

Photoshop, Flash Catalyst

Add punch to a pitch with Flash Catalyst

Paul Wyatt reveals how to give your creative presentations an extra interactive kick, without any coding whatsoever

In this highly competitive creative world, we all need to find new ways of getting our work noticed beyond the standard, dull and dry presentation. Digital designs need to be shown in a digital environment, but creatives with no code experience struggle to articulate their designs when it comes to motion or interactivity, limited by using flat JPEGs for storyboards.

Now you can make your presentation interactive in a click or two, without any code, using Flash Catalyst – what better way to dazzle a client? Using a bit of kit like Catalyst to create an interactive pitch doesn't remove any of the showmanship of the creative process, either – it adds to it. David Ogilvy would be proud.

In this project we show you how to work your pitches harder and embrace technology, using a prototype of a web design that is wrapped up in a presentation for online or in-person demonstration. Alternatively, it could function as a great portfolio template if you work with animation or motion graphics.

You can download a demo version of Catalyst from the Adobe website (www.adobe.com/products/flashcatalyst).

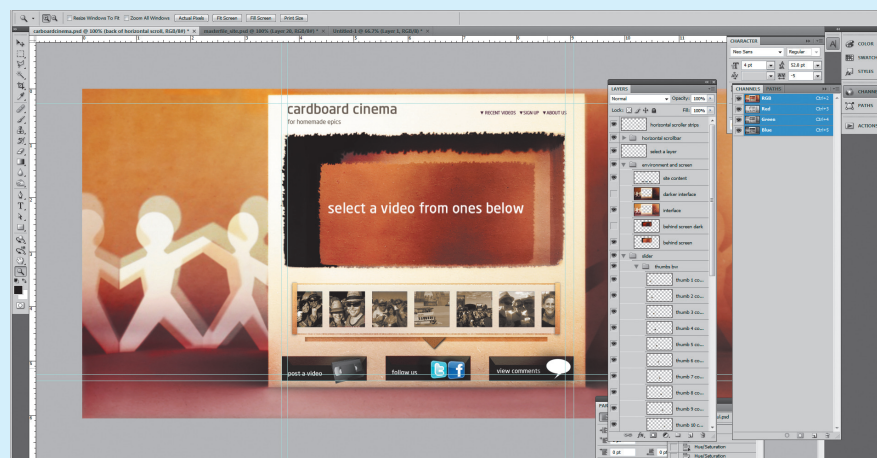


Paul Wyatt

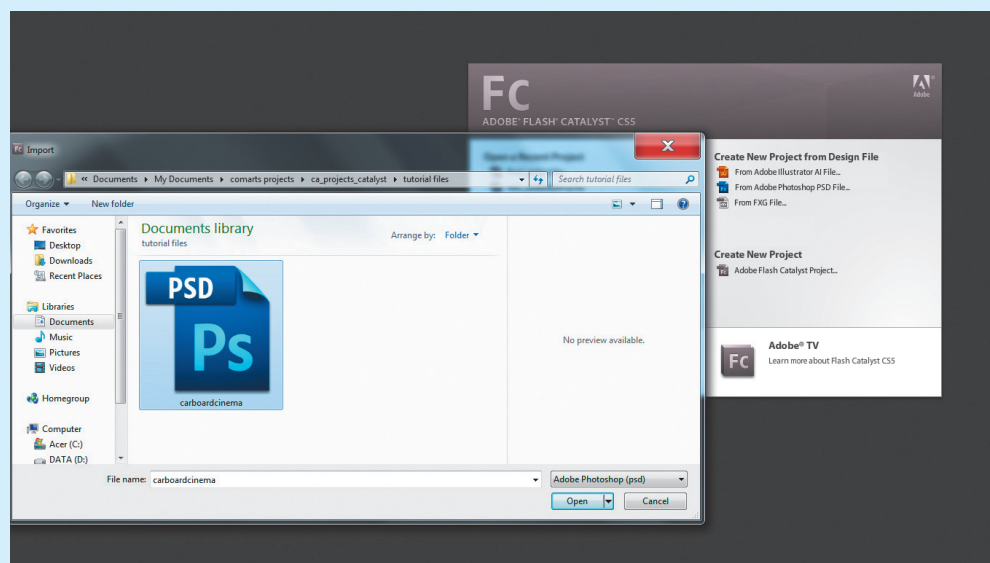
Award-winning creative director Wyatt has worked on various animated, digital, print and branding projects for clients such as the BBC, Channel 4, Daft Punk and Talkback Thames. www.paulwyatt.co.uk

