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Review of MicroMedium Digital Trainer Professional(R) as a Tool for Developing Teaching and Extension Training Programs

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Review of MicroMedium Digital Trainer Professional(R) as a Tool for Developing Teaching and Extension Training Programs

Abstract

The authors have been using Digital Trainer Professional® software for more than 4 years and found it to be effective in teaching classes and Extension training programs. The merit of the program is that, instead of reading a training manual or paper book, trainees interact with an e-book on their computer. E-books can track the reader's knowledge and evaluate responses to questions to measure their progress and performance, and gauge the effectiveness of the training.

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Introduction

The interactive multimedia features of the Digital Trainer Professional® software was reviewed as to how it could be used to enhance Extension training. The authors have been using this software for 4 years and have found it effective in teaching Food Safety HACCP training programs.

This software provides a ready-to-rock format for incorporating interactive multimedia components into training programs and enables the writer to concentrate more on training and less on computers. A log file holding all the scores and test information allows an administrator at a single desk to oversee use of the software for the entire network.

The merit of the program is that, instead of reading a training manual or paper book, trainees interact with an e-book on their computer.

Basic Features

This software works in two modes, WRITER and READER. Before creating an e-book, the author must create an E-BOOK PROJECT. Like a paper book, each e-book has a title with chapters and pages and a table of contents. Any page in an e-book may include text, images, video, animation, audio, and interaction through questions with feedback. Users can click words to see their definition, jump to other parts of the e-book, or even run other software programs.

For images, this software provides markers such as numbers, lines, circles, rectangles, and arrows, as well as hot spots that are used to identify a particular section of an image, which could be used to provide feedback to the user.

It also offers a spell checker. The spell checker works closely with a custom dictionary that allows the author to add words or create a number of different custom dictionaries to suit different needs. The final project is produced as an e-book and saved as a single executable file.

Creating Training Materials

The most impressive feature of this software is that it offers two powerful planning tools: task definition and book outlines. Each page in an e-book may contain text, an image, a video clip, up to two audio clips, a hot spot question, and either a true-or-false, multiple-choice, or fill-in-the-blank question. The writer may type in or import existing text, add images, audio, video, animation, and questions--all with a few button clicks and then prepare the e-books to distribute.

When the program starts, the Toolbar will show up on the left-hand side. Each page in an e-book has a template. It is very straightforward to change the way a page in a book looks and what type of question it has on it by selecting a template style. The writer can easily edit the text font style, size, color, type, as well as paragraph settings and the background color of the text area. This allows a person to use existing files and the familiar word processor format to create the text and vice versa. It also provides a review function for the writer to see the program as a trainee would.

Training in Action

When users read the e-book, they can go to any page in a book by clicking on a page name in the table of contents. They can search for words; place bookmarks; make notes; play audio, video, and animation; answer questions; and take tests. Books can be read from floppy disks, CD-ROM, or over a network. Trainees can download e-books from the Internet and send and receive them by email. A built-in tutorial helps ensure that users will feel comfortable reading the e-books.

If an e-book is a test, it will ask the user to log in with their name and predefined ID number. When a person opens a test, he or she will also be given a time limit for the test. It has an AUTO PLAYBACK section that tells the e-book what to play back automatically or to loop the entire book like endless videotape. In the test, there is a Manual/User Page Advance option that allows the user to navigate the test book. Questions can be left unanswered, and the user may skip around by clicking on the PAGES button and then clicking on a page name to go to that page.

Evaluation and Distribution

When a user finishes a test, a performance page will be displayed, and the user can print this information. This program offers the weight points attributed by default to any question, whether answered correctly or incorrectly. Each question's weight may be set separately. This information is recorded to a log file. This log file holds all the scores and test information. This allows an administrator at a single desk to oversee use of the programs for an entire network.

The e-books can be sent out on floppy disks, CD-ROMs, or other storage media. However, the e-book Reader software Digital Trainer Reader runtime is necessary to read e-books. It can install and read books from floppy disk, CD-ROM, or even over the Internet. The e-book Reader is compatible with browsers such as Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer. Using a network server as an e-book library is recommended so that the e-books are available to the entire organization.

Issues and Conclusion

Digital Trainer Professional® provides straightforward wizards that are user-friendly and requires minimum knowledge of multimedia production. The need for users to copy a reader program is the only drawback for this program when compared with other popular software, such as Microsoft® products. It requires *Microsoft Windows 95, Windows 3.1x, or Windows NT v3.51 or higher*, 8 MB of RAM, 12MB of free disk space, and CD-ROM. Value: \$270.

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