BUILDING TUTORIALS USING WINK

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ABSTRACT

The free software program Wink is demonstrated to show how a tutorial can be easily created for a software application. The steps required to create the tutorial are explained as well as several workarounds for shortcomings in the program. Wink is easy to use and should be of interest to ABSEL members writing and/or using simulations and experiential exercises. Tutorials created can be posted on the web or run on individual PCs.

INTRODUCTION

Tutorials are helpful for people learning software programs and they can be used to introduce experiential exercises, approaches to problem solving, complex concepts and any other task involving a process. The major drawback in creating tutorials is the time involved. Fortunately there is a freeware program available that makes creating tutorials almost painless once, of course, you learn the program. It does come with two tutorials.

THE WINK PROGRAM

The program is named Wink, thus the title of this demonstration. The process to create a tutorial is as follows: capture screenshots of each screen, picture, etc. that you want to display, add text messages explaining what you want the learner to know about the screenshot, add next buttons to screenshots where you want the presentation to pause, also add a back button if you want to allow the user to review earlier screenshots, render the presentation, and save it in a form suitable for the use you have planned. Presentations can be saved as HTML, PDF and .EXE files. HTML files are for web tutorials, PDF files allow printing of a tutorial and EXE files are for viewing tutorials on a PC.

Figure 1—Launching New Project Wizard
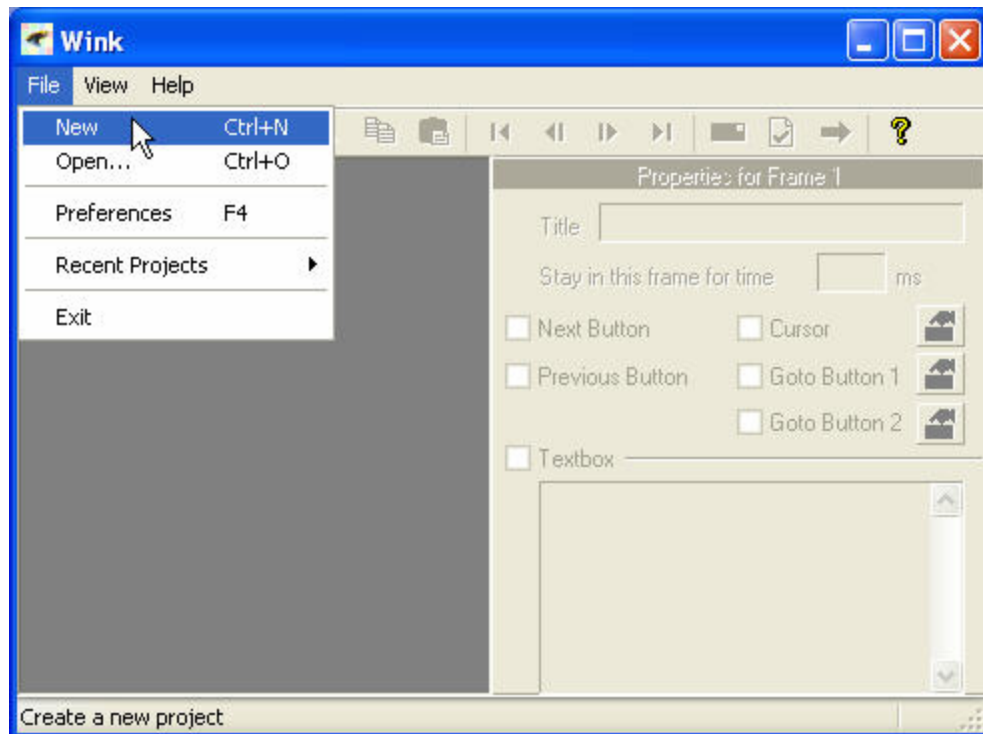
Begin by specifying the screenshot capture region. You can capture the complete screen, a window within the screen or a user defined rectangle within the screen. One limitation of the software is that once the size of the capture region is defined, it stays in effect for the entire tutorial. Thus if some screenshots are of smaller or larger areas than the capture region, the screenshot may not portray exactly what you hoped to show. There are some workarounds that we will discuss later.

