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RATING



ABOUT THE STAR RATINGS

Outstanding	★★★★★
Very good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Above average	★★★
Average	★★
Below average	★★
Poor	★

TRAINING MEDIA REVIEW provides objective reviews of training content and supporting technologies, advice on media-related training issues, research reports, and consulting.

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Trivantis
877-929-0188
www.trivantis.com/products/lectora/trial.html
\$2,495



Reviewed by Richard Karel, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

- Powerful and flexible development tool
- Large user base
- Significant investment

According to Trivantis, Lectora is used in 59% of the Fortune 100 companies and in more than 60 countries. As a one-person online learning department with over eight years of experience in creating and deploying e-learning content, I wanted to know the reasons for the tool's popularity.

I had some apprehension after being subjected to continuous system crashes using Toolbook Instructor, another advanced WYSIWYG development tool, for a period of time in my professional career. This is what I learned about Lectora.

Lectora Professional Publishing Suite comes bundled with these applications:

- Screen Capture Tool
- Screen Camera
- Video Editor and Audio Recorder and Editor
- Image Editor

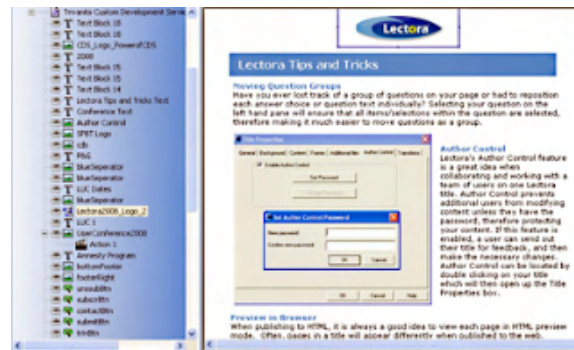
These applications are separate from the development software—it's like buying separate programs bundled with the course development software. However, the programs are meant to work together. Their integration with Lectora is seamless. An optional component that integrates Lectora with PowerPoint 2007 can be purchased for \$395.

INTERFACE

Unlike some authoring applications, you *will not* need to be proficient in PowerPoint to take full advantage of Lectora's rich feature-set. In fact, you should expect to do all of your work in Lectora. The interface can seem a little overwhelming at first, but this is because the folks at Trivantis have not left one stone unturned to make sure Lectora can do everything the simple-to-advanced developer may need the software to do.



Based on my experience, I estimate that the average developer will need about four days to get used to the interface--but the vendor's training and support can cut the time in half.



With the tree hierarchy on the left of the interface, it was incredibly easy to pinpoint and work on any element in my course. I just right-clicked to access the properties of each. You can also add some motion animation to these elements. The drag-and-drop functionality of laying out each object on the screen really came in handy, and Lectora gives one plenty of alignment and arranging tools to make sure everything stays where it's supposed to be.

EASE OF USE

My first project with Lectora Professional Publishing Suite consisted of a simple course with three chapters of two pages each. I used the screen camera tool as well as the image and audio editors. The fantastic aspect to these separate tools is that each is completely integrated with the development application.

You can access each from the Tools menu, and whatever you create is inserted into your course upon saving the file. All of the multimedia functionality I tested worked properly, and the course published true to form. (Just make sure your Flash player security settings allow blocked content from your development folder when you preview your new course. Otherwise, objects will be missing or will not work properly!)

If you already have the applications that come with the Lectora development tool (e.g., screen capture and screen camera and a video editor), I recommend that you buy just Lectora Publisher, not the suite. The separate media development applications are certainly stable and perform basic functions well, but if you need advanced functionality in any of these multimedia areas, I suggest staying with some of the better-known products on the market.

The Lectora Media Library is a central location for all media files that can include keywords and metadata for easy searches. The library can be made accessible to multiple users. It has a clip-art gallery with over 6,000 images and a Flash and Games Library with several animations, Flash characters, and Flash games. You can also add your own media.

“SUPER-DUPER” ADVANCED FUNCTIONALITY

But what about projects that require intense instructional design, engaging learning activities, interactive quiz elements, *and* advanced programming techniques? My next test project involved some of the more complex elements that Lectora affords the developer, all with single-click functionality.

The advanced scripting functions in Lectora are actually easy to pick up after a few attempts. These are mainly if-else conditionals and the like. If you have already learned an ECMA-based, object-oriented programming language (like Actionscript in Adobe Flash), learning the Lectora tools will be very easy.

I had to learn this type of programming language with Toolbook Instructor, and this is truly where advanced functionality comes into play. Lectora provides a Variable Manager to keep up with your most common programming units. Adding external HTML objects is no problem at all.

While I found a user forum on the Trivantis website, I did not see any library of pre-built interactions that any developer can use, but you can purchase any number of these from third-party developer sites. An SDK developer discussion exists online as well. Trivantis publishes a Knowledge Base, FAQs, and a Tips and Tricks section on their website. Also included are in-context video tutorials—very nice.

MAKING QUIZZES

Then I tried my hand at a quiz and a survey. Creating quizzes and surveys proved to be just as easy with the single-click and insert functionality mentioned previously. Reporting is made easy through Lectora's internal SCORM- and AICC-publishing components.

You can also publish your course as a single-file executable, to CD-ROM, or as a packaged HTML lesson. I published the demo to our Moodle LMS, and it worked just great within the Moodle course shell.

My only complaints: You will need to think through many of the aesthetic qualities of your quizzes and surveys, such as font type and size. However, you can save these as library objects to be re-used.

Think of this, the Resource Manager, and Media Library as your best productivity tools in Lectora. If you create a button—or import Flash and image objects—save these as library objects for use in other parts of your course.

This program is RAM- and CPU-intensive, requiring 100 MG of RAM. I tested it on a Vista 64-bit laptop with 2G of RAM. Performance was fine; there were never any system crashes. I don't recommend using this application on any PC with only 512 MG of RAM.

RECOMMENDATION

If my budget allowed the purchase of a solid WYSIWYG development tool with advanced functionality, Lectora would be at or near the top of the list. Its flexibility, ease of use, and especially its incredible advanced functionality helped me understand why it is a fixture in the e-learning development market.

Integration with PowerPoint is available, but to weigh the purchase of Lectora on PowerPoint integration would be unfair. Lectora is an extremely versatile authoring tool. Don't let the PowerPoint integration issue keep you from taking a closer look at Lectora.

About the Reviewer

Richard Karel (rkarel@ecbatanatraining.com) has been involved with issue management and development of online learning for the past eight years. He has a keen interest in online tools for collaboration and management of e-learning projects. He is currently working with the University of Tennessee Cooperative Extension Service to implement a system-wide online learning platform that involves all aspects of e-learning development and deployment.

