



# Minnesota Media Insider

The Official Tri-Annual Journal of MCAI-MN

## Down the Old Mississippi



*Deck socializing*

BY WILLIAM CRESWELL

On a cool evening in late August, over 100 MCAI-Minnesota chapter members, their guests and others from media-related sister organizations enjoyed a cruise down the Mississippi river as part of the networking social event "Media Convergence On The River 2003".

This year's cruise was sponsored by Allied Vaughn, Digital Excellence and AVI Systems and co-sponsored by Alpha Video, Cine-Cermin, Real Productions and MediTech. Invited organizations included AdFed, AICP-MN, AICE-MPLS, AIGA-MN, ASTD-SMC, AWC-TC, AWRT-TC, Flash Users Group, Directors Users Group, IFP/MSP, IABCMN, MNISPI, MCAI-MN, MFTB, MiMA, MNAMA, MNMPI, MNPRSA, TCAF, MNSIG-GRAPH, SMPS-TC, SMPTE-TC, STCTC, WWIFA and many more.

This year's award and contest winners included Christine Wierman, a writer, who won the Best Buy gift card prize. She wrote, "Kudos on last night's event! It was wonderful. The people, the meal...everything was so warm and welcoming. I'm also very grateful for the prize! Finally! I'll be able to get that DVD I've had my eye on. Yeehah!"

Other prize winners were Jeff Kronholm, Allied Vaughn's Rental Manager, who won a Target gift card and Peta Barrett of NUTS, Ltd., who won a "Media Pack" consisting of the "Lord of the Rings — The Two Towers" DVD, the "Martin Scorsese presents 'The Best of the Blues'" CD and the New York Times bestseller, "Benjamin Franklin," by Walter Isaacson.

The winner of the Sponsor Trivia contest was Julie Keller of ProMedia who won a Kodak 3 MegaPixels digital camera. She actually tied with her husband, Steve with six right answers, but she noted that "he has plenty of cameras" and this was her first camera.

All in all a great get-together and social time was had by all. See you next year!

More photos on page 18.

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MMI Journal Editor:  
Sherrill Beecher  
952-830-0611  
[sbeecher@adayana.com](mailto:sbeecher@adayana.com)

Monthly Email & Postcard:  
Christina Meyers  
651-642-4167  
[cmeyers@ks95.com](mailto:cmeyers@ks95.com)

Webmaster:  
David B. McCallum  
612-724-3875

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# President's

## CORNER



BY DENNIS DAVIES

### Greetings MCAI-MN!

To paraphrase a well-known humorist, for those who know me, no introduction could possibly save me! And, for those of you whose acquaintance I have yet to make — please don't talk to the first group!

Welcome to the fall issue of MCAI-MN's *Minnesota Media Insider*. As usual, this journal contains articles written *by* and *for* our membership as well as for our client communities. I believe you will find that our writers continue the grand tradition of all of our volunteers over the years: spreading the word about our industry, our local market and trends that are or likely will affect our careers and businesses. In addition, you will also find suggestions borne of experience that just may help you in your career and business.

These major goals of our professional organization are also evidenced at our monthly meetings. For instance, those present at our Sept. 24 gathering at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design saw the presentation by George Welles III, "The Future Isn't What It Used To Be". George addressed the myriad issues surrounding the quickening pace of technologically-driven change, gave us all something to think about — as well as several things we can do to turn the current climate of fear and confusion into opportunity.

George's topic restated, this time of massive change is indeed difficult, but also presents opportunity for those willing to adjust *vision* to match *insight*. I don't mean to suggest that economic and techno-change realities have necessarily impacted all of us the same, for such is not the case. Some of us have struggled or continue to struggle with the loss of staff positions, and those of us still employed question the stability of our own positions. Some of us who are self-employed have had a consistent if flat income during this time while others just survive by "patching" their way through.

As some of you know, I've spent the past half-dozen years working on the bleeding edge of technology — in various roles for several organizations. During this period of constant personal and professional change, I have experienced many of the situations I've just described. Through all of these changes, I've consistently counted on technology to provide my next opportunity.

But I now find myself in close agreement with George Welles. Technology will continue to both dazzle and confuse us, and ultimately provide us with opportunities yet to be defined ... but our path to success in lies in the *context* with which we view — and utilize its deployment.

As we continue to wonder just when this current jobless recovery will morph into a healthier version that includes actual job growth, I believe an old familiar cliché applies:

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- **The customer is *always* right.** If our clients simply have less money with which to fashion their next communications project, then our creative solutions need to match their "creative budgeting". We are seeing technical solutions such as Apple Computer's Final Cut Pro/DVD Studio Pro now providing for such a match.

That being said, I think there is another, somewhat opposite, trend coming back into prominence:

- **"Consistent Customer Intimacy" overrides short-term advantages in technology or the "cut-to-the-bone" commodity pricing of the competitive bid process.** For most of the clients I talk to, and the stories I hear, the message is the same. If customers know that a vendor is genuinely attempting to meet their needs — by returning calls promptly, by delivering news promptly (good, bad and otherwise), by delivering a solution that matches all needs as best as possible ... then that customer tends to value that relationship and reward that loyalty.

These truths are all well and good ... but how do WE — you, me, the M.C.A.I — survive this current situation? I believe much of what we've all been experiencing, and how we will return to thriving, not just surviving, can best be summed up with the phrase "moments of truth". I think these moments present themselves in our daily lives and how we react at these times will determine our future. In my book, these moments are:

- **When our customer asks for something that we know will be difficult to provide him or her.** It used to be a question of time or money, remember? Now it most often is a question of little time and

less money. In order for us to be effective we must also be efficient. To succeed, we must reduce the steps we go through from start to finish.