Click on the box next to "Hide Wink Window" and the Wink Program window (shown in Figure 1) will move behind the application program. You may want to move the New Project Wizard window which remains on top so that you can access the capture region in the application program window. Click on the Choose button (which becomes active when you click on the "Hide Wink Window" box) next to the capture region selection menu and then click on the application screen, window or draw the region in the application you want to capture. Then click OK. The New Project Wizard, Step 2 appears as shown in Figure 3.

Minimize this window and you are ready to capture screenshots. The hot button for capturing screenshots is the pause button as indicated in the New Project Wizard, Step 2 window. Access the first screen in the application you want to capture, press the pause button and you have copied the capture area. When developing a tutorial for a software program, a new screenshot should be taken every time the application program presentation changes to create a smooth flow through the application.

When all screenshots have been taken, bring back the minimized New Project Wizard, Step 2 window and click on Finish. The Wink program will again be shown with thumbnails of all the screenshots referred to as frames as shown in Figure 4. Click on a thumbnail to see the frame. If you decide you want additional frames or want to redo specific frames, create a new project and capture the additional frames. Then drag the thumbnails from the new project to the location in the original project's thumbnails where you want them to appear.
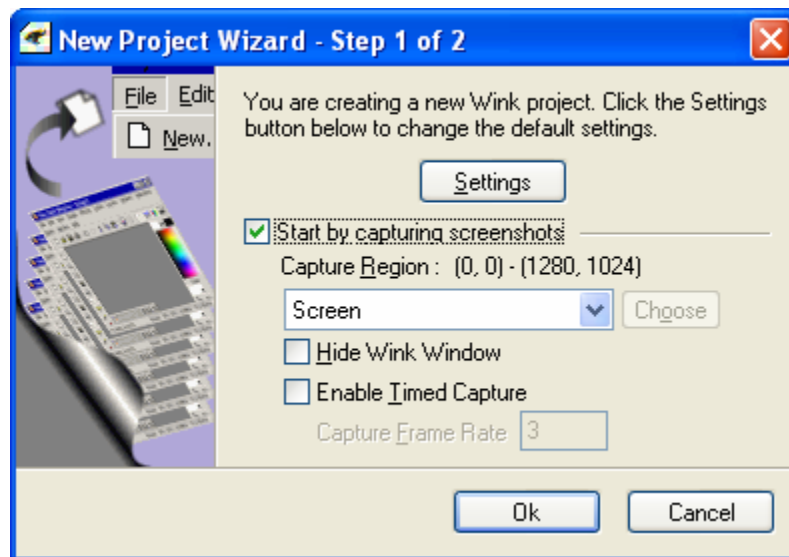

