



Independent Software Duplication

A Simple Guide to CD-ROM Authoring and Production

Much of the following information is also applicable to DVDs when used as the carrying medium for computer data.

CD-ROMs are still an economical way of delivering information - especially if you have large amounts of video, animations or graphics. Many corporations now use CD ROMs to replace paper catalogues, using install-to-system modules with updates via internet or email. CD ROMs are generally used as the carrying medium for productions up to 700MB, any greater then a DVD can be used. (for productions up to 7gigabyte capacity)

CD ROMS have the advantage of being interactive, allowing the user to select and interact with computer applications on the disk.

Uses include:

- Software Delivery
- Corporate Videos
- Training courses
- Product catalogues
- Product Demonstrations
- Presentations

CD ROM AUTHORIZING

The process of creating an interactive multimedia CD-ROM is termed authoring. This involves assessing the client's needs, creating the content which may include text, video, graphics and animations, then determining how the product will be assembled. A variety of authoring tools, or programs, are available and often which one is used depends on how the end product is to be used and whether an on-line up-grade facility is to be provided.

Once all media is gathered and the client's requirements are fixed, the authoring process begins. This can take anything from a few days to several months, depending on the complexity and size of the production.

TESTING IS VITAL

Once authored, the disk is then tested on all platforms that it's intended to function on, eg: Windows 2000, XP, Vista, Windows 7. Testing is essential and is intended to show up any anomalies or conflicts within the program (s).

It's vital to understand this process, as some clients will assume that authoring and testing can be done as a last minute, rushed job. This can lead to errors that can result in the production of disks that are only suited for use as drink coasters!

If you intend having a CD-ROM authored, always build in an adequate time buffer to allow for unexpected contingencies during this phase. DON'T do it in a last minute rush!

PRODUCTION

Mass production of your CD-ROM. Once authoring and testing has been completed, the next step in production is to determine whether you will have the item stamped or "burned" depending on the quantity you wish to produce. As a guide, if you require more than 500 units, the CD-ROM will be stamped, quantities under 500 will be "burned".

Stamped (also known as pressed) CD ROM. The authoring house provides you with a master which is a fully functional CD-ROM. From this the production house will produce its "stamping master" - sometimes referred to as a "glass master". This takes around a week to have prepared (this is an average turnaround time and can vary either way). Once this is made it's not possible to make changes to the product without remaking the stamping master - which costs approximately \$400. So make sure before you give the go-ahead, your authoring master is the correct version and all changes have been made.

Once the stamp master is ready the production run commences. Modern machines press out CDs at a rate of around 800 units or more an hour so the actual stamp-run is often the shortest part of the entire process.

Other items to be considered during the process are:

- Disk Labeling - Usually silk screened in up to four colors
- Packaging -Plastic case, plastic or paper sleeves
- Inserts -Instruction manuals etc

Timeframe. A safe time to plan on for the CD stamping process is a minimum of ten (10) working days. This can vary and you should consult with your production house on actual time requirements as they can vary during the year, depending on demand.

CD-Rs

CD-Rs or “Burned” CDs. Most people are familiar with this production method. Basically suited for small runs (under 500) this can be done in-house or using a company specializing in software duplication. Production time using a company such as ISD is usually much shorter as we use multiple high speed burners and multi-color labelling machines (with direct to disk printing rather than paper labels)

PACKAGING

Packaging and accompanying literature must be taken into consideration as often this will be the critical item in the production timeline. Consult with your production house on this aspect as there are many variations on packaging types. The ISD website has a list of types available.

LIFE of a CD ROM

As well as being cost competitive with “paper” productions, CD ROMs have a working lifespan that is reported to be five times that of most “paper” productions. This means they remain in use for several years vs only a few months for “paper” catalogues and marketing material. In addition they tend to be passed around to a much wider audience than printed materials. One advantage is having modules such as screensavers and pictorial or video catalogues that can be installed to user’s systems – a form of “viral” marketing that spreads information to a wide audience at no additional cost to you.

CDs also save costs in mailing – usually a disk can be mailed for less than \$1, but the “paper” equivalent of say a one hundred page catalogue, can cost in excess of \$3 per unit.

UPDATING INFORMATION

CD-ROMS are now often authored with modules that can be installed to a user’s system. These might be product catalogues, parts lists, calculators – any programs or utility that might be useful to your clients. With broadband now common, many of these modules can also be delivered via the web – either from your website or by email (depending on size).

You might also choose to deliver the initial material via CD-ROM which includes an install to disk function that can be upgraded in future using web delivered modules.

Most CD-ROM productions can also be run from USB devices, the choice of copying medium (CD or USB) depends on the volume of data and your budget considerations. USBs have the advantage of being able to be used by clients for data storage in addition to containing your product information. (See USBs on the ISD website)

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