- **When things go wrong, do we simply fix today's mess — or do we take the time to invest in the required process improvements?** I believe the action I take in these instances underscore my belief in myself, my team, and ultimately, my organization. "If not now ... then when?" is the tough question.
- **Are we investing in ourselves — or waiting for the customer or our employers to make this investment?** One of the insights provided by George Welles is that currently most companies, in most industries, are not investing in training. Of course, those of us involved in the development of training materials already know the very real consequence of this reduction in skills investment! But the investment in training that we will each do for ourselves during this period will pay dividends when the economy comes back and new jobs are created.

According to Welles, current labor trend statistics suggest that upward of 50 percent of current employees will move to new jobs once this recovery includes job creation. To mitigate this trend, employers will quickly begin providing training as an employee benefit. The training we provide ourselves will be critical to our future opportunities no matter on which side of the employee-employer equation we find ourselves.

- **Are you willing to change the client conversation?** Can you bring value through a solution that

both addresses customer's stated needs as well as his or her fears? Or are you asking them to take a full leap of faith?

Also, can you explain your solution in terms of client savings (time, money) as well as any other way? It's not an easy thing to do, but documenting the expected ROI will likely allow you to close the sale more frequently.

And, can you demonstrate a value proposition that illustrates what the client can — and cannot do for herself or himself? Are you willing to partner with them even if the D-I-Y syndrome drives you crazy?

- **Are you locked into your own comfort zone — or are you willing to provide solutions that require more than you alone can provide?** Customers need solutions that increasingly encompass much more than the skill sets we each alone can bring to bear. Of course, ad-hoc teaming is not new to most of us — but has fast become even more vital than previously considered.

**Are you passionate about all of this — or complacent?** I suggest that for those of us reading this, we likely are passionate about these issues, as we are about our careers and industry.

*Until the next meeting or journal ... what are your moments of truth?*  
-D2

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*With special thanks and acknowledgment for the ideas contributed by George Welles III, Imaging Futures, Inc.*

*After stints as DVD Product Manager, Digital Media Services Manager, Dennis C. Davies is now an Account Manager for the Minneapolis office of Allied Vaughn. He can be reached at 952-832-3208 or dennis.davies@alliedvaughn.com.*

# MCAI-MN Gold Member Profile

## AVI SYSTEMS

BY WILLIAM CRESWELL

As a recognized leader in the videoconferencing and audio/visual technology industry with offices in Kansas City, Des Moines, Omaha and Bismarck, Eden Prairie-based AVI Systems is a company with both a local Midwest presence and a nationwide scope of operation. In May the company opened its sixth regional office in San Diego as a result of their merger with Televideo San Diego, a broadcast and professional video communications business serving the San Diego and Mexico markets.

Established in 1972 as the AV Division of Office Machines & Furniture, the company was incorporated two years later and has remained employee-owned, first as an audiovisual equipment supplier in Bismarck, North Dakota then growing by acquisitions in Iowa and Nebraska before relocating to Minnesota in 1990. Today AVI Systems has built a reputation as a premier systems integrator specializing in videoconferencing, audio/visual technology, broadcast production and nonlinear editing.

AVI Systems designs and builds hundreds of projects every year. The company designs, installs and services video, presentation, broadcast, distance learning and videoconferencing systems, with the emphasis on complete systems integration from conceptual planning through installation and hands-on training. The company has provided design-build services for companies as large as AT&T, Carlson Companies, Sprint, ConAgra and Target; and for installations as small as churches, 10-person marketing firms and local television stations. Locally, AVI has recently completed presentation and conference rooms in the new Best Buy corporate campus and the Upsher/Smith corporate headquarters.

In a difficult economy, the company managed to grow its business 12 percent in 2002. "The capability to design and install audio and visual infrastructure according to the unique business needs of the customer is now hypercritical in this industry," said Jeff Stoebner, AVI Systems vice president. "In fact, more than 50 percent of successful projects in the technology industry are based on design-build strategies. This allows the integration of A/V systems at the highest level."

"Design-build is a trend in a lot of industries, such as construction," said AVI Systems regional vice president Joe Baer. "It's a solution for today's time crunch, delivering a facility that will meet the client's needs efficiently, with one contract and one point of contact."

The process often begins at AVI Systems offices, which contain a number of presentation rooms, ranging in size from a small conference room with electronic whiteboard to a large videoconferencing room featuring dual 42-inch flat screen plasma monitors. Along with demonstrating equipment, prospective customers can see these rooms in action because AVI Systems uses them extensively to communicate with their branch offices. "I use the videoconferencing room several times a month, sometimes several times a week," said Baer. "I have a meeting coming up where I'll have 32 people in the room. So we use these rooms ourselves and the customers can see how we use them."

"Design-build is taking a project from the start," said Baer. Compared to a traditional bidding process, the result is more effective and efficient, he added. "The number one thing is

you're working the pre-planning stage better. With a bid situation, it's mostly apples-to-apples with change orders. With design-build you're locked into the client's way of thinking... working with customers to bring their dream to reality. "

The completed integrated systems function at a highly technical level, yet must be simple enough for non-technical individuals to operate. Besides a competitive price, service is an important factor that customers value. "Our biggest differential is service, and (our) problem-solving emphasis," said Baer. "We have the most extensive service department in the Twin Cities, with a total of 21 technical service employees in our Eden Prairie office. These include six service technicians, five engineers in our engineering department and a full crew in our installation department." Baer said customers realize that AVI understands the latest technologies and provides the skilled production and technical support they need to enhance the way they are seen and heard.

