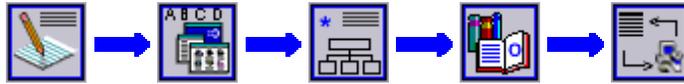# FlexTraining
Course Building Strategies

Building Your Learning Content

A Common Sense Process for Creating Learning Content

The greatest challenge in implementing a successful online training project is in creating professional-grade learning content and building engaging, dynamic courses. Use the links below to help develop a winning strategy and step-by-step procedures that will work in your specific environment. The development phases presented here, and the steps under each, could be described as a course building "methodology." However, it's really nothing more than a set of organized guidelines based on years of content development work, online training management and widely-acknowledged best practices.

FlexTraining allows you a great deal of flexibility in choosing file formats, developing online lessons, and organizing your ideas. These guidelines will help you make the right choices concerning developing learning material, and will allow you to maximize the effectiveness of your courses and stay within the boundaries of your skills and resources.

Planning Your Courses

The Planning phase of course development is a necessary activity for any successful E-learning project. The steps below should help lead you to a documented, sensible training development plan.

Steps in the Planning Phase

1. Determine the scope of your training.
Start by identifying groups to be trained. For example, online learners might include new hires, current staff, customers, sales reps or candidates for management positions. For each group, establish a training goal. Now you will have a list of target groups and the training to be accomplished for each group.

2. Organize your (planned) material into courses.
You may have some paper or electronic material, such as an Operations Guide or Policy Manual, which you can use as a basis for building your online learning content. Or, you may have no existing material at all. Either way, you need to identify what subjects and topics you will cover for each target group of online

learners.

Break the subject matter up (even if you have not created it yet) into reasonable-sized courses. Keep the amount of material in each course down to a level where it can be understood and mastered in less than a day, usually much less. You will probably end up with a preliminary list of several courses for each target group.

Also, make a preliminary decision as to what electronic formats you will use to deliver your training. There are many choices available, including text, HTML, PowerPoint, Flash, Video, Audio and many others. FlexTraining supports practically any web-deliverable content, but the choice of format is always up to you. See the "Creating Learning Content" section of this Course Building Strategies guide for tips on structuring an effective course.

3. Lay out a course structure for each course.
Give each course a tentative name, and break out the material to be covered into individual lessons. In many cases, you might still have no idea what kind of material you will use to build each lesson (text, images, video, audio, screen shots, etc). We'll address the content creation issues later - for now you just need to lay out a structure for each course. See the "Best Practices" section of this Course Building Strategies guide for tips on structuring an effective course.

4. Choose a Testing Strategy and Policies.
FlexTraining offers a great deal of flexibility in how online knowledge assessments are done. Completing this planning step is a matter of asking yourself a number of questions and documenting the answers:
- How many tests should there be in each course?
- Should advanced learners be allowed to "test out" of certain courses?
- Will a strict testing policy be used where high passing scores are established and a limited number of attempts allowed?
- Or, will testing simply be an additional learning experience, with answers and explanations provided after each test?
- What subject matter expert (SME) will you need access to in order to create your question bank?

There are other policies and options you will set when you actually build your online tests, but these questions are sufficient to get you through the planning phase.

What you should have when you are finished

As you complete this phase, you should have some form of training development plan on paper. It may be long or short, detailed or summarized, depending on your budget and the time you have spent on it.

At a minimum, it should identify what courses you will need, what lessons/topics will be covered in each course, how you will test to see that learning is occurring, and what electronic formats you expect to utilize.
One last thing: The plan should specify exactly who is responsible for all the work involved in organizing and developing your learning material and online tests. Every task in an e-learning project should be someone's responsibility.

Success tips for the Planning Your Courses phase

Before you start to document a development plan, read and understand the remainder of this Course Building Strategies guide.
Don't get too caught up in the formality of creating a documented plan. Keep it simple and clean - there will be time later to add detail and finalize the document for presentation to management, if that's required.

If your learners will be required to take several courses in order to obtain a certification or to qualify for employment, consider grouping courses into Skill Groups. FlexTraining offers simple but powerful Skill Group assignment and tracking to help you monitor your learners' progress toward their goals.

When considering various content formats, your best bet may be to stay with text and images, at least until you have established your training system and gained some experience. You can always move to more sophisticated formats later. Read more about File Formats in the "Creating Learning Content" section of this guide.

