

December 3, 2007

The eLearning Guild's
**LEARNING
SOLUTIONS** SM

Practical Applications of Technology for Learning **e-Magazine**

THIS WEEK: Development Techniques

Product Review: Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional

By Jacqueline Beck

As high-speed Internet service and more powerful personal computers have evolved and become nearly omnipresent in the business environment worldwide, two groups of applications have emerged and are growing in importance. One of these is the very large family of collaboration software, members of which allow users in geographically distant (and not-so-distant) locations to work together online, sharing documents and applications, and using video and audio to communicate in real time while doing so.

The other group of applications, somewhat overlapping the first, makes synchronous e-Learning environments possible. In some cases, these applications not only allow developers to create stand-alone e-Learning, but to track learners in blended environments where learning takes place online and offline using both digital and analog media.

As a result, developers now have the choice of many applications to support their work in creating live online learning, from WebEx, Adobe, Microsoft, Elluminate, and many other vendors. But even with The eLearning Guild's efforts to provide research on these tools, and to publish information about

As high-speed internet access and computing power increase, more organizations are turning to collaborative and synchronous software for e-Learning. Reviews of these products are not easy to find, but this week a seasoned expert in these areas provides an in-depth look at one of the market leaders in this area.

A publication of



them, it is still difficult to find actual user reviews.

In this article, I am going to share some of my insights on Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional, including its features and its limitations. As a consultant in e-Learning for 18 years, I have worked with many clients to help them effectively deploy blended learning using synchronous and asynchronous training. As a result, I have worked with many different types of technologies.

I have been using Acrobat Connect and its components (or their forerunners) since 2003. I have developed hundreds of training programs with Adobe Presenter, and have conducted hundreds of hours of online training using Acrobat Connect Meeting. Altogether, this experience has taught me how to analyze, design, develop, implement, and evaluate training programs, as well as how to evaluate software that supports online learning.


Adobe positions this complex product as a complete Web conferencing and training solution. But that's probably not what comes to your mind when you see or hear the product name.

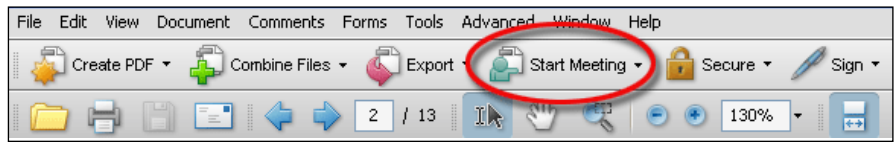
"Acrobat? Isn't that about documents?"

The name of the product is a little bit hard to grasp because most of us hear the word Acrobat and we immediately think, "Oh, that's about portable document format – PDF." Here's how the name "Acrobat" relates to this product.

Adobe has bundled the "live" meeting piece of this solution with Adobe Acrobat 8 (the PDF creator), hence associating the Acrobat brand to this product. When you launch Acrobat 8 you will see an icon right in the toolbar to launch a live meeting (see Figure 1). This gives document authors the ability to do live collaboration from within Acrobat. The meeting itself runs within Adobe Acrobat Connect Meeting, one of four applications in the Connect family. There is a similar button in the latest version of Acrobat Reader.

I am not reviewing Acrobat 8 or the Reader in this article.

 **Figure 1** The Adobe Acrobat 8 toolbar includes a button to launch a live meeting via Adobe Acrobat Connect Meeting.



The eLearning Guild's
LEARNING SOLUTIONS
Practical Applications of Technology for Learning
e-Magazine

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Learning Solutions e-Magazine™ is published weekly for members of **The eLearning Guild**, 375 E Street, Suite 200, Santa Rosa, CA 95404. Phone: +1.707.566.8990. www.eLearningGuild.com

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The Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional components

Well, if Acrobat Connect isn't about documents, what is it? As an e-Learning solution, Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional includes four components, all of them completely Adobe Flash-based:

- Acrobat Connect Meeting
- Adobe Presenter
- Acrobat Connect Training
- Acrobat Connect Events

These four components sit on the Acrobat Connect Server (see Figure 2), and you can purchase them individually or as a complete turn-key solution. The four components together offer a complete blended training solution. Meeting is the "live" virtual classroom component, Presenter is the authoring tool for self-paced content, Training is the tracking and curriculum management component, and Events is the self-registration and lead-capturing component.