Along the way, AVI Systems has been a strong supporter of ITVA and MCA-I. As a commercial member, Baer said the company gets a lot of exposure and learns some things too. "The events are fun, like the boat ride and the holiday bowling outing, and the meetings are informative," he said. "We sell this equipment but we don't often get to see how people are using it out there. At the chapter meetings we get to see what people are doing, learn about how people are using our products. It's eye-opening. There's a lot of creativity out there."

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*William Creswell is an independent writer-producer and project manager, currently co-Chair of the MCAI-MN Communications committee.*

# Creativity

BY CHRIS JONES

It doesn't matter whether someone is a writer, an architect, a Human Resources middle manager, or a producer — everyone can use a creativity boost every now and then. Those of us in the media-creation business must rely on our creativity like a water spigot — being able to turn it on at a moment's notice. The following are creativity boosters I've used and some I've gathered and intend to try some day. Feel free to use whatever works for you.

## 1. The Water Method.

First, I prime the pump. I load in all the program objectives, facts, client quirks, corporate culture and budget parameters. Then I turn on the spigot — literally. A long shower works. So does an afternoon or evening sail. Canoes are good. Somehow the calming effect of water relaxes my mind and activates something. I have a pen and paper handy and make the creative notes that become the backbone of the program that currently needs the creative boost. For those not near water, try doing the dishes by hand. I've also found that mowing the lawn or listening to classical music also work once the pump is primed. I've heard that jogging works, but for me it's hard being creative when I'm thinking, "One more block, one more block, one more block..."

## 2. The One Hour Method.

I dedicate one hour to completing the entire project. I write the entire script from beginning to end. (An architect I know designs an entire house.) Edit the whole program. Write the entire marketing plan. Don't worry about how rough it will be — just get it over with. Once it's all on the page, ideas have a way of presenting themselves. Inspiration comes as you work on

through a project without thinking about being creative. Like creeping charlie (for those of you who garden), the left side of your brain has a way of infiltrating and taking over when you're paying attention elsewhere.

## 3. The One Sentence Method.

When your creativity is blocked, try summarizing the content into one sentence or thought. My favorite theater professor used to make us do this with Shakespeare's plays. When you get the entire concept down to one sentence (the *Reader's Digest* or *TV Guide* logline), then you can keep focused on the goal and work on the means to get to there. Think of the last image with which you want to leave the audience and work backward.

## 4. The Bullet Point or Outline Method.

Take the objectives, key points, and any other content that you've assembled and start putting it into a story outline. Don't go into detail yet, just put down the bullet points. Arrange the points until they flow from start to finish. Then go back and write your way from point to point and make sure you detail the transitions between major topics.

## 5. The Thesaurus Method.

This one is courtesy of fellow MCA-I member Catherine Silverman in Phoenix. From the objectives, audience, and main communication points of the project, identify a dozen key words applicable to the story you're trying to tell. Then whip out your handy thesaurus (book or electronic version) and start pulling related words that grab your fancy. Concentrate on small, pithy, and precise words that evoke emotion or imagery. Listen to the sounds of the words in combination. You'd be surprised how many ideas this generates.

## 6. The Web Method.

I've used this one recently and it

works surprisingly well if you have a high-speed Internet connection. Hop on the Information Superhighway and search for words and pictures related to your topic. For words, I highlight the interesting parts and copy them into a master word-processing document. Grab the pictures by selecting and dragging them to your desktop (for Mac users) or right-click and "save as" with your mouse (for Windows users). Other Web techniques are brainstorming or "brainlining" with your computer (see the end of this article for more about these techniques). For Web sites, I've found a number of useful techniques in "creativity" sites such as Mindtools ([www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)), and "futurist" sites such as the World Future Society ([www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org)) are worth a visit too.

## 7. Prime the Pump Method.

This one is a variation on the Water Method (No. 1), but uses movies and other visual art. Watch as many movies as you can — the old classics on tape or DVD, recent releases and those now showing in theaters. Watching movies primes the pump and also helps in shorthand-speak with your clients: "It's a 'Forest Gump' moment..." or "...like a Ken Burns documentary" or "the data flows on their silhouettes like in 'The Matrix'..." Other visual art such as stage plays or circuses are useful. Even watching television can be useful, particularly programs that use state-of-the-art visuals (like MTV). When the pump is fully primed you'll have more to draw upon when you need to turn on the creativity. I've found wonderful transitions, interesting character types, cool graphics and all manner of creative ideas in other media and other programs. This is one of the reasons it is so fun to participate on MCA-I judging panels for other chapters' media festivals. If you're ever asked to be a judge — say yes. You have the opportunity to see a lot of high-quality work.

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# Ready for 24P?

Alpha Video's Rental Services department has the largest selection of 24P cameras in the Midwest. If you're ready to make the jump to 24P and have a need for shooting DV, SD or HD, we can help.

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# The 24P Effect

BY KEVIN GROVES

I can feel a change coming. It's in the wind. The art of video production is changing.

My company Alpha Video, in part, sells solutions for video production. This allows us to see new equipment, the industry's trends and new ideas that we can bring to our customers. On occasion these trends are mildly interesting. Sometimes they are misguided. Once in a while, they are remarkable. I believe what we are seeing now in video production is one of those remarkable trends.

This is the new age of digital progressive 24-frames-per-second (24P) video production. The cost of new equipment that can provide a totally different look is affordable for almost anyone. The advent of DV equipment (and the change to a digital signal from analog) has made possible remarkable devices—24P capable cameras that range from \$4,000 to over \$100,000 and editing systems that range from \$5000 to beyond \$100,000 allow entry at almost any price level.