Skills

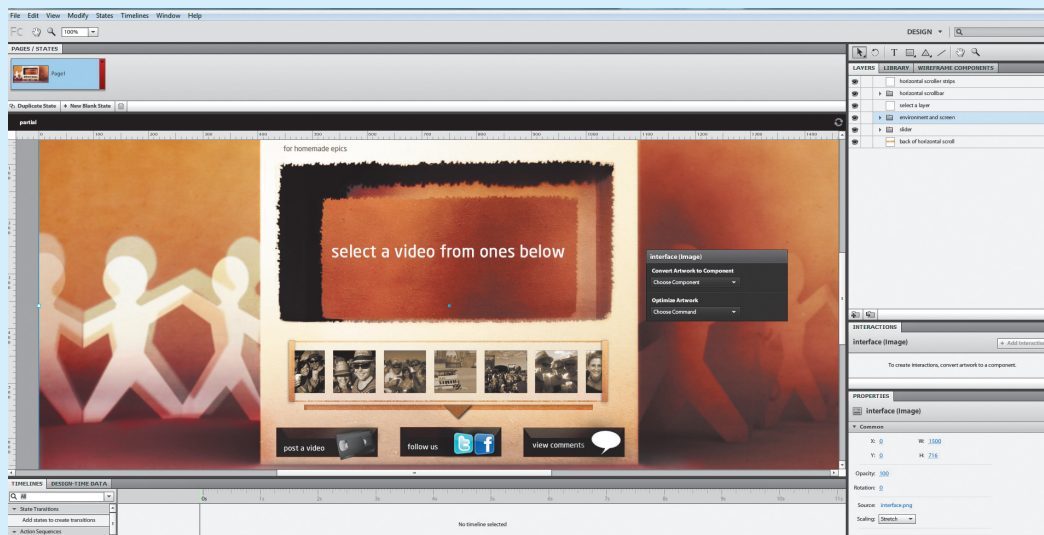
- Import artwork into Flash Catalyst
- Use the timeline to create interactive content in Catalyst
- Make video-rich interactive content without using code



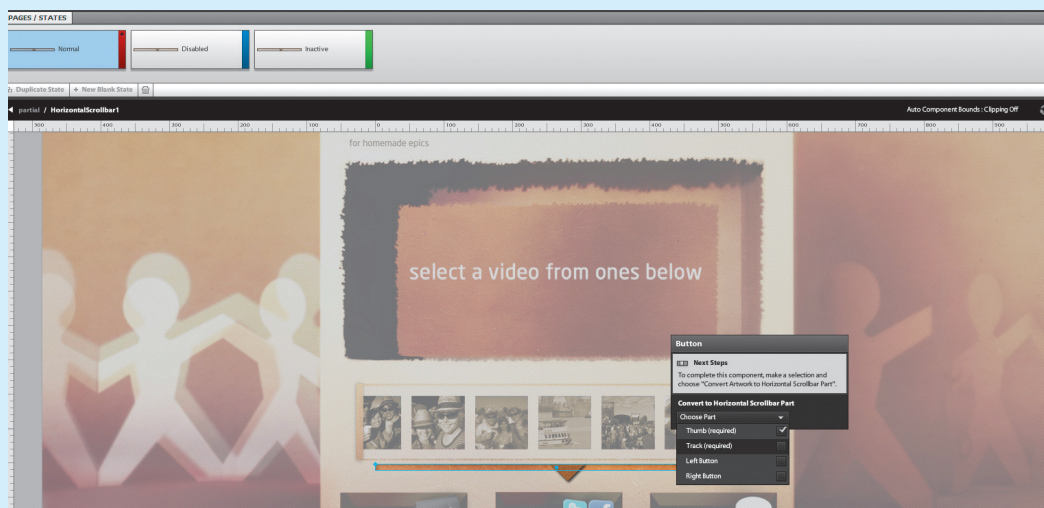
01 First, look at the PSD artwork created for our video website, Cardboard Cinema. Open Cardboardcinema.psd on your cover disc. Ordinarily, a pitch presentation for a design might not have the available resources to make a site design dynamic, so a series of JPEG storyboards and a verbal explanation would walk through the video transitions and any website movement. In this project, instead, we'll take the design and show two featured videos, how they appear and play, and how our horizontal scrolling buttons work and animate.



