

Which Web Technology is Right For Your Company?

FLASH

What it is: A graphics animation program written and marketed by Macromedia

What it's good for: You can use Flash to create dynamic, interactive applications that operate smoothly and quickly because they reside on the user's computer and don't require a constant connection with a Web server to update themselves.

What to watch out for: Just because most users have Flash doesn't mean they all do. Furthermore, some users perceive Flash applications as being "heavy" – meaning they think they would take too long to download, even over broadband.

CODEC

What it is: Software that converts analog video signals into a digital format for transmission.

What it's good for: It's an effective, low-cost way to create the illusion of streaming video. It's also more stable than a video stream – it doesn't get hung up when too many people try to access it at the same time.

What to watch out for: It only works well for videos that don't have a lot of activity in them, such as a meeting or a simple product demonstration. It won't work well if, for example, the product you're demonstrating is animated.

BOTS

What they are: Intelligent software agents programmed to understand written (and sometimes spoken) language.

What they're good for: Bots can supplement your company's customer-service initiative as an alternative to your call center. Bots can even cut down on the number of e-mail inquiries customers submit, according to Melissa Robinson, Ikea Direct's central services manager.

What to watch out for: Unless they're done well, they may not be helpful at all and could frustrate and alienate more customers than they impress.

AJAX

What it is: A programming language for developing browser based applications that behave like desktop applications. It stands for Asynchronous JavaScript with XML.

What it's good for: It's great for making website more interactive and easier to use without developers having to write huge amounts of code or forcing users to download and install browser plug-ins.

What to watch for: To use Ajax, you need programmers with years of JavaScript experience. Also, it won't work with every browser.