I believe 24P changes the perception of those who watch it. We take in full motion visual content quite a bit during our day, from television, movie theaters, and at our jobs. This constant barrage of content leaves our subconscious with certain expectations of how the visual image should look. I believe when viewers watch television, for example, the film frame rates and imagery are associated with a higher visual quality than video. I believe the same subconscious association with "film look" happens when viewers see European-produced video due to the similar frame rate of video and television production (due to the 50-cycle power and 25-frame-per-second) video. They may not know what makes it feel different, but the feeling is there just the same.

With 24P video, I believe most viewers see film, no matter what the resolution of the picture. For example, when a producer has decided to shoot in high-definition 24P or multi-frame-rate video instead of film with the client's approval. When the video rolls, the surprised client asks the producer if he or she used film.

I "see" European video from 24P production. I recall watching a music awards show recently. Although my memory is sketchy, I remember the show switching from the live hosts to the group Nickelback (I think) performing live on the awards ceremony stage. This was being shot at a different frame rate, probably 24P. I had to look at the image three or four times to convince myself that these weren't live images coming from Britain of a European rock band. It was really hard to accept that even though the cameras were showing the same stage I had been looking at the entire night.

I knew it was live, not film, but brain had assumed otherwise, and it was not until logic took over that I made the jump to realizing I was watching a multi-frame-rate video camera. If I hadn't previously seen multi-frame-rate video, I may have never realized it.

The 24P film look can also give the illusion that what you are seeing happened sometime earlier.

The great thing about this technology is its versatility. Almost all of the equipment that can do 24P can also do 30i and 60i (normal, standard video to those not "in the know"). It can also be edited in many cases with standard nonlinear-editing systems such as Apple's Final Cut Pro on a Macintosh. Its aspect ratio can be 16:9 or 4:3. It can be sharp and edgy like video (even European video), or soft and detailed like film. It is also fresh, quick, inexpensive, and easy to use. I would not claim that these products can replace all film production nor can they compete directly with it in all or even most cases (too much past experience to do that).

However, it certainly has a place, and it's growing. When you bring the financial equation into the mix, it gets even more interesting.

The manufacturers are gearing up for this market that is already beginning to explode. Panasonic, for example, has 24P DV cameras for about \$4,000, the DVCPRO50 for about \$25,000, and the DVCPROHD model, with a multi-frame rate (4 fps - 60 fps), for about \$63,000. JVC is delivering a prosumer-level HD camera for about \$4,000 that is based on DTV transmission-stream compression levels of 19.39 Mbp/s, and at the high end, Sony has HDCAM 1080i and 1080/24P cameras on the market. The options will certainly keep growing.

It can be fun to look back at our history and the industry. Sometimes hindsight helps to predict the future. At one of my earlier employers, a film-equipment rental company, a fellow employee and I would have several discussions around the coffee pot, and sometimes the bar, about business, and every so often we would engage in an animated discussion about when (and if) video would replace film. I was the "video guy" and he was the "film guy." Back then we were on opposite sides of the fence (in part because we enjoyed the argument). I claimed that the high-definition video I had seen would replace film. The film guy scoffed at the idea, claiming that film's grain, detail, contrast ratio, and color rendition could not be replaced by video. I had to admit he had a good argument. Today, however, I don't think he would be as quick to argue as to agree.

Yes, video is slowly replacing film, and more. This technology may provide new competitive advantages in your business plan. You should check it out, kick the tires a bit. You might find it interesting. Besides it's cool! (My 13-year-old son loves when I say that. It ranks right up there with groovy.)

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*Kevin Groves, with partner Stan Stanek, owns Alpha Video, a leading solutions provider for all areas of visual communications. Learn more about Alpha Video at [www.alphavideo.com](http://www.alphavideo.com).*

# Captioning for New Media

BY DEREK HINES

Think you know your technology terms? OK, here's a quiz. What does the acronym DVD stand for? Don't know? It means Digital Versatile Disc.

Don't feel bad if you didn't know. Most people don't. But that's not stopping them from buying DVD players by the millions. DVD players outsold VCRs for the first time in 2002. Major chains such as Blockbuster and Best Buy are vastly reducing their VHS titles in favor of DVDs. Now, even kids are starting to complain when mom or dad bring home a movie on VHS tape instead of DVD.

DVDs have some great advantages over VHS, especially when it comes to providing accessibility. Not only can DVDs carry the same closed

captioning that you've grown to know and love (you turn them on just as you do for video), they can also carry up to 32 subtitle tracks. One of these tracks could be the rather new term "subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing" or "SDH." This combines the features of subtitles — proportional, attractive lettering superimposed over the video — with the benefits of closed captions — speaker identification, sound effects description, precise timing, etc. The result is sentences that are easy to read which can be turned on or off at the viewer's desire. You may have started seeing this on DVDs you're renting. Unfortunately, the acronym SDH, or for that matter the word "subtitled," has not been used in a consistent fashion. Sometimes the DVD's menu says the movie has been subtitled in English, when in fact it's SDH, or the menu says the movie

has captions when in fact they're subtitles or SDH. Sometimes the program has been closed captioned, but the box is not marked, nor is it indicated on the menu built into the DVD.

DVDs also present a technical challenge with respect to captioning. Video producers often don't know what they want (i.e. who their intended audience is) for the accessibility they're trying to provide. So they don't know if they want closed captions, subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) or traditional subtitles for hearing audiences.

When producers decide to put their movie or program to DVD, they will either author the DVD themselves or have another company do it. This process can still be expensive and time-consuming, not to mention complicated when it comes to captions. DVD-authoring systems are different from one another, and

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caption/subtitle files need to be formatted in different ways to match the different authoring systems. Some professional DVD-authoring systems cannot integrate captions and some consumer/prosumer systems can't incorporate either captions or subtitles.

