



The article below was excerpted from the cover story for CBT Directions, entitled *Authoring Systems in Action*

## AUTHORWARE PROFESSIONAL FOR WINDOWS

BY MARK FRITS

When you're developing training for gargantuan corporations like American Airlines, Texaco, American Express, and Chevron, you don't sweat little things like the price of an authoring system. The fact that *Authorware Professional* is one of the highest-priced authoring systems on the market was "insignificant" to Walker Interactive Systems in San Francisco, according to Michael Novak, the company's director of cooperative processing.

What was more important to Walker Interactive was the stability of the company behind the authoring system. "The multimedia business is still in its infancy, if not the pre-delivery stage," says Novak. "There's a high level of turnover in multimedia companies. You can't have Chevron implement something worldwide and then have the authoring system vendor go out of business." At the time they purchased *Authorware*, Novak's company regarded the vendor to be a company with a future. Little did they know that six months down the road it would merge with Macromind to become even

stronger.

Walker Interactive Systems is a financial software company based in San Francisco. The company has a full line of financial, accounting, and procurement software — including a general ledger, an accounts receivable program, and so forth — that are used by very large companies with mainframes.

One year ago, sensing that their clients were having trouble finding economical ways to train their employees, Walker Interactive began using *Authorware Professional for Windows* to create multimedia CBT courseware. The courses use animation, digital audio, and graphics, but no video. Delivery methods vary from client to client, but the courseware is ideally suited for delivery over a network, and Novak calls it just-in-time training because the user is meant to call up courses from a mainframe as needed.

Novak and his colleagues at Walker Interactive also felt that the *Authorware* authoring system itself has a bright future. "For one thing, it's object-oriented," says Novak. And he likes the system's "entire approach" to training, which he says is based on the "*Plato mentality*," meaning it is based on learning theory rather than being simply a vehicle of glitzy

presentations like some authoring systems. "We like the process-oriented approach," he says, "as opposed to something like *Director* that uses a film metaphor. Our clients are financial people, a film metaphor would be alien to them."

Novak says his company has 10 people working full time on courseware, a team composed of instructional designers, graphic designers, subject matter experts, and *Authorware* specialists, whom he calls "*Authorware Ninjas*." His team has worked hard to come up with a "standardized approach" for all their planned courses, something he says is "the only way to get productivity. Otherwise you keep reinventing the wheel." The goal, Novak says, is get to the point where, "We can get together and the *Authorware Ninjas* can plunk out templates, and then the instructional designers and subject matter experts can sort to fill in the blanks." Of course, creating courseware with any authoring system still demands a lot of work, Novak says, and he cautions against trying to do anything by formula. "But there will always be certain elements of a course that show up over and over, and by using *Authorware* templates, people can be very productive.

Walker Interactive isn't really taking ad-

vantage of *Authorware*'s Mac-to-PC cross-platform delivery capability, because, as Novak puts it: "our client companies are painted blue." However, in the development process, says Novak, "We often do some graphics and sounds on the Macintosh and then port them over to the Windows version."

Walker Interactive's big-time clients often have offices spread out all over the world, which calls for courses to be available in different languages. Unfortunately, says Novak, there is no easy way with *Authorware* to make data independent from structure." He'd like "sound bites to be external from everything else" so that creating a foreign language version of a course would simply require stripping out and replacing the audio track and some of the text. Novak thinks the *Authorware* / Macromedia people are a very responsive and forward-thinking bunch of people, and he says he suspects they are probably already working on a solution for his problem.