

Gone In A Flash: Preserving Moving Image Media Created by Adobe Flash

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Abstract

In July of 2017 Adobe announced that it would be discontinuing its once widely used Flash Player on December 31st 2020. This announcement raised the question of what will happen to the thousands of animated interactive shorts and video games that were created using Flash animation that currently could only be viewed using Adobe's Flash Player. Preservation efforts need to be considered, or these cultural artifacts from the early days of the internet will be lost forever. My research explores the preservation efforts to keep Flash media available to the masses which is being made mostly by digital preservation hobbyists. It will also highlight how effective these efforts will be in the long term and what other preservation efforts need to be considered to prevent the loss of this type of media in the future.

Methodology

I conducted my research through literary sources and reached out directly to people involved with the preservation efforts. I relied on encyclopedias, trusted news sources, and tech publications. In addition, I relied heavily on websites promoting the preservation efforts of individual hosts, and creators as well as blog posts and articles written by those who have spearheaded the preservation effort.

What is Flash



Flash is free animation software with a plug-in player. It was one of the earliest video players on the internet. Flash made creation of animation and video games that could be played across all web browsers easy for the DIY crowd. It started to become obsolete due to incompatibility with the iPhone

Findings

Adobe recommends converting all Flash supported media to the coding language HTML5 to keep it usable. This method has been adopted by fan favorite Flash animation and gaming sites like Homestarrunner.com and Newgrounds.com. This method of preservation is less than ideal because videos and games lose Easter egg interactivity.

A more complete preservation method is Bluemaximas Flash Point, an emulator created by Flash enthusiast and gaming writer Ben Latimore. It has preserved 38,000 games and 2,400 Animations, and is able to keep Easter eggs interactive.



Conclusion

Currently the best bet for long-term preservation seems to be the emulation method used by Bluemaximas Flashpoint. When I asked the founder about long-term maintenance this was his reply "One of the things I wanted to do with Flashpoint was to make it as easy as possible for someone to pick up my role of maintainer / developer / head curator / what have you, and I like to think I've at least made it possible, if not particularly simple."

As with almost all born digital media to keep Flash alive it will require constantly migrating content to the latest format. There is a real risk that as people lose interest in the maintenance Flash content could someday disappear.

Sources

Sources are included with supplemental research paper.