Creating Learning Content

The Create Learning Content phase of course development is where you create actual online learning material. You may decide to use external files, such as Flash movies, PowerPoint files or streaming video, or you may decide to enter your material directly into the FlexAuthoring content authoring tool.

If you use multimedia files and image files, you will probably want to use FlexAuthoring to organize and deliver these files, and add required text and navigation. There are many ways to develop and deliver learning content when you use FlexTraining.

Steps in the Create Learning Content Phase

1. Understanding File Formats
Learning content may be developed and presented in a number of formats. There are many options, and the choice of format is usually a tradeoff between ease of development, ease of delivery and effectiveness. FlexAuthoring is the preferred method of assembling and delivering your content and can even be used to create lessons from scratch.

Below is a matrix of file formats commonly used in e-Learning projects with notes about the usefulness and utility of each.

Learning Content File Formats

Format	Extensions	Note
HTML	.htm .html	Fast delivery, easy to create.
Images	.gif .jpg	Keep images fairly small for fast delivery.

Flash	.swf	Dynamic, interactive. Difficult to create from scratch, but many tools can easily build Flash from other formats.
Video/Audio Files	.avi .wav .mov .au	Very slow if actual files are used. Need to convert to another format before using.
Streaming Video/Audio	.wmv .wma	Faster than using raw files, but students need a Windows player to view.
PowerPoint	.ppt .pps	Quick and easy development, but very slow delivery, and students need a viewer.
Word or Excel	.doc or .xls	Easy development. But content can be dry and "textish", and students will need Word/Excel to view.
PDF	.pdf	Easy development. Content can be dry and slow, and students will need PDF viewer.
Specialty / proprietary	Various formats	Slow, bulky, need plug-ins

FlexTraining's integrated FlexAuthoring Tool is not a file format, but rather a means to pull together content of various formats (especially text, images, video, audio and Flash) into a consistent delivery and tracking interface with built-in navigation and bookmarking.

If you did not license FlexAuthoring with your FlexTraining system, you will still have basic authoring functionality. FlexAuthoring simply adds a much wider variety of templates.

2. Subject Matter Determines Format
Your subject matter will often determine your choice of file formats and how you will actually build your learning content. For example, if you are training an audience on sales techniques and methods, you will likely want to use video as the basis for most of your lessons. On the other hand, training customers on how to use a new software product would not be a good fit for video.

In some cases, you might be in such a hurry to get your training up and running that you would develop content using text and images, where a better long-term choice might have been narrated video or Flash. Fortunately, you can make gradual changes to your content after your project is launched without starting over or rebuilding an entire course.

3. Keeping it Simple
If you are like most FlexTraining course developers, the primary goal is to deliver and track effective training in a timely and cost-effective manner. Most developers need to take a realistic look at the people and resources available to them as they begin the task of developing learning material.

Sometimes people strive for complex, elegant training content where cleaner and simpler material would get the job done. Here are a few questions to ask yourself about the content you are developing:

Does the content make sense and flow logically? Ask a co-worker. Is it clean and error-free? Typos and bad grammar can distract learners. Is it interactive? FlexAuthoring's Learner Exercises make adding interactivity simple and easy.

Multimedia is a great way to spice up your content, but for many companies it is a luxury and might just as well be added in a subsequent development phase.

4. Shared & Re-usable in FlexTraining

Many people are concerned about spending time and resources to develop multimedia files for use in one training system, and then having to recreate everything if they change systems. This is an issue that should never come up. All your image and multimedia content should be completely re-usable once it is created.

FlexTraining uses built-in libraries to manage your images, audio, video and other multimedia content. In fact, your content files remain in these libraries at all times and can be used by as many courses as you like without creating additional copies or undergoing any type of conversion.

This architecture provides total re-usability for your media files, both within FlexTraining courses and outside of FlexTraining if you should decide to use another training system at some point in the future.

5. Software/Document/Forms Training

Online courses covering computer software, business forms or specialized documents would normally be best developed using a "screen-capture" tool such as Adobe's Captivate product. These tools capture movement and data entry from your computer screen and produce Flash files as their output. These Flash files can then be placed in the FlexTraining Media Library and combined with the built-in navigation tool in FlexAuthoring to create professional-looking training lessons.