You are in the minority if all these names do not completely confuse you. Macromedia called this solution Breeze when it acquired the technology from a company called Presidia back in early 2003. When Adobe acquired Macromedia, it wasn't long before they changed the name to Connect ... confusing nearly everyone in the e-Learning community.

Acrobat Connect Server

The Connect Server product is built on the Flash Web Player. What this means is that if you have the Flash Player installed, there is no need for participants to download and install additional software in order to join in live meetings, or to view self-paced content. Since Flash is ubiquitous, you can be sure that your audience will be able to see your work. This is a big plus for large organizations!

Security is also a nice feature of this system. You can make anything you create with Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional available as a public or private training activity. Public means anyone with the link can

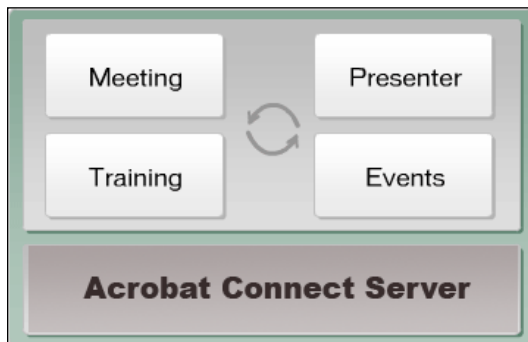


Figure 2 Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional includes four components that run on top of the Acrobat Connect Server.

view it. Private means that only people who were enrolled, invited, or accepted by the meeting manager will be able to participate or view the training course.

Adobe Acrobat Connect Meeting

Connect Meeting is the "live meeting" component. It allows screen sharing, file sharing, polling, video and audio conferencing, multiple presenters, chatting, Q&A filtering, whiteboarding, and a host of other really nice features for a rich and engaging online experience.

The meeting room appears as a set of windows on the user's screen. Adobe calls these windows "pods." (See Sidebar 1, Terminology.) You can customize the

Figure 3 Live virtual meeting room in Adobe Acrobat Meeting (one possible arrangement).



Sidebar 1 Terminology

A Meeting Room is where your meeting takes place. The meeting room has its own URL.

A Layout is an arrangement of pods, as you see in Figures 3 above and 4 on page 4. A Pod is scalable window that has a specific type of functionality, like video conferencing, screen sharing, polling, or file sharing.

There are nine pods that come with Adobe Acrobat Connect Meeting:

- Share (Screen Sharing, and sharing PowerPoint, JPG, or any Flash file, whether SWF or FLV)
- Attendee List
- Chat
- Camera and Voice
- Notes
- File Share (FTP for downloading any type of file)
- Poll
- Web Links
- Q & A

Each of these pods encapsulates a specific type of functionality to allow meeting hosts to create a rich and engaging online training experience.

Development Techniques

layout of a meeting room with any type of pod arrangement. In other words, each pod is scalable and moveable, so you can create a series of layouts to accommodate your goals for your live event or virtual classroom.

Figure 3 on page 3 is an arrangement of pods with four presenters using Webcams for a live video interaction. In the top right corner is a polling pod to allow participants to interact with questions or surveys. The server saves all interactions in the live meeting so you can track who attended, how long they attended, and how they answered the questions and surveys. This is ideal for managers or designers who have implemented a blended learning model in their organization. In this meeting room layout, there is also a PowerPoint display in the center of the lower row of pods, and a video clip that you can stream to the lower right corner simultaneously with all the other activities. The nine pod options identified in Sidebar 1 should accommodate nearly any scenario.

Figure 4 offers a different arrangement of pods. This is the same meeting room, but using a different setup for virtual training. The “iPod” on the left side is a Flash object that will play Podcasts through the meeting room. Participants can interact with the play list in the iPod and select content on-demand. The designer positioned survey questions on the right so participants can interact and see the results as their peers vote. All this information goes to the Connect server for permanent record keeping. As before, you can position these pods any way you like and create multiple layouts. This makes it very easy to modify a single meeting room to a variety of layouts.

The Share pod

Figure 5 shows a Share pod with a PowerPoint slide deck loaded into the pod. Notice the navigation controls on the bottom left of the pod. In Connect Meeting, a presenter uses these controls to trigger animations and change slides. The presenter can also choose another deck from the Share button, or select the option for Screen Sharing and broadcast his or her computer screen through this Share pod.