Another issue is that many DVD authors have never imported caption or subtitle data, so they must be trained.

One final hurdle: Unlike VHS, once a DVD is authored and burned, it cannot be added to (unless it's a DVD-RW, a re-writable DVD.) This becomes a problem because of end users such as educators will often need the material captioned. They won't be able to get this done unless they go back to the company that created the DVD and ask them to author a new version with captions.

As the DVD market matures, these inconsistencies and problem areas will most likely decrease as they did with VHS.

## Webcasting

So you're saying, "Thanks very much, but how do I get captions for videos that play over the Web?" The answer is, don't panic — there is a way. The proliferation of the Internet and the speed with which we can access it have paved the way for the flood of video programming appearing on the Web. From movies to commercials to music videos, "Webcast" media is everywhere. There are three major media players that most people use to access audio and video on the Internet. They are Windows Media Player, Real Player, and QuickTime. Each of these players has integrated accessibility features that give users the ability to turn on captioning and audio description if they're available. Knowing where to find these features in each of the players can be difficult. Not only are they in different places in

each of the players, they can be in different places from their previous version.

In the RealOne Player version 6.0, captions are turned on by going to the Tools menu, selecting Preferences, and clicking on Content. Under the Accessibility heading, choose "use supplemental text captioning when available" and/or "use descriptive audio when available."

In Windows Media Player 9.0, go to the Play menu, point to Captions and Subtitles, and then click the appropriate language or other option.

QuickTime can operate a little differently. In a lot of instances, when you play a captioned video in QuickTime, the captions will automatically play. You can turn them on in QuickTime version 6.0 by going to the Edit menu, selecting Enable Tracks, and choosing the "caption text" track.

Captions for videos played in these media players are created in a similar fashion to those created for video and DVD. But captioning for the Web

presents its own challenges. Just as different DVD authoring systems require different caption files, each of the media players need specially formatted caption files. Windows Media Player, RealOne Player and QuickTime all have their own special requirements for the makeup of these files, how they're named, and where they go in conjunction with the video file. Video producers must go the extra mile to figure out how to give their viewers access to both the video and captions that go with it.

Now that you know how to turn captions on, you may still be frustrated, because most video material you can find on the Web is not captioned. But don't fret. With the rise in the amount of captioned programming found on television, demand for this same access to video on the Web will grow.

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*Derek Hines is with CaptionMax, a national closed-captioning & audio description services provider with offices in Minneapolis, New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. You can contact him at [derek@captionmax.com](mailto:derek@captionmax.com).*

## Hennepin Technical College Wins Gold Medal in National Video Contest

BROOKLYN PARK, MN — Two students from the Video Production Program at Hennepin Technical College (HTC) took a gold medal at the National SkillsUSA/VICA Video Production contest held in Kansas City. Representing Minnesota, Todd Randall and Justin Leasure produced a 60-second public service announcement (PSA) about Kansas City's Union Station.

The PSA was shot with a Panasonic DVCPPro and edited on the Media 100 system. All competitors had to provide their own equipment and music for the event. The HTC students had four hours to shoot and another three hours to edit the final product. Todd and Justin each received a one-year scholarship to the Art Institute worth \$15,000.

Hennepin Technical College is Minnesota's largest technical college, serving over 12,000 students at its two suburban campuses in Brooklyn Park and Eden Prairie and sites in Hopkins, Plymouth and Bloomington. Students may attend part-time or full-time and choose from over 40 programs of study leading to certificates, diplomas and degrees. The college offers many evening and weekend classes to accommodate students' schedules.

# Macromedia Launches MX 2004

BY CHUCK PRESTON

In an event billed as the first ever worldwide user-group meeting, Macromedia previewed the new release of Studio MX 2004 on Wed., Sept. 3, 2003. Using cool Web presentation app, Breeze Live, the Macromedia presenters broadcast real-time audio, video, animated slides and text-messaging to user groups around the world.

Locally, the event, which included pizza and soda, was presented by the three Macromedia user groups in town: Twin Cities ColdFusion User Group, [www.colderfusion.com](http://www.colderfusion.com), Flash Minnesota User Group, [www.flashmn.com](http://www.flashmn.com), and MN Director User Group, [www.andrew.gribble.com/director.htm](http://www.andrew.gribble.com/director.htm), and the viewing of this live worldwide presentation was held at the St. Paul campus of the University of St. Thomas. The audience was able to watch the live presentation as well as see messages from the U.K., South America and Europe and the corresponding responses from Macromedia. It was cool, although a little distracting, seeing the back and forth exchange during the presentation. Then, after each section, the presenters took questions from the viewers using the same text messaging.

The presentation included many new features that will make current users of MX happy, plus a couple of features that will be of interest to video professionals who want to publish their work on the Web.

## Here are a few of the highlights:

MX 2004 implements major upgrades to Dreamweaver, Fireworks and Flash and tightens the integration among them. There's a new start page for all three apps that helps the user get started quickly and with fewer clicks.

Dreamweaver now has better support for Cascading Stylesheets (CSS) and improved browser validation. There are new vector and bitmap editing tools for Fireworks. One of the coolest is the contour gradient that lets you fill an irregular shape with a gradient that follows the outline of the shape. Improvements for Flash include ActionScript 2.0, screens-based authoring and new timeline effects that make it easy (maybe too easy) to add common animations and transitions. (One unfortunate effect is called "Explode". Look for this to unleash a flood of gratuitous Flash animations.) Plus, with this release, Macromedia offers a second, pro version of Flash that will appeal to power users.