As a simpler but less effective alternative, you could take "still images" of your documents or software screens and save them as GIF and JPEG files, using FlexAuthoring to combine them with text and built-in Learner Exercises.

6. Soft Skills and Streamlined Video Production

A course on phone-answering skills or sexual harassment might be termed a "soft skills" course. These courses would not likely utilize screen-shots or document images. More likely, you would shoot video clips of certain realistic scenarios involving your subject matter and use the videos in combination with text and navigation in FlexAuthoring.

Most video capture equipment and software will generate what's called raw video, which might be in a very large format such as "AVI." AVI-format video is too large to efficiently deliver over the web, especially in a training environment. So you would likely convert the video to a "streaming" format such as "WMV" that consumes less bandwidth and does not cause the student to experience long delays.

Another alternative for video delivery is to use Flash to convert the video to a ".SWF" flash file. This format is also efficient for internet delivery. See the table above in the "Understanding File Formats" section.

In this example, the production steps would be as follows:

- Capture videos with a common digital video camera (recommend using a tripod and decent quality microphone).
- Edit your Video using an inexpensive desktop video editor, such as Studio AV from Pinnacle Systems.
- Add transitions and titles for a professional look.
- Convert your edited AVI-format video to a streaming format like WMV. Or, use Flash to convert the Video files to a Flash format.
- Load the finished videos into the FlexTraining Media library for use in the courses you will soon be developing.

What you should have when you are finished

As you complete this phase, you should have a significant collection of media items at hand, including:

1. Images relevant to the subject matter being taught. Images should be cropped and resized to share the screen with headings, text, and/or learner exercises.
2. Media item files, captured, converted and edited as needed. Formats might include WMA, WMV, Flash and others.
3. Media files in your FlexTraining media library, uploaded from your computer.
4. An updated content development plan document, indicating what formats (text, image, audio, streaming video, flash) you plan to use for each course and section.

Success tips for the Create Learning Content phase

1. Most customers begin with modest ambitions for content formats (text and images, for example) to build their initial courses.
2. Consider your audience and the software they have on their computers. If your students won't have speakers on their computers, narrations will not be effective.
3. If you have the time and experience to develop audio narrations, they are a low-cost and easy way to add another dimension to your training.
4. If you decide to use video, choose small dimensions like 320 X 240 or perhaps 480 X 360. This keeps file sizes manageable and leaves room for some text on the screen as well.
5. For Audio, an MP3 format is a good delivery format which uses small files and provides good quality. A WAV format sounds good, but uses large file sizes.

Best Practices

This phase is where you utilize proven techniques and practices to help you produce the best content, with the least time and effort, leading to the best results possible.

Most of these best practices are not directly dependant on the provided technology, but you will utilize technology to support and implement each practice.

Below are selected practices which have, with experience, proven to have a positive impact on online training projects. These practices tend to either cut costs and development effort, or improve the quality and effectiveness of the training itself, or both.

Steps in the Best Practices Phase

1. Read the FlexTraining Management Guides
If you have not already done so, read the FlexTraining Management Guide and, if you purchased FlexAuthoring, read the FlexAuthoring Guide, as well. These are provided with the FlexTraining software in hard-copy form and will answer most all your potential questions about what you can do in FlexTraining. In addition, review the remainder of this Content Strategies section and the FlexTraining help system.

2. Utilize the FlexTraining Authoring Tools
FlexTraining comes with an integrated content authoring tool that lets you build individual learning screens that you can then group into lessons as you assemble your courses. This authoring tool comes with four basic built-in templates, and if you also purchased FlexAuthoring, you will have over 20 templates to choose from. You do not have to use the built-in authoring tool. You can simply assemble your PowerPoint shows, Flash movies, PDF files or web pages into online courses, and FlexTraining will provide tracking and navigation. Many customers have launched successful training projects and operated in this manner for years.

However, using the authoring tool, or FlexAuthoring, gives you another level of control and interactivity. It provides more robust navigation and more detailed bookmarking for student progress. It also lets you create content from the ground up without requiring any knowledge of HTML or web page development.

3. Interactivity Reinforces Learning
Instructional designers tell us that the key to knowledge transfer and retention is interactivity. If a student interacts with an online course, rather than just viewing it, he will retain the information longer.

