriate points in the lecture.

The selection of Authorware as an interactive multimedia presentation tool has both advantages and disadvantages. On the advantage side, text, graphics and sound files are easily assembled and cross-platform translators facilitate

moving from a Mac to DOS environment. One important disadvantage of selecting Authorware as a presentation tool is the serious lack of novice user training resources. To date, there is no "Big Dummies Guide to Creating Interactive Presentations with Authorware". When compared to the plethora of examples, tutorials and utilities available for the production of HyperCard stacks, Authorware comes up very short. Authorware Models for Instructional Design, is one publication that begins to redress this dearth of training material. Except for Authorware's own in-house training seminars there are only two or three third party publications that will help a new user learn to use the syntax associated with Authorware's built-in functions and variables.

Packages like Authorware Models for Instructional Design are valuable because a significant portion of the power of Authorware is resident the user's ability to employ one or more of the several dozen built in system functions and variables. Trying to capitalize on Authorware's interactive capabilities without template resources, is like trying to write HyperTalk scripts without any background in computer programming. While a presenter may be quite familiar with Authorware's media assembly capabilities, having templates available permits the presenter to begin to tap the power of this tool without having to become an expert programmer. Generic models prepared by expert programmers may not do everything the presenter wants, but they will definitely cut down on presentation production and debugging time. While not a perfect solution, a well developed library of standardized routines should be able to handle most of the display tasks associated with slide show types of presentations.

This software package is also valuable because it provides good examples of how to program a presentation in Authorware. To do this, Allen starts with a simple model and then shows the presenter how to enhance it in order to achieve more complex display tasks. By studying the models and learning how they work within the context of the tasks they perform on the screen novice authors should be able to reduce the level of frustration they commonly feel when starting to use a new programming tool. Originally, Course of Action was developed to address productivity and user friendly deficiencies found in Tutor Control Data's authoring language for PLATO. When Allen developed Course of Action, which eventually became Authorware, he succeeded in making the display of text and graphics on the screen much more author friendly. On the other side of the equation, while he may have tried hard, he did not do a lot to increase author productivity. Authorware Models for Instructional Design begins to address productivity issues. Hopefully, this software package is the first in a long line of many more productivity enhancing packages to come.

EDITOR

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