The integration of Flash and video continues to mature with MX 2004. Although many video people don't consider Flash a serious contender in the Web video war, its quality can be as good as other architectures such as QuickTime and Windows Media Player. Plus, Flash has a couple of advantages the other guys don't, such as a larger user base and the ability to incorporate the video within an app instead of having to display it in a separate window. With this release, there are a number of improvements for integrating video into your Flash projects. You no longer need to embed your video into the Flash file. Flash can now link to external video files at runtime, the same way Director does. (Flash uses Macromedia's proprietary FLV format.) This will greatly speed up authoring and publishing.

Making changes to the video will be easier too because you won't have to re-import the video each time. The professional version of Flash comes with a new video encoder that exports FLV video directly to all applications on the desktop, including

professional video-editing and encoding tools such as Avid Xpress/Media Composer, Apple Final Cut Pro, Discreet Cleaner, and Anystream Agility. Here's how: MX 2004 includes an installer for the encoder. When you run the installer, it adds a new export option to whatever Quicktime installation it finds on your machine. The export drop down will now include an option called "Movie to Macromedia Flash Video (FLV)". Now, any NLE that can export QuickTime will also be able to export FLVs.

The exporter includes some high quality compression options such as variable bit rate that before was only available with Sorenson's compression tool, Squeeze. The professional version also includes new, pre-built components that allow you to incorporate video into your project without a lot of scripting. For instance, you can use the components to easily add and customize a video controller or a progress bar. The professional version takes advantage of Flash's use of external video files to provide progressive streaming using a normal server, where with other formats a specialized server is required for delivering progressive streaming video. If you want true streaming or any of the real-time, two-way teleconferencing functions, you should look into the Flash Communication Server, an amazing new product from Macromedia that provides all kinds of ways to use video over the Web. Some examples are video on demand, Webcam chat, real-time collaboration and live presentation events.

The other half of Flash's video delivery system is the Flash browser plug-in. Nobody likes browser plug-ins but they are a necessary part of the Web today and as they mature,

*continued on page 11* ➔

their installation will become less and less obtrusive. Macromedia recently upgraded the Flash plug-in to version 7, which improves video quality and performance. Besides being faster, it fixes some of the quirks that have plagued Flash for a while such as the aggravating 1-pixel bitmap shift.

There are a lot of things I like about this release. I ordered the upgrade almost as soon as it was available and decided to go with the professional version because I don't want to miss out on anything (score one

for Macromedia's marketing department.) One of the first things I want to experiment with is linking to external video. For me, that alone is worth the upgrade. I'm also looking forward to all the little usability tweaks such as the start page. The Flash interface has always been frustrating to use, so the more Macromedia tweaks it, the better. It's been improving with each new version and this release should be the best yet.

MX 2004 is available for purchase now for \$999 or you can download a trial version at <http://www.macromedia.com/software/studio> as well as find a complete list of the new features and sample Web sites that use it.

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*Chuck Preston, a former freelance video editor, moved into CD-ROM development in the mid '90s. Now he produces Web solutions using the Flash Communication Server. His services also include video-messaging, real-time teleconferencing and live presentations. You can contact him at [chuckjr@stinkless.com](mailto:chuckjr@stinkless.com).*

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CREATIVITY *continued*

**8. Mind Mapping.**

Grab a variety of color markers or crayons and draw a circle in the middle of a blank piece of paper. Write your key topic or question in the circle. From the circle, sketch out a variety of lines radiating from its center in various directions, and on them draw a series of new circles, squares, triangles or other shapes. In each, write whatever comes to your mind based on the central circle. Continue for a bit, branching out from each new word or phrase to develop yet another series of lines and words. Use colors, shapes, words, drawings or symbols to create an artistic variety. Color freely.

**9. An Audience Insight Handy Hint.**

No time to watch movies and don't have any teen-agers in the house? The printed word will help you tune in to popular culture. Look at *The New York Times* Bestseller List. What does it tell you about what interests people? What does it tell you about trends? What is common subject matter? Who do you see purchasing these books? What ideas for products and services come to mind?

**10. Reframe the Matrix — Look at problems from a different perspective.**

This one comes from Mindtools. A Reframing Matrix is a simple technique that helps you to look at business problems from a number of different viewpoints. It expands the range of creative solutions that you can generate. The approach relies on the fact that different people with different experience approach problems in different ways. This technique helps you to put yourself into the minds of different people and imagine the solutions they would come up with. Start by putting the question to be asked in the middle of a grid. Draw boxes around the grid for the different perspectives.

For other perspectives, try the Four Ps (Product, Planning, Potential and People). Another set of perspectives is to consider how four different types of professionals, — such as medical doctors, engineers, systems analysts and sales managers — would view the problem.

This method, like the other nine, are just ways of laying the problem out and letting your ideas flow. If it does

not suit your style, try another. Find out what works best in boosting your creativity!

Here are some notes and useful links for more information on these techniques:

*Brainstorming With Your Computer*  
[www.gocreate.com/Articles/atchow.htm](http://www.gocreate.com/Articles/atchow.htm)

*Brainlining*  
[www.gocreate.com/Articles/abl101.htm](http://www.gocreate.com/Articles/abl101.htm)

*The Mind Map Book: How to Use Radiant Thinking to Maximize Your Brain's Untapped Potential*, by Tony Buzan, Barry Buzan (Contributor).