There are many ways to offer interactivity within your courses. Within the content itself, you can provide interactivity in formats such as PowerPoint and Flash. Buttons, clickable icons and form fields are examples of interactive content.

If you use the built-in authoring tool, you can provide interactivity with an easy method we call "learner exercises." These exercises can be added to most learning screens simply by choosing a template. Each exercise consists of a question and up to four candidate answers, which you provide. You can also include an image or a video in the exercise. Multimedia responses are available for your selection for each possible answer.

4. Narration Adds Life To Learning Content

A voice-over narration can spice up your learning material with a modest amount of effort. You can add a narration to every learning screen if you are using the integrated authoring tool or FlexAuthoring. The steps are as follows:

A. Develop your content for each learning screen without the narration, using whatever text and images you choose. You can add the narration at any time later.

B. Based on your content, write down a summary statement or two for each screen that will become your narration "script." Don't repeat the exact words from your learning screen - your students can read.

C. Record your narration using a recording tool like the Windows Sound Recorder or a more capable product such as Sony's Sound Forge Audio Studio. Record it several times, if necessary, to get the narration right. Use a normal computer microphone.

D. Save each narration on your computer as a separate MP3 file. MP3 is an efficient audio format that works well over the internet. If the recording tool you are using lets you choose quality parameters, choose one from the middle of the pack (for example, you might choose "Radio" settings for decent sound quality). Avoid CD Quality and Stereo settings - these options create larger sound files with little or no benefit.

E. Upload your files to the FlexTraining Media Library and give each a meaningful description. You can test them within the Media Library screens to verify that they look and sound as you intended.

F. Add the narrations to each learning screen using the built-in authoring tool. Simply select the narration from the list on the screen. After you have recorded and utilized a few narrations, you will see that the process is straightforward and the improvement in your learning material is considerable.

5. Smart Choices for Video
Video can be difficult to manage and deliver, or it can be simple if you make the right choices. If you decide to take on the challenge of creating video content, follow these guidelines:

A. Record your videos in AVI file format. AVI is not suitable for *delivering* video because it creates files that are very large. But it is an excellent format for *saving and editing* your video and adding titles and transitions. Other "large file" formats are OK as well. Just don't expect to save video in a final, efficient streaming format right after you record it.

B. After recording, edit your videos in a simple, inexpensive editing software like Pinnacle's Studio AV product (there are many others). After editing a video to your satisfaction, save it again in AVI format. Use long file names that describe the contents of each video.

C. Consider converting the finished video into Flash format for use in FlexTraining using the Flash development environment. Flash is efficient for internet use, and almost all web browsers already have the Flash player built-in. This simplifies the

delivery management process. Streaming formats such as Windows "WMV" format are a decent second choice. Streaming formats are bandwidth-friendly but require the student to have a player on his computer. For most people, Flash is the best choice as a final delivery format.

D. Upload your Flash or streaming videos to the FlexTraining Media library and add them to your learning screens using the authoring tool. Do not load the "large file" videos which you saved in AVI format into FlexTraining. These large files are not useful within FlexTraining - they hog bandwidth and slow things down. Just keep them on your computer in case you decide to re-edit them another day.

6. Choose Images and Multimedia Carefully
In general, use images, photos, audio, video and other multimedia objects that:
- Support the lesson objective
- Are student-centered
- Build on previous learning
- Have useful and meaningful content
- Are consistent with learning principles
- Maintain student interest/attention
- Are quality images, movies, etc.
- Are complete and accurate
- Use appropriate terminology
- Are properly sequenced
- Are clean and visually appealing
- Give proper stimuli and enforcement

7. Consider a Pilot Approach
One strategy to consider would be the idea of selecting a single course to use as a "pilot." The pilot concept means that you fully develop all the screens, images and multimedia you need for this single course, and actually assemble and deliver the course, before beginning working on the material for your other courses. The primary benefit is that you will experience every step in the development process on a small scale. This experience will help you work more efficiently when developing subsequent courses, possibly changing your mind about what kinds of material to use.

Put another way, you might develop enough material for one course, view your resulting course, and then change your mind about what kind of text, images or narration to use. For example, you might decide you narration distracts from the on-screen text and needs to be shortened. Using a pilot approach, you will only have to rework a small amount of material before you continue on with your other courses.

