Flex in a Week, Flex 4

Video 1.03: Understanding and installing Flash Builder and Flash Player

In this video, you will learn about the Eclipse Foundation development platform and application framework, on which Flash Builder is built.

You will also learn the configuration and version options for Flash Builder and the differences between the installation and project folders for the tool.

Lastly, I will give you a high-level overview of the Flash Player and the Flash Player Debugger version.

Flash Builder 4, formerly known as Flex Builder, is the Adobe commercial product for building Flash applications using the Flex framework.

This tool includes everything in the Flex SDK and Flex Framework plus many features to improve your productivity.

You will learn about Flash Builder throughout the rest of this video series, but some of the features include context-sensitive code hinting, an interactive step-through debugger with variable evaluation, a visual design environment for laying out and styling your application, data access wizards for connecting to server-side data, memory and performance profilers, automated testing support and more.

Flash Builder is based on the non-profit, open source Eclipse development platform and application framework for building software.

Eclipse is based on software originally released by IBM into the public domain and hundreds of plugins for the environment have been created to support software developers working in many different programming languages including ColdFusion, PHP and Java.

For developers who are already working with Eclipse, you can use the plug-in installer for Flash Builder.

Developers who have never used Eclipse can use the standalone installer which is a customized package of Eclipse that includes the Flash Builder plug-in.

The standalone installer is ideal for new users of Flash Builder, and since it is an Eclipse software environment, you can also install other plugins, like those for ColdFusion, PHP and Java support.

Flash Builder is also available in two versions: Standard and Premium.

The Standard version has most of the features developers need to accelerate and support their Flex development.

The Premium version is aimed at building business-critical applications and includes all of the features of the Standard version plus features for enterprise users including memory and performance profilers and automated testing.

The data visualization support in Flash Builder Premium allows you to create charts, visual dashboards and rich reports with complex grouping and summary features.

After you have installed Flash Builder and have started development, there will be times when
you need to distinguish between the installation folder for Flash Builder and the folder where your code files are stored by default.

This is the default installation directory on my Windows computer.

When I drill down into the sdks folder, you see that two versions of the Flex framework are available in this version of Flash Builder.

Flash Builder 4 uses the sdk in the 4.0.0 directory.

On my Mac, you can see that Flash Builder is installed in Applications > Adobe Flash Builder 4.

Otherwise, the sdks are in the same location.

In a later video you will learn how to organize your code into Flash Builder projects and workspaces.

For now, just note that the default location for your code is not the installation directory for Flash Builder.

By default, on a Windows machine, Flash Builder stores your code in the Adobe Flash Builder 4 directory inside of your user directory.

You can see that I currently have only two Flex projects in my default Flash Builder workspace.

Code files on the Mac are stored in the Documents > Adobe Flash Builder 4 directory.

On my Mac, I have quite a few Flex projects.

You learned in an earlier video that Flex application code is compiled into a SWF file which is then played back by the Flash Player.

I am right-clicking on this movie in the Adobe home page to see that it is running in the Flash Player.

Note that a Flash Player instance running in a browser is known as an “embedded” version while an instance running on the desktop is called “standalone.”

When you install Flash Builder, it will prompt you to install the version of the Flash Player that is necessary to run the Flex framework SDK that you’re using.

If you ever need to install a new version of the Flash Player in the future, you can do so at this web site.

When I scroll down the page, you can see that there is also a Debugger version of the Flash Player.

The Flash Player Debugger version can also play back SWF files, but is designed with additional functionality to help developers who are programming SWF applications.

With this version, you can output statements and error messages to a Flash Player local text log on your computer.

Flex SDK developers can also write to the local log using the command-line debuggers.

Developers who are using Flash Builder can skip the use of the local log file in favor of an interactive Debugger right inside the tool.

You will use the Debugger in many exercises in this series.

The Flash Player Debugger version also supports the Flash Builder Profiler, but this feature is outside the scope of Flex in a Week.

For your next step, watch the video titled “Using Flash Builder”.