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Choices: Music, Sound, and efx tracks for Flash

For any web based streaming media delivery, size is the first issue that must be considered - the major difference to the "traditional" mediums of film and video. This is the area to start with: if your final delivery method is tape or digital media [CD/DVD] this is not an issue; with web content, it is the start of the planning process.

File size limits are determined by your target audience and their connection speed. If designed for a general audience via the web your file size should aim at a 28.8K connection as a least common denominator - if your target is a high speed connection [DSL, etc., and B2B] larger sizes are acceptable. As a rule of thumb, 28.8 should be under 1meg - more, and the time to download and stream becomes a tedious wait. High speed connections do not have this limitation; here, total length of the presentation - determined by purpose - should be considered for the web.

Fortunately, one of the advantages of utilizing Flash for web content delivery is its ability to provide a rich content experience with a minimal file size. The inclusion of music, sound, and efx can easily be kept within the determined size limitations.

Part of tailoring the audio component to the determined size limits is simply put: "how much". The music/sound/efx can be minimal while retaining the necessary impact to draw attention to the message, holding the viewers interest, and highlighting key points.

For the sound designer, the task then becomes one of effectively working within the size limitations and providing a aural environment which gives additional substance and depth to the visuals. The biggest consideration is balance - as these audio elements are added, a "balance" must be maintained to ensure that visual portions are not perceived as silent. Just as the animator must be concerned with timing and pace, so must the sound designer consider pace and timing in audio - the minimal density to provide a "real" world experience.

For the composer, there are additional considerations: appropriate style and maintaining a perspective with the required sound and efx [does it work with the sound/efx elements?]. Here, all the considerations for music in "traditional" media apply. Who is the target audience and what stylistic considerations need be considered? But, this must be [again] balanced with the needs of the visual component - does it enhance and augment - giving added depth and substance? Does it convey and reflect an appropriate emotion and image that compliments?

In its historical context, the web is very much a text driven and silent medium - it is rapidly evolving beyond that limitation. The technology is available but must be accompanied by creativity and the desire to provide a visual with all the depth and substance audio can contribute.