The verbiage in this "Content Strategies" section does not specify whether you will be building all your content at once or utilizing a single-course pilot concept. The decision is yours, but a pilot approach is an excellent way to save time and effort, and to produce course material with which you will be pleased.

What you should have when you are finished

As you complete this phase, you will have most of your content development work completed.

1. If you have chosen not to use the integrated authoring tool, you will have your content files (PowerPoints, HTML, PDF, videos, or other) uploaded into the Content Library within FlexTraining. The Management Guide will tell you how to assemble these into online courses.
2. Assuming you are using the built-in authoring tool, you'll have a set of template-based learning screens, as well as images and multimedia suitable to your purpose. Many of your learning screens should include learner exercises to provide interactivity based on the templates you selected.
3. You should have one or more online tests defined for each course, based on the built-in testing framework.
4. Narrations and other multimedia should be complete and loaded into the FlexTraining Media Library. While the *Content Library* holds files for direct use in your courses, the *Media Library* holds the images and multimedia items you will use to build learning screens in the authoring tool.
5. Learning screens should be organized into lessons and assigned sequence numbers within each lesson. Changes to sequence can be made at any time later.

Success tips for the Best Practices phase

1. As you build learning screens, use the preview tab frequently. Also, quickly assemble your course and schedule it so you can view the course from the student module. Do this early and often in the development of each course, so you can see how your course will look to the learner. See the Management Guide for instructions on assembling and scheduling courses using the FlexTraining Content Builder and Scheduling Wizard, respectively.
2. Keep video and images small for easier screen layout. Don't make your students scroll down through a learning screen unless it is unavoidable. Short screens make on-screen navigation easier for the learner.
3. Test students at the beginning of each course (pre-test) and at the end (post-test). This technique lets you verify that the online students are actually learning.
4. If you create your own narrations, speak slowly and enunciate every word carefully. Most people tend to rush their speaking in normal conversation and to skip over syllables that need to be pronounced.
5. Set realistic expectations with management about the timing for your training to go live. FlexTraining is the fastest training development system available today, but you will still need to verify and edit your content carefully as you build courses.

Case Studies

Below are four scenarios which illustrate realistic online training projects, each with their own goals and objectives. Although the names and facts here are fictitious,

the underlying methods and techniques are representative of how real-world training is developed and implemented.

Scenario 1: Software Training, Screen Captures

Scenario
Tom has been assigned the responsibility of developing training material for the rollout of a new accounting software product. The students will be spread across several locations and will use a variety of computers with various software configurations.

Goals
Tom wants to be able to show his learners the actual screens, and actual user activity, that this accounting software involves.

Constraints
Tom has a limited budget and won't be able to hire outside consultants to create his screen-based in-motion learning content. Also, the fact that his online students have different computer software on their desktops means that "plug-ins" for the users machines would be undesirable.

Solution
1. After doing some research, Tom decides that he will use Flash movies to show his 'live action" software captures. Flash streams well over the internet, and students will already have the Flash player integrated into their web browsers.
2. Tom chooses Adobe's Captivate product to perform the screen captures and create the Flash movies (there are other products available). He breaks his course outline into small, digestible sections that each cover one activity that users perform in the accounting system. He saves all the screen "movies" in Captivate and uses a simple interface in Captivate to create the Flash movies.
3. Tom likes the narration concept, and he records a set of narrations on his multimedia-enabled computer and saves them in the efficient MP3 audio format. One narration matches each of the movies he created earlier and turned into Flash. Tom uploads the Flash movies and the MP3 audio narrations into the FlexTraining Media Library.

Finally, he builds learning screens in FlexAuthoring that include the Flash movies and the appropriate audio narrations. He also builds several learner exercises, using the provided templates, to insure that his online students are engaged and learning.

Scenario 2: Soft Skills, Video Clips

Scenario
Starting this year, Deborah's company has a new strict policy against sexual harassment. She has been asked to prepare an online course to help educate

employees on the nature of, and ways to recognize, behavior that may be inappropriate.

Goals
Deborah feels the best way to communicate simulated "soft skills" interpersonal behavior is through the use of full-motion video. She wants to record employees interacting with other staff and customers in typical work scenarios.

