

SCREENFLOW > VIDEO TUTORIALS WORTHY OF A MAC

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It's not hard to compare the Design Awards at Apple's Worldwide Developers Conference with Hollywood's Directors' Guild Awards. In both cases, the work is judged by its most knowledgeable critics: the creator's professional peers. In 2008, one program walked away with both the Best Leopard Application and the best Leopard Graphics and Media Application. Like one of the year's great films whose only exposure is a limited, art house release, **Vara Software's ScreenFlow** has received little of the attention that it deserves.

ScreenFlow from Vara Software, which was recently acquired by **Telestream**, is a powerful, exquisitely designed screen and audio recording application that can create some of the best screen-based video tutorials in the computer business. It harnesses the remarkable power of **Leopard's** core animation capabilities and merges it with an interface that makes it easy to start simple but has the flexibility to give full reign to your creative skills and instructional design experience. The program offers a workflow very similar to conventional video or multimedia production: you create your content, edit it down to what you really want, add effects and then export it out in the best format (or formats) for your audience.

ScreenFlow's workflow begins with the screen capture phase. Start the recorder and the program will display an onscreen countdown and then begin recording your actions in real time with full-motion

video. If you're planning on adding a narration track, you can either record it in real time or add it later as a voiceover. A ScreenFlow project can, and probably should, contain multiple clips, so there's no need to get through your entire demo without a glitch on the first pass. You tell ScreenFlow that you're done with a keystroke combination (command-shift-2, by default) and the clip you recorded appears in an **iMovie**-like library panel. You can record audio or video sequences with a microphone and video camera or import sound, video or graphics with drag-and-drop simplicity. Editing and trimming clips work just like a video editing system. Play back a clip in the viewer and use the "I" and "O" keys to set in and out points to trim the clip down to just the action you want people to see. Once you have your clips collected, add them to the timeline tracks at the bottom of the screen. A recorded track can also be split and placed in different parts of the timeline. When you cut a section out of the timeline, ScreenFlow lets you either leave a gap or perform what editors call a "ripple delete", sliding the following scenes back to automatically fill the gap.

The program incorporates several unique effects designed to create great training videos. One of the most impressive is the Callout Action, which automatically magnifies and follows the area around the cursor, so you can zoom in and highlight an important action. The effect lets you either track the cursor or enlarge the element (like

a dialog box) that you're interacting with. For a very professional touch, you can fade in and out of the effect to smooth the transition. Because it uses multiple video and audio tracks, ScreenFlow lets you build layers of video. This is particularly useful if you want to show what some activity looks like on a client and host, or it can import an outside graphic, video or audio source if you want to show something from the real world, even a talking head shot of the instructor. What makes this really cool is the ability to crop, resize and rotate screens and even give them a tasteful bit of reflection on the mirror-like black stage (thanks to Leopard's core animation tools).

The effect is a little like what you're used to seeing in **Keynote** and **iChat**. Audio recording and editing works well but you can also produce a more lavish soundtrack in another application and import it back into ScreenFlow.

In spite of the *raison d'être* of the program, the one element that is sorely lacking is the training component. ScreenFlow includes a brief tutorial that will get you started on the basics, but a huge number of its features and functions are not immediately obvious. A few of these are revealed in videos on Vara's Web site, but the rich feature set is worthy of far more coverage. You'll need to sift carefully through the Help file and do a lot of experimentation to understand the program's most sophisticated features. If you have any experience with timeline-based media editing systems, you should be able to pick up most aspects of the program without too much difficulty.

ScreenFlow is unquestionably the best video tutorial tool available on the Mac.

Product	ScreenFlow
Made by	Vara Software <varasoftware.com>
Price	\$99 (download)
Pros	Produces incredibly polished results; export to a variety of formats
Cons	Limited documentation; advanced features have a learning curve fairly steep
Rating	★★★★