Meet the ScreenFlow-er:
Joshua Rosenbaum of MailChimp

ScreenFlow for Promotional Videos

Joshua Rosenbaum is the man behind the videos at MailChimp, an email service that serves more than a 3 million users worldwide. Joshua uses ScreenFlow to help introduce new features of their service and educate their users about them. His videos are sprinkled throughout the MailChimp application as "Show Me" videos, and embedded into promotional pages and blogs that discuss or promote new features or best practices.

In this interview Joshua gives us some great insight into his screencasting process, as well as some of the tools he uses, and the lessons he's learned along the way.

How long have you been screencasting?

I've only been making screencasts for a little over a year. ScreenFlow was recommended to me by Ben Chestnut here at MailChimp. He had used it for a while and was very pleased with it, so I gave it a try and was off and running in no time. I realized pretty quickly that ScreenFlow was a unique blend of power and simplicity. It's not bogged down with a lot of unnecessary features, but has just the right amount so it remains easy and intuitive while still being a powerful and versatile app. I consider it a very elegant application in that sense.

For what purpose to do you make your screencasts?

MailChimp is a pretty powerful application, lots of features and so forth, so we use screencasts to help introduce new features and educate our users about them. We have them sprinkled throughout the application as "Show Me" videos, and embed others into promotional pages and blogs that discuss or promote new features or best practices.

What kind of studio or set up do you have?

I've got a pretty great studio set up in a pretty large, versatile space with good light. My workstation is made up of two really big Apple monitors and a Mac Pro Quadcore tower. In the area behind me I have a photo/video set with a seamless, a light kit and green screen. Then in another corner I have a wonderful soundbooth I cobbled together out of unused cubicle components. Inside of that I have a MacBook Pro laptop, and MXL mic and a Tascam audio digital converter. There are a few keyboards and musical instruments, as well as some puppets and other wacky toys lying around here as well.

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What's your process for creating your screencasts?

I always start with a script. Then I'll do a few reads in the soundbooth, then I'll take the best voice over and create a soundtrack with it. When the soundtrack is finished, I'll crack open ScreenFlow and begin capturing, animating the moves and stitching things together. In the midst of that process I'll sometimes create or collect some other assets to pull in, which may be still graphics or other animations. When it's all complete I'll export a H.264 file right from ScreenFlow and upload it to a test server so that people can review it. Then if it is ready I'll upload it to the video host and one of the other folks here will embed it into its proper place in the MailChimp site or application.

What processes have you changed as you've gotten more experienced?

I can't say there have been any huge "Aha" moments, however there has been lots of little things that I've learned along the way. I have a tendency to try and one-up myself with each project, even if that's done with something small or insignificant. So it might not be the process that changes, but little techniques here and there. Such as keeping the objects on screen moving at all times. This can be annoying if done wrong, but it can add an elegant quality if done correctly. Many subtle things can add a lot of polish to a piece, and it's mostly these things that I've picked up along the way.

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What other programs/accessories do you use besides ScreenFlow to create your screencasts?

I use AfterEffects, Photoshop, Illustrator, Garage Band, Final Cut Pro, Text Edit, various musical instruments, microphones and sound gear, Canon EOS Rebel XT DSLR, Panasonic AVCCAM, Flip MinoHD, seamless and greenscreens, hotlights, toys, costumes, puppets, unicorns, and occasionally I'll hijack a co-worker and use them or their voice somehow, usually against their will.

Garage Band is a great app for recording sound and composing soundtracks. It's not ProTools, but for what I'm doing here it's just fine.

The Setup

FinalCut is like PhotoShop to me because I use about 10% of its capabilities. So it still befuddles me a little bit sometimes, but it's a workhorse, and makes it pretty easy to capture and edit video.

Compressor is also a necessary application for compressing final renders and cooking them down to a manageable size.

AfterEffects is a playground. I love it for its headroom. To me it's kind of the opposite of ScreenFlow, in that it has limitless possibilities. But sometimes that's what you want, and other times that can be a burden.

ScreenFlow remains at the core of my process. It's stable, easy to use, fast, and has exactly the features I want and need. I love the interface, it makes compression super easy, and pretty much takes anything I can throw at it.

What advice would you give to someone just starting out screencasting?

Put yourself in the audience when you make your screencasts. No one wants to sit through a boring 8 minute video where they have to squint to see things and strain to stay awake through droll narration. Keep things snappy and to the point both from a script and visual perspective, and you'll have a more successful result.

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