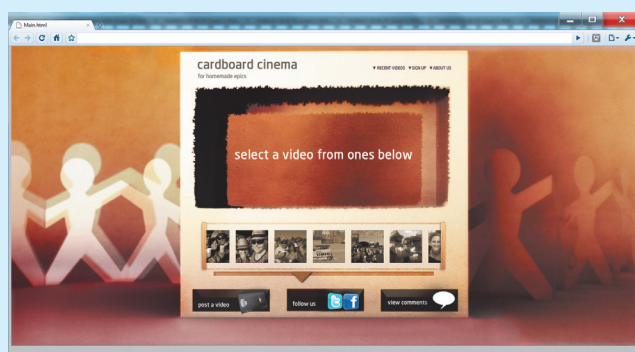
02 Open Flash Catalyst (FC). From the splash menu there are a number of ways you can start: you can begin from scratch with a new project, or choose to create one from an Illustrator or Photoshop file. The latter option will set the FC project dimensions and layer structure to exactly that of the file used. Hit 'From Adobe Photoshop PSD File...' and select the file Cardboardcinema.psd.



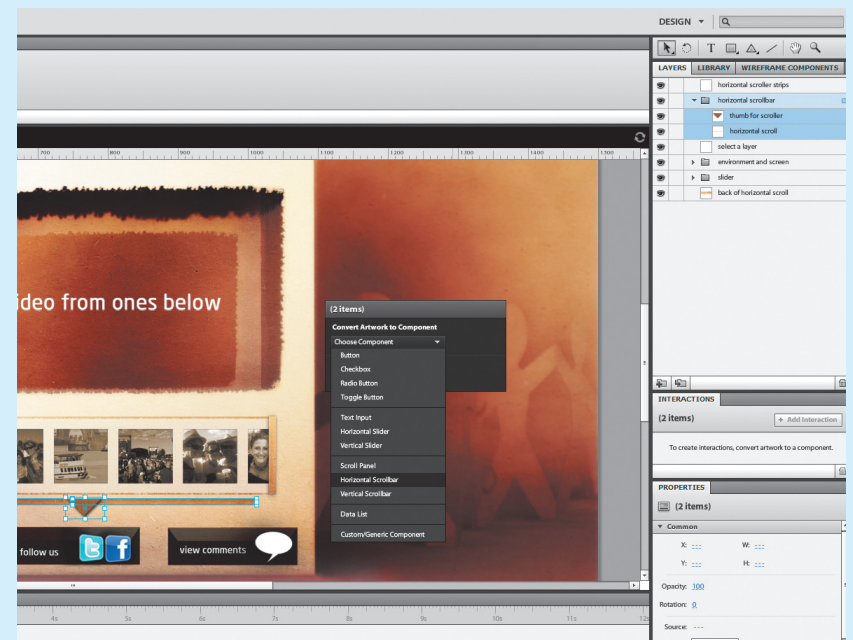
03 The Photoshop Import Options dialogue box will appear, asking if you wish to keep image, shape and text layers editable. You do, so accept the default options by hitting OK. The artwork will appear centred on your artboard, and is already selected. Save your file. You can use the Selection tool to select artwork, or the Layers panel, which is located at the far right of the interface.



