

# Evaluating Axure RP

February 2010

Covers Axure RP Pro for Window, v5.6



By

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Disclaimer: I am not an employee of Axure nor am I compensated by the company in any way, shape or form. Rather, I have a vested interest in its continued development as an avid user of the application on a daily-basis.

## In a Nutshell

- Axure is a collaborative tool for rapidly creating wireframes, Lo/Hi-Fi interactive prototypes and specifications for applications and web sites.
- Axure is not an all encompassing tool – It is only one in a toolbox we use for throughout the UX project life-cycle.

## My Experience with Axure

- Have been using Axure for over 3 years
- 7 projects with Axure as primary wireframing, simulation and specifications tool
- Active in the Axure user community (discussion board)
- Founder & Organizer of AxureWorld (<http://AxureWorld.org>)
- What got me involved was Axure's superb **customer support**: Well above and beyond cordial response to email – actual fixes to pressing issues, and accessibility to real people. This seems to be an experience shared by many customers.

# Pick Your Poison

Drawing Oriented	Dev Oriented	Specialized UX
OmniGraffle Pro (Mac)	Flash (Mac, Win)	Adobe Flash Catalyst
Visio Pro (Win)	Flex Pro (Mac, Win)	mockFlow (cloud, desktop)
Photoshop (Mac, Win)	Dreamweaver (Mac, Win)	HotGloo (cloud, beta)
Illustrator (Mac, Win)	MS Expression Blend (Win)	Balsamiq (cross platform)
InDesign (Mac, Win)	MS Expression Design (Win)	MockupScreens
Fireworks CS4 (Mac, Win)		ForeUI
Powerpoint (Mac, Win)		FlairBuilder
Pencil (Mac, Win)		JustProTo
		ProtoShare
		EleganceTech
		Screen Architect
		iRise Pro
		Axure

# The Spectrum



- Professionals possess a high degree of comfort and productivity with their expert tools. However, when assessing the appropriate tool for a larger project that involves a team of UX designers, critical issues to consider must include collaboration and change controls.
- Many of the traditional tools do not support such features. Some of the newer tools are not mature enough to handle the complexities. While Axure is not perfect, the company consistently demonstrate its commitment to enhance such specific features.
- Knowing when to invest the energy to gain expertise in a new tool is a strategic decision each professional must make at some point or another.

# Features of Specialized UX Tools

- Rapid Prototyping of RIA
- Collaboration
- Specifications
  - Various tools boast relevant features but only tools specialized for our profession combine the 3 capabilities above.
  - One needs to consider a product that is built with ongoing feedback from practitioners. From this angle, Axure is very accessible and responsive. Other companies in the space might be responsive as well, but I just don't know.

## About Axure

- Axure (currently v5.6) is a mature yet evolving product: company founded in 2002, Axure released 2003.
- Top notch customer support.
- Axure has about 10,000 users worldwide.
- Used by over half of the Fortune 100 companies.
- Gaining Popularity in the UX community
- Mac version in Alpha.
- Version 6 will be released in the Summer- lots of feedback from our team at JPMorgan.
- More focus on collaboration and specifications.

## Axure Strength

- Inexpensive (Visio Pro ~ \$400, iRise single user \$7000+ ? \$annual , Axure \$589+\$150 annual).
- Technology agnostic - Not tied to Flash, Microsoft, etc.
- As consultants we need the flexibility to work with clients who are set on various technologies.
- As employees of a corporation we want minimize long-term technology dependencies that might
- From single UX to a large UX team AND other teams like BAs.
- Flexible - perfect for winning quick POC's yet scales to very large enterprise projects.
- If an html/css front-end is a deliverable, reduce internal development costs by creating high fidelity prototypes to guide developers while working with the client to complete specification.

## Axure Strength (2)

- UXAs become productive in a day. Moderate learning curve for top-gun proficiency.
- Version control – Ability to restore any point in file's history
- Very stable – even in Beta.
- Terrific customer support and response to customer feature requests.
- Helps us be more profitable and valuable UX professionals – as consultants or in-house : We provide more high-quality deliverables - in less time.

# Axure Weaknesses

- Need to know how to work around the gap between creating high-fidelity RIAs and generating meaningful specifications. This applies to ANY tool
- Specifications are not easy to consume by stakeholders – Axure will be addressing some of this in release 6. Again, it is important to consider the output quality of other tools
- Not object-oriented enough – but this is changing.
- Shapes and Flow diagramming is weak
- Does not support CSS styling (yet)
- Not the best UI (Shoemakers need to go barefoot...)
- Craftsmanship of wireframes and interaction is important because of impact on the quality of generated specifications.

**\*\* The comments above reflect complexities and experiences with very large, phased, complex projects that involve a large team of UX designers (over 10), where pre-planning is important. Otherwise, Axure is extremely agile for proof of concepts and less complex project environments.**

# Misc Points

Relevant project attributes from my experience:

- Proven ability to support a large UX team using a shared project (over 15 designers)
- Distributed UX workstreams (US, Overseas)
- Ability to support Flavors of Agile development (although planning is needed on how structure the sitemap, annotation fields etc.)
- Supports projects with phased implementation that require autonomic specs for each release at any time. This is not optimal, but hopefully version 6 will help.
- Need to consider using a single shared project file for all releases or one file per release.
- Proven ability to support a project where top priority is delivery of extensive UI specifications that follow a rigorous traceability and change control process. Needs improvement (waiting for v6)
- Taking an early move on developing, implementing and maintaining a consistent naming convention, and design pattern libraries for prototype can save significant headache and time downstream.
- Seek the feedback and acceptance of stakeholders who will consume your Axure deliverables - especially the specifications. Make them aware of existing limitations that impact the generators.

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