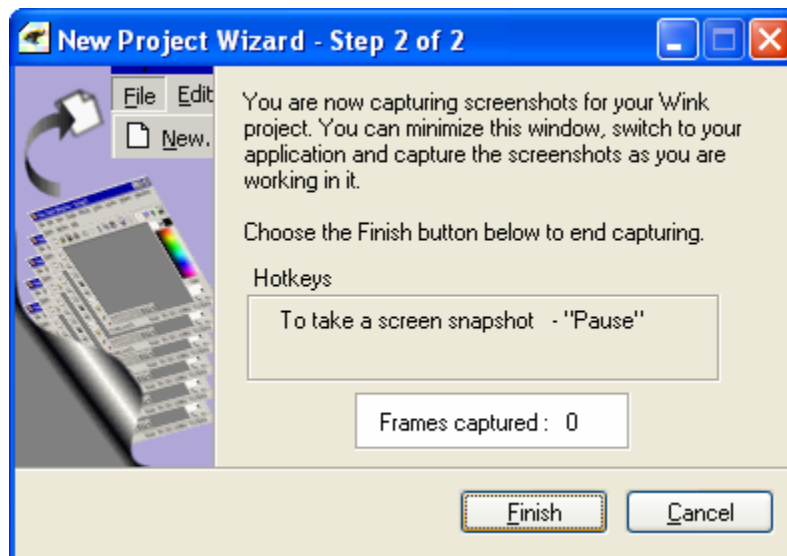Figure 2--New Project Wizard Window, Step 1
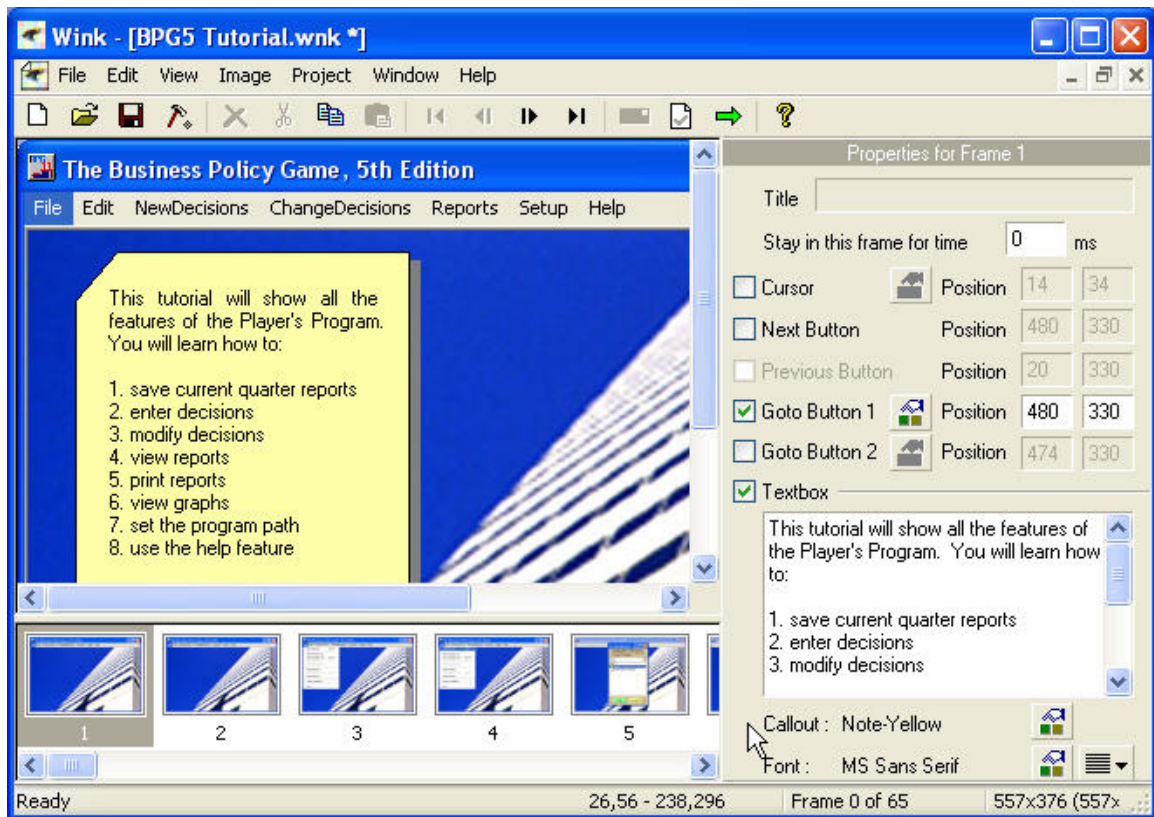
Figure 3—New Project Wizard, Step 2