05 In order to create interactive content in FC, your artwork needs to be converted into individual components. The HUD will now be asking you to edit your horizontal scroller. Click Edit Parts. This will take you into editing mode for the scroller itself. Select the downward facing cardboard arrow, and under 'Convert To Horizontal Scrollbar Part' in the HUD, select Thumb. Now select the 'horizontal scroll' layer, and select Track from Choose Part. Your scroller is now ready to be tested.



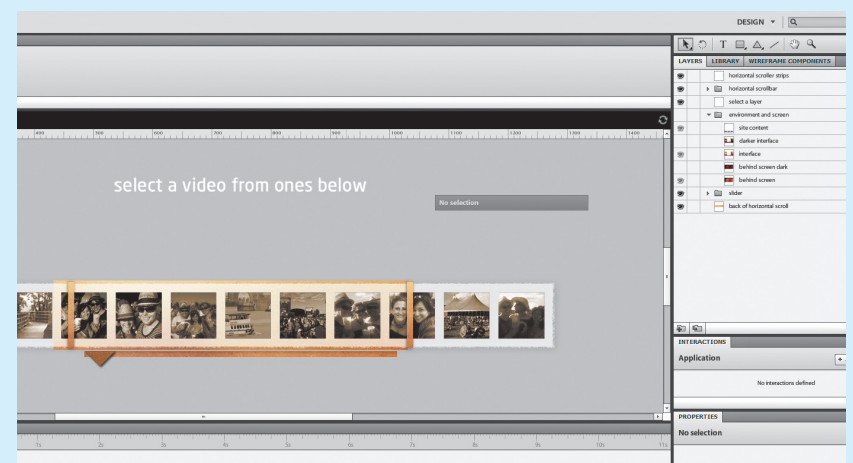
06 The black bar above the artboard is a useful shortcut for exiting the editing mode for an element, and returning to the main project timeline. Alternatively, you can hit Escape to do the same thing. Go to File>Run Project. This will open the project up in your default browser. You will notice that the cardboard scroll arrow has moved to the far left of the scroller's track layer. Click and drag the arrow to test its functionality.



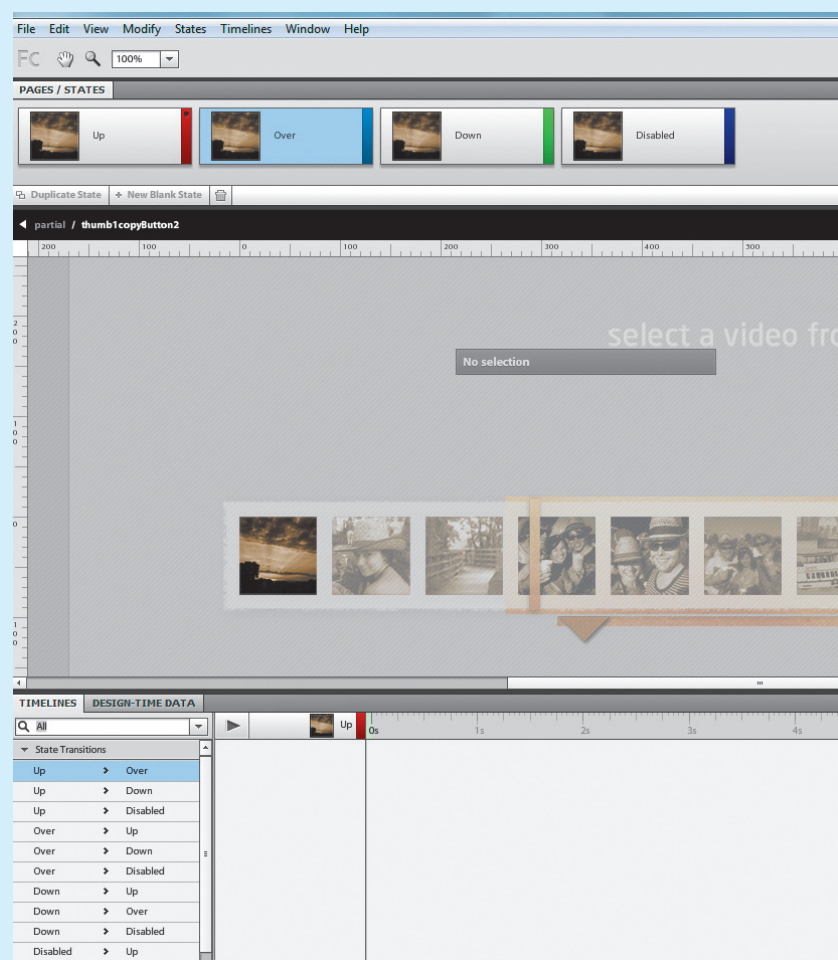
04 When artwork is selected in FC, a dark grey window appears on your screen, displaying information about the selected artwork. This window is called the Heads-Up Display (HUD), and is context-sensitive, offering different options based on your selection. Select the two layers that make up the horizontal scrollbar ('horizontal scroll,' and 'thumb for scroller,' on the top-right of your screen). In the HUD drop-down list under 'Convert Artwork To Component,' select Horizontal Scrollbar.