With the ability to customize each layout, multiple presenters can pre-load PowerPoint decks in their own layout and easily access various types of content without fumbling over window size. Because the virtual meeting room leverages the Flash Web Player, Connect Meeting automatically converts PowerPoint decks to Flash, with controls and support for all animation features. This means consistent delivery across both face-to-face and distance learning. Presenters can use virtual whiteboard markers over their content, and they can use pointers to keep the students focused on specific points on a slide.

You can use the Share pod to share:

- Documents
- PowerPoint (PPTs)
- Images (JPGs)
- Flash content (SWFs)
- Flash videos (FLVs)
- Your computer screen
- Whiteboards

Figure 4 Another meeting room layout, emphasizing Podcast content and survey responses.

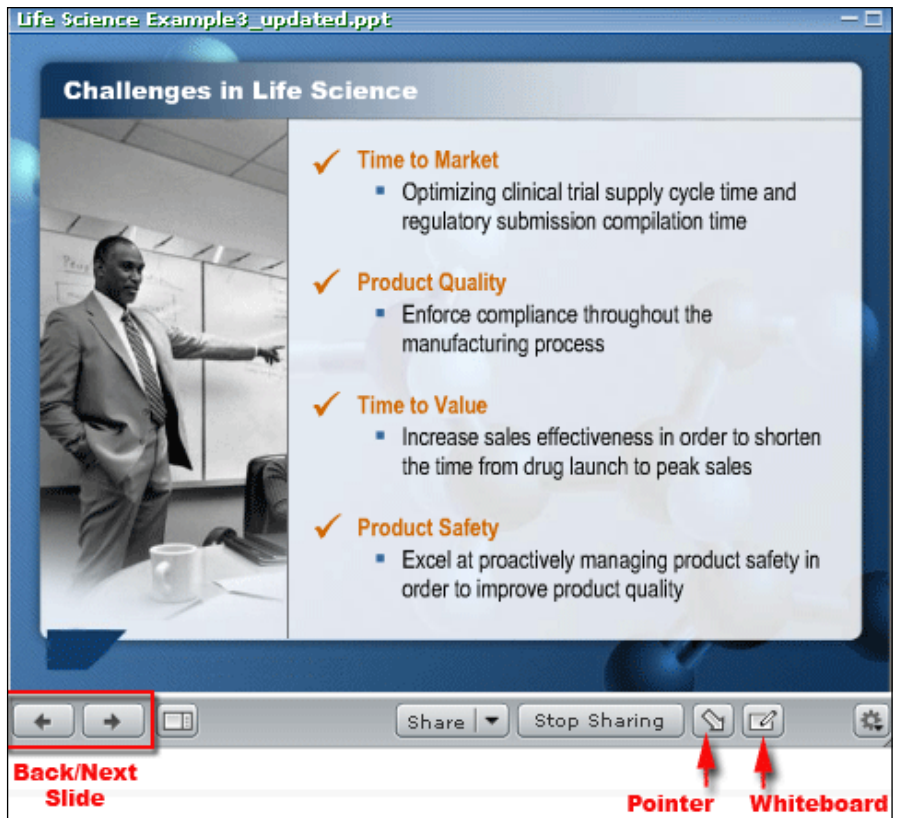


Figure 5 The Share Pod displays documents, including PowerPoint slides, provides screen sharing capability, and serves as a whiteboard.

Recording

You can record a virtual classroom session, and archive it on the Connect Server. Upon completion of the virtual training session, the server will generate a URL so you can e-mail the link to people who were not able to attend the live training session. Archived events play back as a movie with a complete transcript. Indexable actions that are hyperlinked in the transcribed menu are:

- Layout changes
- Chat messages
- Slide changes
- Users joining or leaving the Attendee List, or Camera and Voice pod changes

Recordings play back as a movie at 30 fps (frames per second) and have controls for Fast Forward/Rewind, Pause/Play, and Stop. The quality of the recording is excellent. The file will stream to the end-user so the playback performance is optimal. The transcript is a great way to see specific information from the meeting, as it provides time codes so you can quickly and easily drive to specific points in the meeting.

Adobe Presenter


Adobe Presenter is the authoring tool that allows you to create on-demand learning. After installing the software, authors will have a new menu item ("Adobe Presenter") in PowerPoint. The drop-down menu supports addition of audio, quiz items and surveys, Flash movies, and themes to PowerPoint presentations.

