



review

They dotted the i's

by Hank Stanley

Lectora Publisher, content authoring software (3 CDs), 2002, Trivantis (877-929-0188, www.trivantis.com), Other material: user guide, template gallery CD. Runs on windows XP/2000/98/NT.

This review is part of a Training Media Review research report that compares nine leading e-learning authoring tools.

Lectora Publisher is a content rendering system that provides for the creation of courses to web-ready HTML and Dynamic HTML, CD-ROM, or DVD. Developers use Publisher to lay out their courses in up to three levels of detail, patterned after the divisions within a book. The overall lesson/topic package is called the 'Title' and is the equivalent of the book. Within the book are the major subdivisions called 'Chapters' (of course), and they are divided into subgroups called 'Sections' made up of individual pages. Depending upon the complexity of the subject, books may contain only pages or any number and combination of the subgroups.

The Lectora CD set contains a template gallery with 60 attractive page backdrops pre-fabricated with sharp color schemes and four common navigation buttons (Back, Next, Home, Help). To selectively populate certain combinations of course pages, Lectora uses a feature called Inheritance. The function applies the same object such as a company logo onto all pages within a designated section, within only a certain chapter, or only on certain pages that have not been preconfigured to prevent such application. With a little prior planning, Inheritance can really reduce the time it takes to lay out multiple pages.

Practicing their preaching

Prior planning seems to be a Lectora strong suit. The user guide contains an excellent discussion of the workflow involved in creating courses, including a 25-step sequential checklist on analysis, design,

and development preliminaries. The checklist is repeated in the online Help narratives – couched in learning objective statements!

The creation of media, obtaining clip art, and publishing output options are also addressed. And, if there's an object format or media type that can't be used in Lectora, it wasn't evident. Lectora even handles IPIX 3D images.

Developers have full leeway for creating progress tests in any combination of true-false, multiple choice, essay, and short answer. Tests can be timed and have per-question feedback; they can be randomized from a master question bank and may be automatically graded. Collaborative development is accomplished internally by using the 'Import from an Existing Title' feature, which combines various Lectora frameworks into a single pre-designated master project controlled by the team leader.

Project participants will find that Lectora actually has three modes of operation. As with most tools, there is a build mode (Edit) and an operate mode (Run). But the Run mode plays selected portions of the course sequence within the Lectora workspace. A third mode, Preview, runs the course in a full screen display exactly as a student would see it.

Action and objects

Lectora uses all the standard interactive bells and whistles such as mouseover pop-ups, object visibility toggling, dissolves, fades, executables, variables for branching, and much more. There are also assistant functions that Lectora calls automated tools such as wizards for buttons and titles, spell checking, and table of contents creation. A post-delivery error checking function jumps to the offending page if any problem is discovered.

Lectora Publisher is SCORM compliant and proudly sports the Good Housekeeping Seal in the form of the AICC logo, which means the



software has been independently tested by the aviation industry's CMI standardization body. And, when I dashed off an email to the Lectora technical support department asking our how-to question, not only did they answer back within a couple of days, but they also included a .ZIP file with three different options for addressing the problem, any of which could have been imported as a fully functioning object within Publisher.

Recommendation

Recommendation? Let me count the ways. The people at Trivantis have thought of everything. Lectora Publisher is simple to use with competently presented functionality; it has innovative features (Inheritance, et al.); the technical support seems to be above and beyond; the documentation is absolutely superb; and the product is AICC certified. It's as if the Lectora project team at Trivantis decided from the outset to design in all the things that would attract positive attention on their way to creating a great product. Oh, and did I mention I am rather impressed with Lectora?

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| Lectora Publisher Enterprise LMS Star Rating | |
|--|------|
| Ease of installation | ★★★★ |
| Presentation | ★★★★ |
| Production quality | ★★★★ |
| Ease of use | ★★★★ |
| Value of purpose | ★★★★ |
| Value for the money | ★★★★ |
| Documentation | ★★★★ |
| Overall rating | ★★★★ |

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About Trivantis Corporation

Trivantis Corporation, based in Cincinnati, Ohio, provides digital authoring and publishing technologies and services for the creation and distribution of multimedia content. Trivantis develops authoring tools for academia, business, and government designed to help overcome the technical barriers traditionally associated with publishing to the Internet.

The company's flagship product, Lectora Publisher Enterprise LMS Edition, helps subject-matter experts within an organization collaborate with colleagues and convert content quickly, providing rapid knowledge transfer across the enterprise and increased productivity. Lectora Professional Publishing Suite, Trivantis' newest product, features new media creation and editing tools and allows developers to move efficiently among multiple editing, authoring, and publishing applications.

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| Outstanding | ★★★★ | Above average | ★★1/2 | Poor | ★ |
| Very good | ★★★1/2 | Average | ★ | NA | Not applicable |
| Good | ★★★ | Below Average | ★1/2 | NR | Not rated (usually not enough information) |