

Moving from Flash 8 to Flex: Day 1

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So today I begin my journey. Having worked with every previous version of Flash and gone through several flavors of actionscript by now, I have been a bit loathe to once again relearn how to develop flash applications. Just when I think I've finally discovered the last pitfall when developing in the latest version of Flash, they go and redo the whole thing from the ground up and call it Flex.

To me, it looks suspiciously like a return of Adobe Live Motion and SVG, which used XML as an authoring language for Flash before it died a well-deserved death. Apparently they learned from their mistakes and kept on working and have now produced Flex. I sat on the sidelines with Flex for so long because I really wasn't convinced that version 1 would catch on with Flash authors and didn't really understand how Flex related to Adobe's future plans for the traditional Flash authoring environment. I still can't say I understand how the two parallel branches of Flash development will move forward without some kind of friction between them, but with Flex2, I'm finally biting the bullet and diving in. My first task will be to learn the basic principles and design a simple application that will probably do nothing useful, but will let me decide whether I should be using the Adobe Flex2 authoring environment, or the Flex plugin for Eclipse to do my Flex authoring. After that I will take a look at my unfinished front-end for PHPLive and see if I can solve the technical problems I was having with Flash memory leaks by recoding in Flex. Perhaps it will even lead to a releaseable version, but I'm slowly learning not to make promises when it comes to developing in Flash. There are some things in Flash, that you just should not do, and one of them is to assume that you can leave any Flash application running for more than 20 minutes without a memory leak bringing your system to a screeching halt. Depending on how much dynamic movieclip creation and destruction you are doing in your application, Flash memory usage will slowly grow over time and eventually crash either your browser or your OS. So plan your UI carefully and don't create/destroy too many objects over too long a period. I really hope they've fixed the problem in Flex, but I'm not optimistic since it still runs on the Flash Player which has inherently flawed memory management or "garbage collection" that is not directly accessible to programmers. But I digress. I'm only on day 1 of my Flex training and I'm already behind. Sigh. My goal is to be at intermediate level within two days and be close to an expert within a month. It's going to be a long month. I will document my progress here.