Audio

Let's start with audio. You can purchase a microphone and record audio directly to your PowerPoint presentation. It's easy to do, and allows you to edit mistakes. You can also import audio files. The recording tool is very intuitive. Once your microphone is hooked up, you will use the VCR-like controls to record, pause, stop, and play your recording. The Audio editor makes it easy to highlight unwanted mistakes and delete them. A visual waveform represents the sound file. As the playback head goes over the spoken word, you can easily highlight sections in order to edit mistakes, insert new recordings, or increase or decrease volume.

Quizzes and surveys

Interactive quizzes and surveys are also part of Presenter. You can use a Wizard (the Quiz Manager) to create your questions or surveys, and Presenter will create the PowerPoint slides for you. Once the Wizard turns the quiz into a slide set, you can edit and manipulate each question just as you can any other slide. There are six types of interaction you can build with the Quiz Manager: multiple choice/multiple



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answer, true/false, fill in the blank, short answer, drag and drop (see Figure 6), and Likert-type surveys. The Quiz Manager is extremely intuitive and easy to work with. By simply reading through the fields and checkboxes you can create engaging content with no programming skills.

Flash support

Adobe Presenter allows you to insert any type of Flash file created with Flash 8 or earlier into a PowerPoint presentation. You can use a SWF file created with a product like Captivate, for example. This gives authors the ability to create rich and engaging content with third-party programs, and embed them into their PowerPoint/Presenter files.

There are several ways to use Flash content with Adobe Presenter. You can use a streaming FLV digital video file in the navigation panel (see Figure 7). You can embed digital video into the real-estate of the slide (see Figure 8 on page 7). Or, you can embed a SWF interactive Flash file (like a simulator) into the real-estate of the slide (see Figure 9 on page 7). Notice that the Sidebar navigation is turned off in Figure 9. This forces the students to navigate sequentially through the slide deck, and increases the size of the slide for better viewing.

The FLV is a streaming format, which means the file will start playing after downloading a few seconds of the video, eliminating longer delays in the application. Converting a digital video to a SWF will require the entire video to download before it starts playing. Depending on file size, you may want to go with the streaming format to eliminate longer delays in your program.

Theme Editor

Use the Theme Editor to customize your application. Customizations include:

- Putting the navigation bar on the right or left
- Turning it off so there is no sidebar
- Publishing presenter contact information in the sidebar next to the presenter photos
- Placing corporate logos in the sidebar
- Changing the names of the navigation bar tabs
- Publishing the wrapper in German, French, Japanese, Dutch, or Korean.

There is also an option to apply RGB values (color) to the skin of the navigation wrapper. This means that you can publish your file with the exact colors of your corporate logo, and apply these colors to the wrapper of the training program. These options make your program fit the needs of your organization.

Adobe Acrobat Connect Training

Peter Drucker said it best: "We can't manage what we don't measure." Adobe Acrobat Connect Training

component allows you to build training courses and curricula, and to enroll users so proper tracking takes place for effective measurement.

When deploying a blended training program, you will need to track participants by name, record how they did on the assessments, and know what they completed. This is what Connect Training does for you. Training includes a Course Builder that turns any piece of content into a training course, and provides the means to enroll learners in that course. Once enrolled, the system will track what slides the participants viewed, how long each participant was in the course, how many times an individual viewed the content, as well as his or her test score and how each


 **Figure 6** This is an example of a drag-and-drop question created with Adobe Presenter.

Figure 7 Talking-head video is inserted into the navigation panel so you can use the slide real estate to show graphics while your subject-matter expert is speaking.

person answered each question. This very granular data provides what a course administrator needs for effective management. The data is easy to get to, and easy to read.

Another element of Training, called Curriculum Builder, provides the developer with a way to create a learning path that includes multiple courses and assets. This is a way to design a learning program and track the progress of each student. For example; if there are six courses in your New Hire Orientation program, you can assign these six courses to be part of one curriculum. The student would receive a URL to a single launching page that would have learning object dependencies set up ... such as test-outs and prerequisites. Learners can be required to take courses in a certain order. If you set the curriculum up with prerequisites, the student will not be able to open the second course until the first course is completed. The learner will see the required courses, but will not be able to open them until he or she completes the prerequisite requirement. The learner's completion status also appears on this page, showing what courses are completed (and the date of completion), test scores, and close dates on all courses in the curriculum.