Optimising graphics

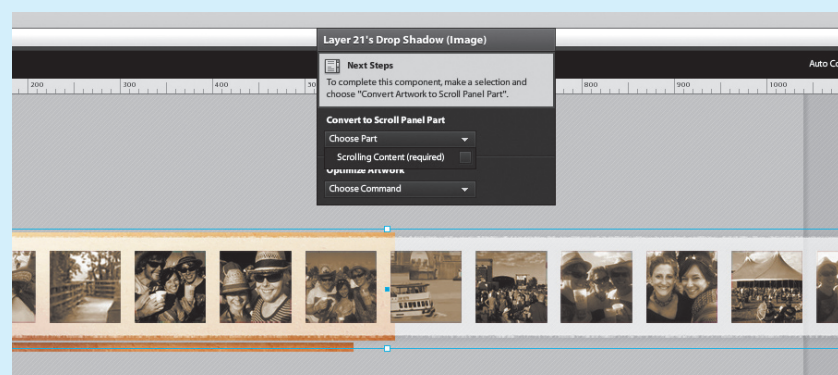
It's important to remove all redundant layers from your PSD file before bringing them into Flash Catalyst. Delete or merge your layers so you have the minimal amount before you import them into your project. There is the ability to optimise graphics directly from within Catalyst. This includes being able to convert vectors to bitmaps, compressing images and converting embedded images to linked files. When a graphic is selected, optimisation options appear in the HUD.