*Mindtools*  
[www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)

*World Future Society*  
[www.wfs.org](http://www.wfs.org)

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*Chris Jones writes, produces and directs in video, film and interactive formats for her company Chris Jones & Associates, Ltd. In her "free" time (non-billable) she enjoys the hands-on creativity of gardening and parenting.*

# Every Word In Its Place

BY JUDY NOLLET

What can a writer supply to a good interactive script? More than you might initially think. Verbal elements may include:

- text on screen (TOS)
- narration
- button names
- navigation prompts
- title bars
- help tips
- alternate text for graphics (i.e., the text that appears when a Web graphic doesn't load)

Not only that, to be "programmable ready," a script should also contain screen numbers, suggested graphics, navigation options, special programming instructions, and other comments, as necessary.

In other words, a good interactive script is complicated. There are many ways to lay out all of this information on a page. One constant for every company I work with is the requirement that each new screen starts on its own page. Other than that, they all have their own templates for interactive scripts.

## Setting a Stylish Table

The best layouts I've seen combine two elements that are common to modern word-processing software: text styles and tables.

Predefined text styles for various screen elements ensure a consistent look for headlines, regular paragraphs, bullet items, etc. This makes it easier for the folks in production to copy-and-paste or import the content into the final software program.

Tables are great for separating the various elements into labeled cells. For example, a typical script might have one table for TOS, narration, and graphics (generally the most vital elements for the client to review).

Another table may hold button/navigation information, and still another may hold comments. Additional tables may also be used, when necessary, to detail what happens during rollovers, click-tells, and other interactions. The default settings in a table normally allow cells to expand vertically so any amount of text can be entered. However, it's possible to set an exact size for a cell. So, for example, the TOS cell can be set to match the available screen area. Then, when the specified styles are used, it's possible to see just how the text will appear in the final program. This also makes it easy to see when the text needs editing to fit on screen.

## Putting It Together – Automatically

What is the most important word for anyone putting together an interactive script? "AutoText."

At least, that's what the feature is called in Microsoft Word. AutoText is the multimedia writer's best friend. It can store page layouts, navigation prompts, and other elements that need to be consistent throughout a script. Basically, AutoText allows you to establish any number of "clipboards" to hold content. Unlike a computer's RAM-based copy-and-paste clipboard, AutoText does not disappear when you turn off the computer. It remains part of the document's template. You name each item as you add it. Then, you put the desired AutoText entry into a document simply by using the Insert dropdown menu to select the AutoText menu. Or, for really quick access, you can add the AutoText tool to your menubar. It may take some time to get used to the quirks in this feature. But once you do, it will save you time whenever you work on a script.

## Summing Up

A good interactive script requires both creativity and consistency. All the words that a user will encounter, whether written or spoken, are important. So are the instructions about graphics, navigation, and programming. A well-defined script template helps everyone — from the writer to the client to the designers and programmers — do their jobs more efficiently.

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*Judy Nollet, dba White Plume Communications, is a freelance writer specializing in scripts for e-learning, as well as writing video and multimedia programs. You can reach her at [janollet@minn.net](mailto:janollet@minn.net).*

	<p>MCAI-MN P.O. Box 582862 Minneapolis, MN 55458-2862 (952) 927-8747 <a href="http://www.mcai-mn.org">www.mcai-mn.org</a></p>	<p>MINNESOTA MEDIA INSIDER is the official Tri-Annual journal of the Minnesota Chapter of the MCAI, and is published for the benefit of its members.</p>
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# Victory Sports One Leads Off

BY WILLIAM CRESWELL

The name Victory Sports One may be familiar only to baseball fans who've spotted its sign hanging next to the Metrodome scoreboard during Twins games. But beginning on Oct. 31, 2003, sports fans in the upper Midwest, and in particular, Minnesota Twins fans, will discover a new regional sports network producing the familiar TV telecasts of their favorite team. And Victory will showcase the games with a new post-game show about the players and the fans.

Besides the Twins, the Victory Sports One schedule includes Minnesota Gophers men's basketball games, St. Cloud State and Minnesota State football and hockey games, selected Big 10 basketball and football games, and Minnesota high school boys and girls basketball and hockey "games of the week." Kevin Cattoor, president of Victory Sports, said this lineup and more will roll out over the next 12 months.

"Our goal is 2 million viewers—we're at about 20,000 now," said Cattoor. "We're securing carriage on the expanded basic (cable) package. About 85 to 90 percent of all cable subscribers will have it. It's in the same package where receive ESPN, ESPN 2 and the other main cable channels. Distribution is now our primary focus. We are working with distributors such as Direct TV, Comcast, Time Warner, Charter, Mediacom and other distributors. We are showing them that we are unique—a regional sports network with relevant sports programming in the market."

Victory Sports One LLC is owned by Twins Sports Inc., which also owns the Minnesota Twins. Victory is part of a growing trend of pro-

sports owned-and-operated cable networks, which also includes the Yankees Entertainment & Sports Network (owned by the New York Yankees) and New England Sports Network (owned by the Boston Red Sox, the Boston Bruins and private investors). Major league baseball and cable television have made money together since Ted Turner used Atlanta Braves baseball to build TBS into the first superstation in the late 1970s, but the value of cross-ownership between cable and baseball is even greater today. The inclusion of the New England Sports Network as part of the sale of the Boston Red Sox last year helped drive the sales price to a record \$700 million.

Major league baseball is an attractive centerpiece for a regional cable network. Games take place during the difficult-to-program summer months, and there are nearly twice as many games compared with basketball and hockey. Only pro football has a larger audience, but NFL football is shown exclusively on network TV and national cable.