All reports in Connect Training provide information as a chart, with the same information below in table format. (See Figure 10 on page 8.) Charts are interactive so you can hover over them, or click, to drill down for more details about the questions, answers, or slides. Ad-administrators can easily download all report content to an Excel spreadsheet by clicking on the "Download Report Data" button. For more complex courses, managers can set filters so they can see results for only the people they manage, or by dates. This learning management system gives you everything you need to launch and run an effective training program. By publishing content to the Connect Server, all the tracking is automatic. The system is turn-key, with no programming skills required to create, publish, or track content.

Adobe Acrobat Connect Events

Connect Events allows you to create pre-event registration pages on the Connect Server. Think of this component as your tool to register and gather information about your audience, and track who attends and completes your training or meeting events. Using the Wizard you can fill out fields and select options by clicking check-boxes. No programming or HTML experience is required. Once created, you can post the URL on a Web site or send the link via e-mail to invite participants to your live meeting or your self-paced training course. This event management tool facilitates qualifying people, and managing their participation in live events and in self-paced training courses.

Features of Connect Events:

- Registration management
- Create custom online registration forms
- Enable self-registration through attendee registration approval and confirmation
- Attendee qualification
- Track registration form answers to qualify attendees
- Approve and deny attendance
- Branding
- Create and brand customer-facing event pages including registration pages as well as event listing pages

 **Figure 8** Digital video embedded into the PowerPoint slide.



Module 3: Early Effective Treatment of Depression

The use of Venlafaxine in major Depressive Disorder

- Treatment approaches for MDD
- Venlafaxine efficacy in MDD
- Important Treatment Considerations

Module Three



Walt Disney Travel Company 2006 Walt Disney Travel Product Tutorial Module 1

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Walt Disney World® Resort is 47 square miles of magical fun offering something for everyone. From our four legendary Theme Parks to golf, world class resorts and award winning restaurants, we have what your client's need to make their vacation dreams come true.

Click on an attraction to view Disney resorts in that area

Click on an attraction to view Disney resorts in that area.

Figure 9 Interactive Flash map allows users to click on the slide deck and learn more.

- Event recording
- Record and archive events for future use
- Reporting
- Pre-, during-, and post-event tracking and reporting
- Notification management
- Automatic sending of customizable invitations, registration confirmations, approvals, or denials, reminders, and post-event communications

Use this event management tool to gather information about people who self-register, and export the information for other uses. You can also “qualify” leads for marketing events, and use the form fields to keep out competitors.

Additional resources and information

These four components make up the entire enterprise solution called Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional. You can purchase Meeting and Presenter as stand-alone applications. Adobe only offers Events and Training with the server product, and they work specifically with Adobe Presenter and Connect Meeting.

Any content created with Adobe Presenter is both AICC and SCORM compliant. You can create content with Presenter, publish it locally with SCORM 1.2 or SCORM 2004 files, and integrate it directly into an existing LMS.

Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional provides Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), so you can send tracking data from the Connect Server to another server in your environment. You can do customization with the APIs to create certificates with dates, names, and course titles. Adobe has detailed information on their Web site on APIs, as well as sample code.

There is also an entire library of Flash components that you can download for free and use with Connect Meeting and Adobe Presenter. The Acrobat Connect Exchange (http://www.adobe.com/cfusion/exchange/index.cfm?event=productHome&exc=14&loc=en_us) contains dozens of free downloads for Connect Meeting. These downloads include Break-Out Groups, Jeopardy-like Quiz Games, Interactive Maps (my favorite), and Timers and Meters for tracking collaboration sessions.

Adobe offers both licensed and hosted accounts for Acrobat Connect. Even with the hosted accounts, you can add your corporate colors and logos to the server so it takes on your company’s look and feel.

Adobe provides excellent resources on their Web site to help users get started with Connect Meeting and Presenter. You can download a 15-day trial version of Presenter or Meeting at <http://www.adobe.com/products/connect/>. You can produce a complete

blended training program with this combination.

Adobe has a certified training curriculum for each of the four components, with a wide network of certified trainers to help your team get started. The training books Adobe offers include hands-on work labs with sample media files, so you can learn how to use all the features of each product. Recommended training for Adobe Presenter and Training is two days in length. Recommended training for Connect Meeting and Events is also two days long.