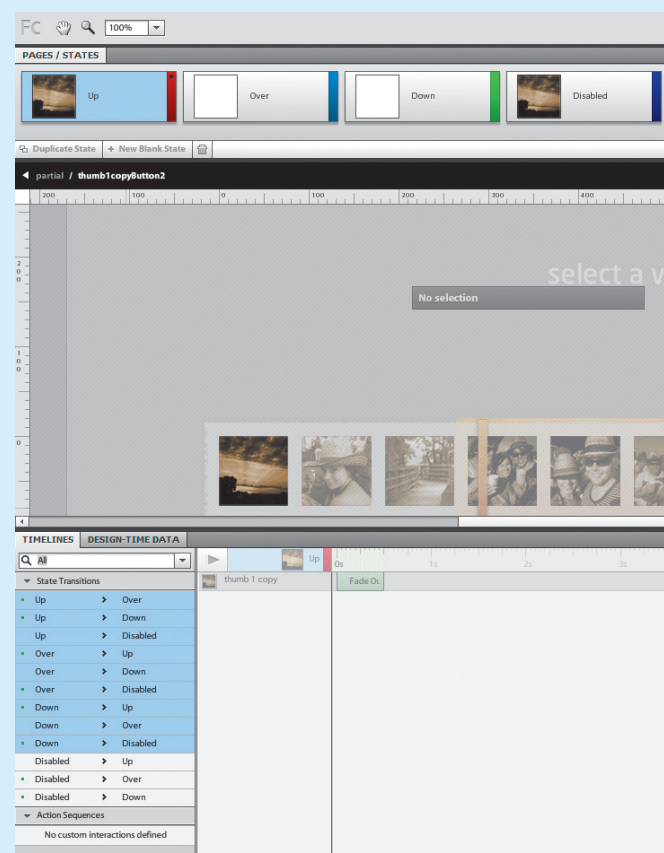
07 The scroller works well, but you need to hook it up to your thumbnail buttons and make them move as the scroller is dragged left and right. First, you have to make your buttons, and add an animated treatment to them to make them turn from sepia to colour once a mouse pointer goes over them. In the Layers panel click the eye icon for the layer folder 'Environment and Screen' to make it invisible. This will make it easy to see the artwork you'll be converting to buttons on the artboard.



08 For the purposes of our pitch, we're only going to make two of the buttons clickable and play video content. However, we will make each button have a roll-over state. With the Selection tool select the first button thumbnail. In the HUD drop-down menu, convert it to a Button component. This will give you button state options. Now click Over to enter editing mode for the button, with four states shown for the button in the Pages/States panel.



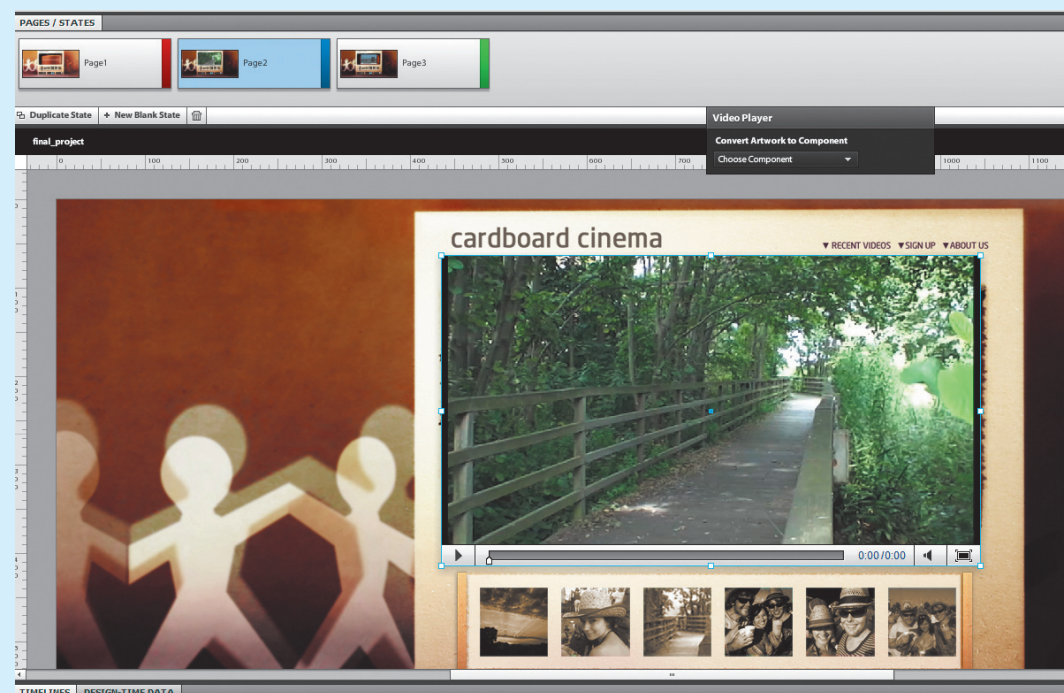
10 Now your content is ready to be turned into a horizontal scroll panel. Hit Escape to return to the main timeline. Using the Select tool, select all the elements to be used for the scrolling content, and use the arrow keys to position this content to the far-left above the cardboard arrow. Select both the scrolling content and the horizontal scrollbar. In the HUD dropdown menu, convert these to a Scroll Panel. Hit Edit Parts. Select all the thumbnail scrolling elements, and choose Scrolling Content. Again, go to File>Run Project to preview. The scrolling content is now controlled by your scrollbar.