Constraints
Deborah needs to have something ready to use in a couple of weeks, without breaking her budget with high production costs.

Solution
1. Since planning is essential, Deborah analyzes various ways to capture video and present it over the internet. She has access to a digital movie camera and a tripod, and connects a standard microphone. She writes several scenarios and assembles her "actors" who are actually co-workers.
2. Videos are recorded and saved in the Windows AVI format. She chooses a movie size of 480 pixels wide by 320 pixels high, which will fit on the screen easily and allow some room for text below it. Some of the videos have to be shot a few times before Deborah is content with the visual and sound quality.
3. Afterward, she edits the videos on her computer, adding transitions (fade in and out) and on-screen captions for a more professional look. When she has finished editing, she converts the videos to Flash format, using the standard Flash development tool. She could have chosen to convert the videos to the streaming WMV format, which is also bandwidth-friendly. She knew she could not actually use the videos while they were in the AVI format, because the AVI files were very large.
4. Once she has created all her Flash movies, Deborah uploads them into the FlexTraining Media Library and incorporates them into her learning screens.

Deborah also has some PowerPoint presentations she wants to use. She converts these to Flash as well (using the PowerConverter software from PresentationPro, one of several tools available for this purpose). From there she uploads them to the media library and utilizes the flash movies as multimedia items in her course's learning screens.

Scenario 3: Safety Training, Simple Text and Images

Scenario
Tony is in change of safety training at his manufacturing company. He sees education costs rising as people are brought in from distant locations to attend classroom training. He does not have a large staff to support his mission - only one administrative assistant is available to him.

Goals
After careful consideration, Tony decides that the best way to cut costs and still offer effective training is to deploy an online training system like FlexTraining. He wants to have a set of courses up and running in three weeks.

Constraints

Tony realizes that many of the staff who will utilize the online training will be using dial-up lines to connect to the internet, and some will not even have speakers attached to their computers. Therefore the training material needs to be bandwidth-friendly and should not include multimedia.

Solution

1. Some of the handouts and PowerPoint presentations that were used in classroom training contain images and text that will be useful in online courses. Tony reviews these materials, and pulls out many photographs, charts and text material related to safety rules and practices.
2. Tony lays out each course in a simple Microsoft Word document, placing images and text in a logical flow in order to get his ideas across to the learner. These scripts will form the basis of his individual learning screens within each course.
3. To quickly add interactivity, Tony inserts a learner exercise after every third learning screen. These are also part of the course outline he creates in Word.
4. Tony uses FlexAuthoring to create the actual learning screens for his course, choosing various templates to add some variety. He also edits and re-sequences the screens until he is content with the final result. He builds a multiple-choice test at the end of the course to assess the level of learning being accomplished.
5. Finally, Tony uses the FlexTraining Scheduling Wizard to publish the course and begins enrolling online students.

Scenario 4: Technical Training, Extremely Tight Deadline

Scenario

Lisa has a just been handed an online training project with a very tight deadline. She is concerned that the quality of the training material will suffer because of the super aggressive schedule.

Goals

Management has decided that online courses need to be available to sales personnel in one week. The FlexTraining software just arrived yesterday and was installed on the company web server this morning, so no FlexTraining work has been done yet.

Constraints

Lisa will not have any help in building her courses, and has other responsibilities besides the online training project. She needs to build her course content as quickly as possible.

Solution

1. The built-in authoring tool provides excellent navigation, bookmarks and flexible templates. However, it is not unusual for customers to create courses outside of the authoring tool simply by assembling existing files. Knowing

this will allow her to build courses almost instantly, Lisa begins to look for existing files to use.

2. Lisa finds a collection of documents that cover her desired material. The documents are in PDF format and include text and imbedded images. She knows that having pre-built documents will save her the work of building learning screens, even though this technique does not always produce the best learning experience.

3. She confirms that her learners will all have the Adobe PDF reader on their computers, so they will be able to view the material in the online courses. She would have the same issue to deal with if she had chosen to use PowerPoint files, Word documents or Excel spreadsheets.

4. Lisa uploads the documents to the FlexTraining Content Library and assembles them into courses using the menu-driven Content Builder. FlexTraining provides basic navigation, tracking, bookmarking, testing and reporting, even for file-based courses like Lisa's.