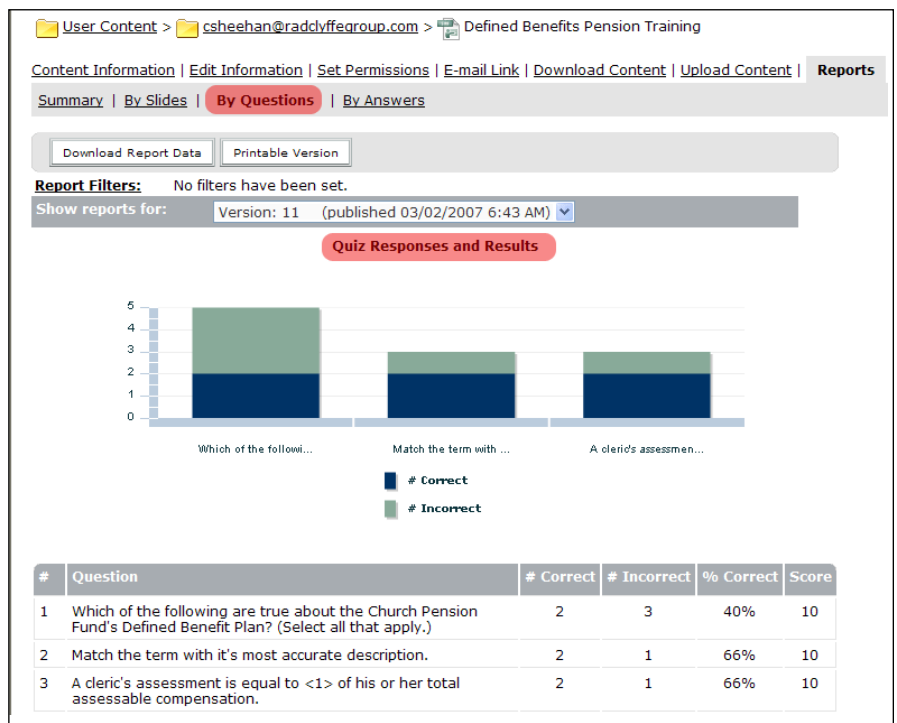
The good and not-so-good features of Adobe Acrobat Connect

To summarize, here are what I see as the reasons to choose Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional:

- Leveraging the ubiquitous Flash Web Player for Authoring and Live Meetings
- Wizards for non-programmers
- The ability to assign learning object dependencies to your training courses
- Building curricula, and launching blended content, from a single URL
- Using Flash Learning Objects for both self-paced and live virtual classrooms
- Ability to create “custom skins” with your corporate logos
- Video conferencing for multiple presenters
- Easy-to-use reporting that can be downloaded to Excel for data-sharing
- Use of APIs for customization to your environment
- Granular search results to find details of content easily and quickly

Any content created with Adobe Presenter is both AICC and SCORM compliant. You can create content with Presenter, publish it locally with SCORM 1.2 or SCORM 2004 files, and integrate it directly into an existing LMS.

 **Figure 10** Connect Training reports results in both graphic and tabular formats.



- Easy publishing to a server or local hard-drive
- Integration with Outlook so you can easily schedule and invite people to your events
- Creating online forms for self-enrollment by people outside your enterprise
- Certified Training and Certified Trainers
- Free online assets through the Adobe Website to help users take development further
- Local and online User Groups to learn from your peers (www.connectusers.com)
- Extensive online support and success stories

At the same time there are some limitations that you might experience with Acrobat Connect.

The audio editor only allows single-track editing. There are some work-arounds, but you will need an external audio editor to use music and voice together. You can import the produced audio files (WAV) with multi-tracks through Adobe Presenter after you edit them externally.


When recording live meetings, you cannot download off the server or edit the archived files. They must remain on the server, and they are viewable only if you have a live Internet connection. You can start and stop recordings to create several files, but you cannot edit them down after the meeting.

Audio is not searchable. Adobe has included best-practices to include scripts in content so you can, in fact, find the content in audio, but this must be trained ... it is not automatic.

Mac support could be an issue for some organizations. You cannot use Presenter with PowerPoint for the Mac – mostly because Microsoft doesn't offer a plug-in architecture for PowerPoint on the Mac. You can, however, author a PowerPoint file on the Mac, and then upload it to your content library on the Connect server using a Web browser. The result will be without the features of Presenter. It is a straight Power-Point-to-Flash conversion with no audio, quiz questions, or inserted Flash objects.