Figure 4—Wink Program with Thumbnails of Captured Frames

As you examine each frame in Wink, you have an opportunity to add a callout (text message) to the frame. There are a variety of callout shapes and custom shapes and colors can be easily designed. A callout is usually used to explain the important aspects of a frame. When a callout is added, you will likely want to add a next button. A Wink presentation runs continuously frame by frame until a next button is encountered. Adding a next button stops the progress until the viewer clicks on the button. This provides time to read and digest the text shown in the callout. A back
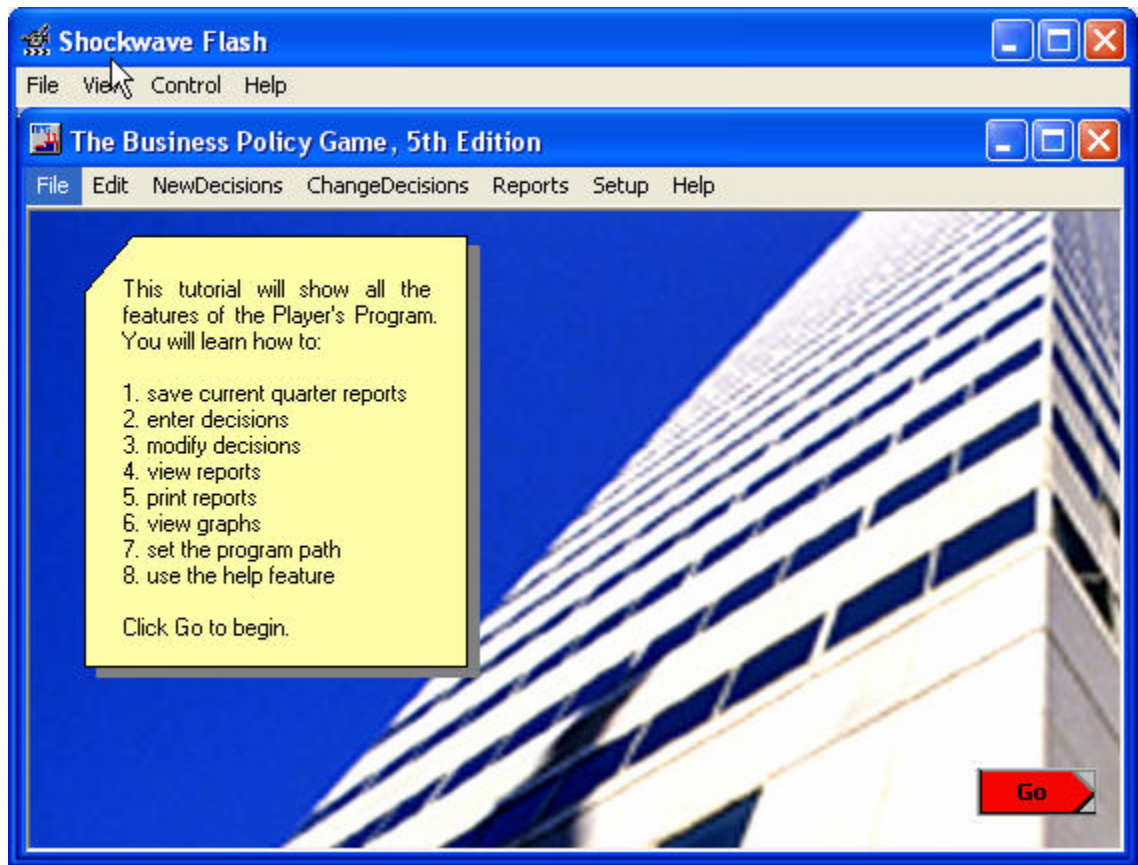
Figure 5—Tutorial Running on a PC

button can also be added to allow the viewer to go back and review earlier frames.

After callouts and next and back buttons have been added where desired, it is time to render the tutorial for presentation. The rendering is saved in HTML, PDF or EXE format. If you decide to make changes to the tutorial after saving it, you will need to go back to the Wink program, make the changes and render the frames again. A completed tutorial for The Business Policy Game Player's Program is shown in Figure 5.

Earlier we mentioned that once a frame size has been established, it is in effect for the entire tutorial. If you want to show a larger screenshot, you will find that the frame will truncate the screenshot to fit into the established frame size. The frame contents will show as much of the screenshot as will fit in the frame beginning in the top left corner. If the frame contains the content of interest, keep the frame with the truncated screenshot. If the content is located outside the visible frame, create a new project specifying the capture region as a rectangle about the size of the frame containing the desired content and capture the screenshot. When you have finished, copy the thumbnail to the original presentation in the location desired. You might have to try this several times to get the capture region the right size.

If the screenshot is smaller than the defined frame size, the extra space in the frame will be black. If this is not acceptable, create a new project specifying the capture region as a rectangle about the size of the frame. Include a background color, design or graphic to fill the space between the screenshot and the frame. As above, when finished copy the thumbnail to the original presentation in the desired location.

If you captured a screenshot that was larger than the defined frame and want to add a next or back button, neither will appear in the frame. They will appear in the truncated area. To bring them into the visible frame, go to the View menu item and select Properties Bar/Advanced View. Then click on the desired Next or Back button. The coordinates of the button will be shown in the properties window. Change the coordinates to a number where they will appear in the visible frame, for example 150 and 150, and then drag the button to where you want it in the frame. Buttons can be set to the same location in each frame by selecting all frames containing the buttons you want to set and then typing the desired coordinates in the properties window.

Wink allows the user to create tutorials fast and easily. I believe it has many potential applications in the ABSEL community. Developers can create tutorials, but so can users. The program can be obtained free by downloading it from www.debugmode.com.