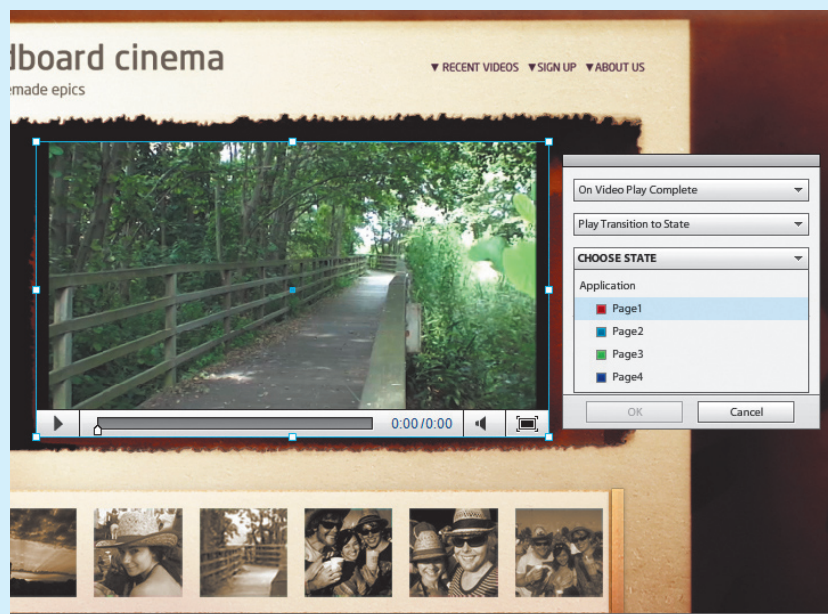
09 In the Layers panel click on the eye icon for the 'thumb 1 copy' layer to make it invisible. This will then reveal the colour layer below the sepia one. Click the Down state panel, and do the same for that thumbnail layer. You want your images to fade from sepia to colour, so click the Up state and, in the Timelines panel under State Transitions, Alt-click all the Up, Over and Down states. At the bottom of the Timelines panel click Smooth Transition. Do exactly the same for the Over and Down states in the Pages/States panel. Repeat step 9 for the remaining buttons.

Smooth it out

Hit Smooth Transition to extend an animated transition or movement over half a second. You can fully customise this by clicking and dragging the time bars out to different timed lengths. You can also click and drag these around the timeline for more irregularly timed animations. Customise transitions further at Properties>Easing.



11 Hit Escape to return to the main timeline. Make the 'Environment and Screen' folder visible again. In the Pages/States panel click Duplicate State once to create Page 2. With Page 2 selected in the Layers panel, turn the visibility on for the 'darker interface' and 'behind screen dark' layers. Now hit the Duplicate State button again to replicate Page 2, and create Page 3. Return to Page 2, and choose File>Import>Video/Sound File, and choose Naturepark.flv. Use the Select tool to scale this so that it fits in the cinema screen gap. Under Properties, change Video Controls to Standard.



12 Repeat the process to import a new video in Page 3. This time select the file Waterfront.flv. Ctrl/right-click on this video, and select Add Interaction. From the pop-up box, choose 'On Video Play Complete', and 'Play Transition To State', and then go to Choose State and select Page 1. Do the same for the video in Page 2. Double-click the Scroll panel to enter editing mode, then double-click again to reach the individual buttons. Select Button 3, Ctrl/right-click, and select Add Interaction. Select 'On Mouse Down', and 'Play Transition To State', and then select Page 2. Select the seventh button, and repeat the process but with the transition going to Page 3.