Conclusion

Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional addresses the four critical components of a rapid e-Learning solution and a blended solution: easy content authoring, convenient content management, live virtual classrooms, and curriculum management and tracking.

Since Adobe owns Flash, and has been in business for 25 years, in my opinion it is safe to say that they have the proper resources to support future releases and grow this product into much more than what we are seeing today. Selecting an enterprise solution with a company of Adobe's size is a very safe way to ensure you will be using a tool that is going to be around for many years to come. 

About the Author



Jacqueline Beck, M.Ed., has been creating interactive learning programs since 1988, when she began producing them with Laser Disc technology. After 18 years in this area of training and development, she is one of the veterans in the industry. As a speaker at many events, she shares her e-Learning expertise with other developers, instructional designers, and training managers. Her recent projects include work done for Pfizer, Adobe, Goldman Sachs, Walt Disney, Boeing, FedEx, and Harvard Medical School. Jacquie recently led a workshop for the Drug Information Association at their Electronic Document Management (EDM) Conference, demonstrating how to build effective e-Learning with Adobe Presenter. She has written numerous articles on e-Learning development, instructional design, and rich-media optimization for slow bandwidths. Jacquie is Senior Vice President – e-Learning at Brookwood. Contact Jacquie by e-mail to jbeck@brookwood.com.

Discuss these articles in the "Talk Back to the Authors" Forum of Community Connections (http://www.elearning-guild.com/community_connections/forum/categories.cfm?catid=17&entercat=y). You can address your comments to the author(s) of each week's article, or you can make a general comment to other readers.

Additional information on the topics covered in these articles is also listed in the Guild Resource Directory.

In the Archives

This is the fourth article by Jacquie Beck for The eLearning Guild. The eLearning Guild has previously published articles whose topics relate to this week's. These are available to Guild members in the Learning Solutions Archive online. Members must log in to download them. Here are the authors, the article topics, and the publication dates.

Previous articles by Jacquie Beck

Meeting Challenges with Learning Objects (August 6, 2007)
 High Value, Low Bandwidth (July 21, 2003)
 Image Compression and Optimization (April 30, 2002)

Articles on related topics:

While this is the first review of Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional, the following articles deal with its predecessor, Macromedia Breeze:
 Russ McNally, How to become an e-Learning Guru (July 26, 2004 and January 24, 2005)
 Paul Clothier, e-Learning with Macromedia Flash and Breeze (September 2, 2003)

Best of the Blogs: Excellent recent posts

Clark Aldrich's Style Guide for Serious Games and Simulations: "The Campfire and the Veld" (<http://clarkaldrich.blogspot.com/2007/11/commentary-field-vs-campfire.html>)
 Kapp Notes: "Second Life ... It's Synchronous" (<http://karlkapp.blogspot.com/2007/11/second-lifeits-synchronous.html>)
 elearnspace: "A Wiring Diagram of the Brain" (<http://www.elearnspace.org/blog/archive/003160.html>)
 Stephen's Web: "Groups vs. Networks: The Class Struggle Continues" (<http://www.downes.ca/cga-bin/page.cgi?post=42522>)



A Worldwide Community of Practice for e-Learning Professionals

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Guild membership is an investment in your professional development and in your organization's future success with its e-Learning efforts. Your membership provides you with learning opportunities and resources so that you can increase your knowledge and skills. That's what the Guild is all about ... putting the resources and information you need at your fingertips so you can produce more successful e-Learning.

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offered for each membership level. To learn more about Group Membership and pricing, go to www.eLearningGuild.com.

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Past Conference Handouts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resource Directory – Access & Post	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Connections – Access & Post	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Board – Access Jobs & Resumes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Board – Post Resumes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Board – Post Jobs	✗	✓	✓	✓
Learning Solutions e-Magazine	✓	✓	✓	✓
Guild Research – Standard Interactive Reports	*	*	*	*
Guild Research – Online Briefings	✓	✓	✓	✓
Guild Research – Archives	✗	✓	✓	✓
Guild Research 360' Report Purchase Discounts	✗	✗	10%*	20%*
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Optional Workshop OR Colloquium Upgrade	\$	\$	\$	1 year free
Event Fee Discounts	✗	20%	20%	20%
Online Event Site License Discounts	✗	✗	20%	20%

*See www.eLearningGuild.com for details

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