

# Tools For Multimedia Production Turn Into Big Business

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By Tony Bove and Cheryl Rhodes. Special to the Tribune.

CD-ROM and multimedia technologies are driving the growth of the personal-computer industry.

And though much of this growth can be attributed to home computers with built-in CD-ROM drives, business use of multimedia equipment-including CD-ROM drives, sound cards, video cards and presentation programs-is on the rise.

This is not surprising, considering the explosive growth of the CD-ROM installed base. An average of the estimates from research firms Freeman and Associates of Santa Barbara, Calif., and INTECO of Norwalk, Conn., puts the installed base of CD-ROM drives at 70 million units by 1997, up from 30 million to 40 million currently.

There also is a vibrant hardware- and software-tools industry growing along with this installed base. According to a recent Newmedia magazine, PC users can choose among more than 29 video capture cards for using video on PC screens, 33 16-bit sound cards for providing high-quality sound recording and playback, and more than 100 software tools for creating multimedia and interactive content. (A typical PC with a CD-ROM can play multimedia content-it doesn't matter to the computer whether that content is business-oriented or entertainment.)

As the tools for multimedia production evolve, they become easier to use, enabling a slew of applications in which effective communication is essential.

"(Employee) training is our biggest market," said James Lemay, president of Chicago-based Design Access Inc., a full-service multimedia design and production firm. It develops interactive information delivery systems for multimedia sales and marketing presentations, computer-based training and touch-screen kiosks. Clients include large and medium-size corporations, such as Glaxo, Baxter Health Care, Dell Computer, Apple Computer, Ameritech and Anheuser Busch.

"We developed our own animated characters, which we call 'peer tutors,' that we use in many of our training applications," Lemay said. "We are delivering about half our titles on CD-ROM and about half on hard or floppy disks for laptops."

"Sales training is the second biggest growth area," said Carol English, vice president of business development. The material is used like a reference tool or as a laptop-training tool that a sales force can use to learn how to sell a particular product before calling on a customer, she noted.

The idea of providing distributed multimedia training applications using PCs and Macs with CD-ROM drives is attractive.

"In the past year we have seen a lot of growth in the use of multimedia in business," English said. "The larger companies are using multimedia in training programs.

"The medium-size companies are starting to invest in multimedia for sales and marketing tools, more than for training. These are mostly delivered as disk-based presentations, frequently on floppy disks. They are used for direct-mail pieces, as trade-show giveaways or as leave-behinds on sales calls."

Some larger corporations have computer-based training programs that use laser videodisc systems set up in a central location.

Employee training is widely regarded as the largest growth and interest area for multimedia use in corporations,

according to industry analysts.

Computer-based training is widely used by large corporations to train employees to use the computers and applications software in such areas as accounting and word processing. And now, many companies are starting to use these computer-based training systems for non-computer-related training.

Traditionally, employee training has been an expensive proposition for large corporations. For example, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration mandates that companies handling hazardous materials must provide annual training in hazardous-materials handling and safety procedures. In addition to the cost of setting up the training rooms, a corporation with offices across the country incurs costs for instructors, travel, materials, scheduling, etc.

"Using multimedia (computer-based training) for non-computer-related training has broken down the problems surrounding traditional training," said Diane Wilczak, president of Applied Computer Graphics Inc. of Orland Park. The company works with corporate clients primarily in computer-based training, sales promotions and new-product presentations, and in other methods of presenting company, product and other business information, such as kiosks and trade-show displays.

"The front-end cost of (computer-based training) is higher," Wilczak said, "because corporations have to invest in the software, pay for the development of custom training materials and, in some cases, invest in new hardware. But the cost is recouped in six months or less.

"Multimedia (computer-based training) is not as intimidating as the classroom setting for the employees," she added, "and because the training can be provided to each employee, you eliminate the problems of trying to schedule a large group."

The use of multimedia in presentations also is growing rapidly.