Chapter 5

Choosing the Best Workflow

Now that you are familiar with the new features of Flex 4 and Flash Builder 4 and the basics of Flash Catalyst, I’m going provide an overview of where and when each of these applications are used in the development process of a Rich Internet Application (RIA). In this chapter, I will use small examples for each workflow situation to illustrate my points and to help you understand why I’ve chosen that particular way of interacting with other colleagues.

In the past couple of years, the way people develop applications has changed significantly. Developers come from a line of products that use client-server technology. Designers have occupied themselves more in the web technologies. I’m not saying designers don’t work on client-server applications, because well designed usability is very important in that arena as well. But I think that in the world of business applications there is more work cut out for interaction designers than for pure artwork designers. RIAs have combined both worlds into web applications. That means that now it is becoming increasingly important for designers and developers to work together. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Flash Catalyst is making an attempt to bridge the gap between those worlds. So, how do you use this product in the real world?

In this book, I consider a workflow to be a combination of the concept of iterations in creating the project and the interaction between the designer and the developer. Before we dig into the different application types and their workflows, look at Figure 5-1 for a diagram of a typical designer-developer workflow looks like for a RIA. As you can see, there are some tasks that are sequential and some that can be performed at the same time. For example, a developer can start working with an initial design as soon as it is more or less stable. In other words, the design can still change, but there should only be minor changes or additions at best. If more radical design changes are required, the design will have to be re-imported, which could have some serious consequences such as major code rewrites.
In this workflow, which is an elaborate version of the workflow depicted in Figure 4-1 in the chapter on Flash Catalyst, you’ll find some very different aspects from design to release. Note that I didn’t include the requirements and business analysis as well as the technical analysis; those steps all precede this workflow. However, in the chapter about project management, I’ll dig a little deeper into all of the steps and how they work in an interactive or agile development process when creating RIAs.

The workflow depicted here is only an example workflow to give you an idea of the steps involved in developing RIAs. The actual detailed workflow will differ from project to project and even depends on the team composition.

The largest block in this workflow is the actual development process because here all of the parts come together, from implementing the design to developing back end services and using them in Flash Builder 4. As soon as the prototype is approved and the first parts of the design are ready, you can start developing the back end services. In some cases, you will be able to start directly from the analysis documents. For example, when you have use cases available, you can start somewhat earlier on the back end development. Since design updates can occur during development when the previous design is already implemented, I’ve also extended the development process to exceed the design updates to allow for some extra time to implement the changes.

In the chapter on Flash Catalyst, I talked about who is going to use this product, but let me give you some examples of feasible applications. Although these examples are quite small, they all represent certain kinds of applications you could encounter on a larger scale when working on RIAs.