And baseball is a winner in ratings and share on cable. *Rating* is the percentage of television households tuned in to the program and *share* represents the percentage of TV sets in use that are tuned to the show. The Twins' 2003 regular season ratings peaked in mid-September at 12.0 and 11.8 for two consecutive nights of a home stand against the division rival Chicago White Sox. (One ratings point equals about 15,947 households.) Cattoor pointed out that, excluding the NFL Vikings, the Twins and Gophers men's basketball are the most popular regional sports teams by share of viewers with 73 percent and 9 percent respectively, making Victory Sports One the owner



*Kevin Cattoor, Twins sports executive vice president and president of Victory sports, LLC.*

of more than 80 percent of the regional viewing audience.

From the company's sparsely furnished downtown Minneapolis offices (many of the 20-some employees are still moving in), Cattoor described the organization of Victory One Sports. The network's geographic market is identical to that of the Minnesota Twins: centered in Minnesota, the Dakotas, western Wisconsin and parts of Iowa. Cattoor said the mission is to provide advertisers and business partners local and regional sports programming that is relevant to their interests. "Relevance is the key," he said.

Compared with Fox Sports Net North, the current producer of televised Twins games, Cattoor said Victory Sports One programming will more closely match the interest of the region's sports fans. "Fox does the games, they do them very well, at a high level of quality," Cattoor said. "But [Fox Sports] target is ESPN, which has a tremendously strong brand that you really can't compete with. [So] they add other shows: 'The Best Damn Sports Show,' 'Beyond The Glory' and '54321'. What's wrong? There's no other significant local or regional programming for this market. They lose the regional appeal."

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Along with Twins pre-game and post-game shows, Victory Sports One will cater to college hockey and basketball fans. "We don't have Minnesota Gopher hockey on Victory, but we have St. Cloud State and Minnesota State hockey," said Cattoor. "These teams are in a strong conference. St. Cloud State is the only team to qualify for the NCAA tournament six years in a row. Our coverage of them can build these programs to the next level."

Big Ten men's basketball will provide some live programming and some delayed programming, to fit around approximately 20 Minnesota Gophers

men's basketball games. "A major attraction of our Big Ten package is the number of Iowa and Wisconsin games we cover," said Cattoor, noting the large number of fans of both schools in the state. "We'll be the home of the Gophers, and also the Hawkeyes and Badgers, too."

Even traditional state high school sports rivalries like the Grand Rapids and Hibbing (MN) boys hockey game will get their due. Cattoor envisions video crews dispatched to communities days ahead of a contest to interview fans, townspeople and players. "We want to go on the road to do stories that talk about the

communities, the tremendous history of these rivalries, to relive some of those memories," he said.

Along with syndicated ESPN News, golf and outdoor sports are on the agenda. "Maybe a club championship event, where players from two amateur golf clubs compete as teams on a course, then there's fishing and hunting," Cattoor said. "But probably not fishing for marlin in the Gulf of Mexico. It'll be how to catch walleyes in the upper Midwest."

Victory Sports One will operate its master control from the studios of Hi-Wire, the Minneapolis post-production facility co-founded by Bill Pohlad, a son of Twins owner Carl Pohlad. Victory Sports One is looking to hire on-air talent and office management in the near future, said Cattoor. He expects the company will grow to about 25 employees, and with a mix of original programming, paid programming and background programming, the company will have business to spare for freelance producers. Victory will contract with outside vendors for much of their production needs.

In all, Victory Sports One represents change and an exciting opportunity, said Cattoor. He founded Midwest Sports Channel in both Minnesota and Wisconsin (now FSNN) in the 1990s and was COO of the Twins from 2000 to December 2002 but didn't hesitate to jump at the chance to lead Victory Sports One as its president. "For me the exciting part of the business is *building* the business," Cattoor said. "I'm still a part of the Minnesota Twins, but I get to create a network with just tremendous resources behind it."

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*William Creswell is an independent writer-producer and project manager, currently co-Chair of the MCAI-MN Communications committee.*



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*continued on page 18* ➔

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www.mnfilm.org

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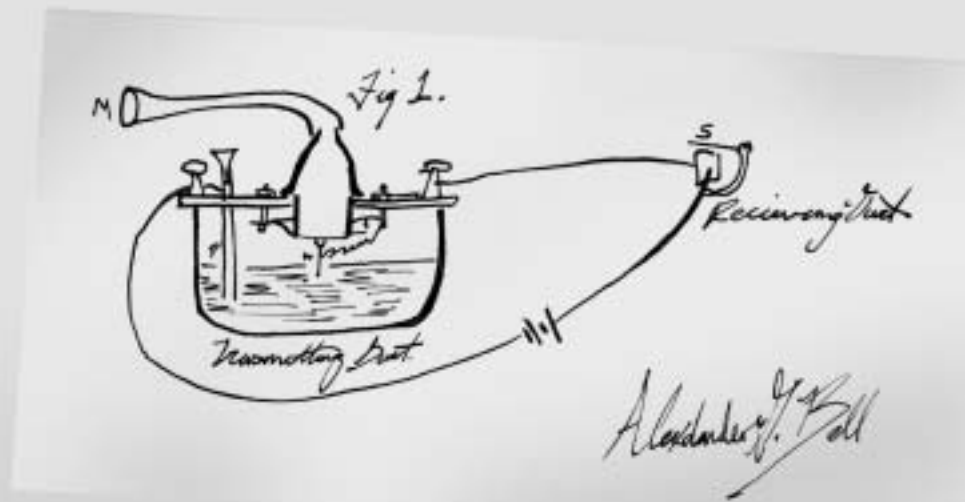
*Networking off the starboard bow.*



*Fast and furious action at the buffet table.*

Elisha Gray applied for a patent on his "voice telegraph" on February 14, 1876.

He was two hours too late.\*



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