The courses are scheduled using the Scheduling Wizard and Lisa meets her deadline. Management agrees that when time allows, Lisa will go back and gradually revise her courses. She will re-create her material in the authoring tool, lesson by lesson, for better navigation and interactivity. She can work on one course at a time without shutting down her active training system.

Using FlexTraining

Putting your Courses Together

You have documented your course outline and plan, decided on what text you wanted to include, created or acquired your images and perhaps audio and video files. You may have already loaded your multimedia content into the FlexTraining libraries.

From here, you will be using FlexTraining's integrated course development environment to complete the development of your online training.

Libraries
The centerpiece of your learning content is the material you have placed in the FlexTraining Libraries. As mentioned earlier, the *Content Library* is for files to be used as whole training sections on their own. On the other hand, the *Media Library* is for audio, video and flash files that will be included in learning screens that you author with the authoring tool.

Assembling Learning Screens and Courses
FlexTraining provides a flexible, easy-to-use course assembly toolset. You can stop at any point and return later, and you can come back and make changes to your content and your courses at any time later. So you can relax - it's very easy to

recover from any errors you might make, and to adjust, resize, edit or replace material later on.

The basic steps are as follows:

1. Make sure you have read, and are familiar with, the FlexTraining Management Guide, and if you are using the authoring tool and have purchased FlexAuthoring, the FlexAuthoring Guide.
2. Load (or finish loading) your media items and images into the FlexTraining libraries.
3. Create your Learning Screens in the authoring tool. Paste the text from your course plan document, so it will have already been spell-checked. Typing your text directly into the authoring tool is not recommended. An advanced user may choose to paste blocks of HTML into the text boxes in the authoring tool, which is permissible.
4. Preview each learning screen using the Preview tab in the authoring tool and make changes until you are content with its appearance. Use the Lesson tab to group screens into Lessons, and give each lesson a meaningful name.
5. When your learning screens have been grouped into Lessons (or your standalone files are loaded in the Content Library, if you are not using the authoring tool), you are ready for final assembly of your course. Use the Content Builder to quickly create the sections of your course. If you are using authoring, each Lesson you created will become a course section. If not, each of your files in the Content Library will become a course section.
6. Add tests to your course as desired. If you have reference material like a glossary or a technical manual, or some other background material, consider adding a Course Guide.
7. If your course will be taught by an instructor, you might consider adding one or more assignments. These require review by a human, so they are really only appropriate for instructor-led courses.
8. Use the schedule wizard as described in the FlexTraining Management Guide to schedule your course so that students may enroll and begin training.

Success Tips

Techniques

When loading your Media Library, use long, meaningful descriptions so you can locate the item easily in a list. Also, use long file names for Content Library files and any image files you are using.

Resize your video or flash for optimum screen presentation. When you add an item to the Media Library, you will specify a height and width. These are the dimensions, in pixels, that the movie will occupy on the screen. Adjust your height and width for the best appearance - movies displayed too high and/or too wide can look fuzzy and distorted.

Multimedia items are not in any way "converted" when they are loaded into FlexTraining. The movies and narrations you worked so hard on are left intact, for re-use in FlexTraining, or in any other system. All your FlexTraining multimedia items are totally re-usable.

Resize your images outside of FlexTraining. Images do not have a specified height and width in FlexTraining - they will display at their actual size. To resize or crop an image, do so with an image editor like Adobe Fireworks, Paint Shop Pro or Windows Paint.

Maintain consistency in fonts and colors. Keep your fonts, background and text colors consistent from one learning screen to another. FlexTraining allows you to use different colors on each screen, but you should do so only for a good reason.

Place a Learner Exercise at approximately every third or fourth learning screen. It's an easy way to add interactivity. Record one audio MP3 file with something like "Please choose the best answer below" and add it to the Media Library. Use it as a narration for every Learner Exercise screen to give your course a more professional feel. Avoid Scrolling. Learning screens can be any length you want, but you should keep them short so your students do not have to scroll down, if possible. This can be accomplished by breaking up your content into smaller pieces.

Keep courses manageable. FlexTraining courses may be of any length and include any number of learning screens, lessons and tests. Use good judgment in breaking down your courses into digestible screens and lessons.