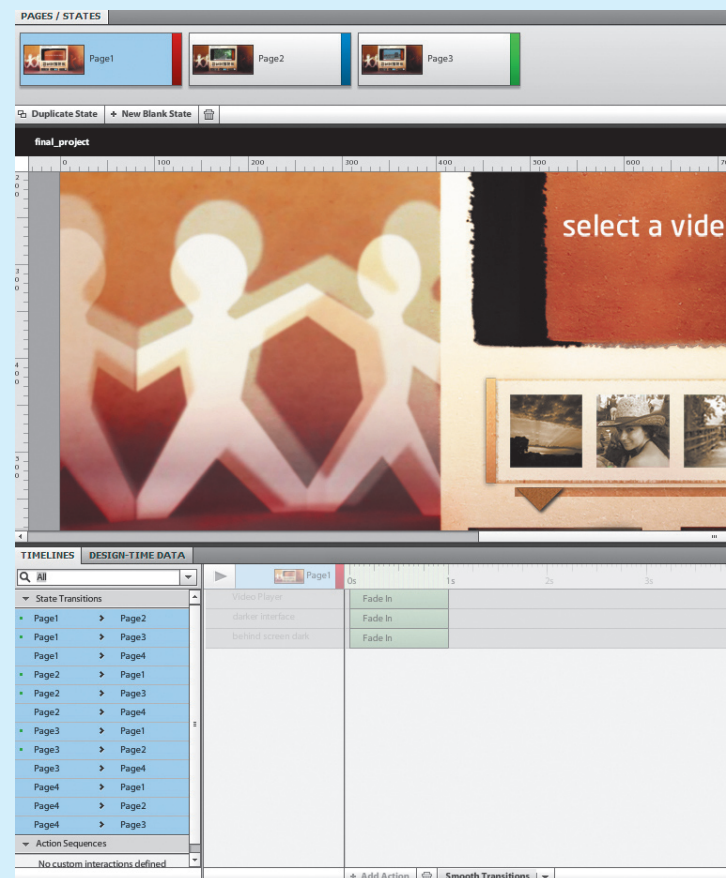
Pages/States

A key concept to understand when using Flash Catalyst is that of pages and states. This way of working will be familiar for those used to creating DVD/Blu-ray disc interfaces. The Pages/States panel in Flash Catalyst makes it easy to navigate as you design, and provides a visual way to see exactly how content will look through different stages of the website.



14 In the Pages/States panel select New Blank State. This becomes Page 4. Ctrl/Right-click this new page in the Pages/States panel, and select 'Set As Default State'. This will be your presentation information page (or pages – you can add as many as you like, so long as they are all linked together using the Interactions panel). Select File>Import>Adobe Photoshop (psd) and choose Presentationcontent.psd. Click OK on the Import Options, and the content will appear centred on the artboard.

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15 Select View Site, and the right-facing arrow graphics. In the HUD convert these to a Button. Select this Button, then Ctrl/Right-click and choose Add Interaction. Select Play Transition for Page 1 in order to reveal the demo. Save your file, and choose File>Run Project to preview your finished project. Now go to File>Publish To SWF/AIR, set a location for your exported files, hit Publish and you're done.

13 Hit Escape to return to the main timeline. Select Page 1, and Alt-click all the page states. Click Smooth Transition at the bottom of the Timelines panel. Repeat this process for Pages 2 and 3. This will cause a gradual fade when transitioning between pages. Now go to File>Run Project to preview the final prototyped functionality.

Intuitive shortcuts

You'll notice using Catalyst that many of the shortcuts are similar to those found in Photoshop and Illustrator. This eases the learning curve hugely and allows a designer to get to grips with making their designs interactive and polished, without the need to learn a whole load of new tools and shortcuts.