



What is the Best Format to Stream Video Sermons? Flash!

W

e have recently seen an explosion of video usage on the Internet mostly because of broadband. [Comscore](#) did a study to find that five out of every seven U.S. Internet users (71.4 percent) streamed video online. They also state that the average online video viewer consumed 55 video streams, or nearly two per day. Comscore continued to say that online viewers watched an average of 145 minutes of online video a month. Additionally, the September 2007 Pew Internet & American Life Project [reports](#) that for the first time that as many as 50% of respondents say they have high-speed Internet connections at home.

The leading file format for this video explosion is Flash. Flash delivers a better experience compared to the other major media formats. This is possible because Microsoft, Real, and QuickTime are built to run outside of the Browser and on top of the operating system, where Flash is built to run specifically inside the browser. Video streamed with Flash has a higher quality than the other formats; currently you can even stream HD video only with Flash.

According to [Macromedia](#), Adobe® Flash® Player is the world's most pervasive software platform, reaching 98% of Internet-enabled desktops in mature markets as well as a wide range of devices such as mobile devices which are starting to get broadband connections. Flash is a lightweight component that is already built into your web browser.

Reach is Further

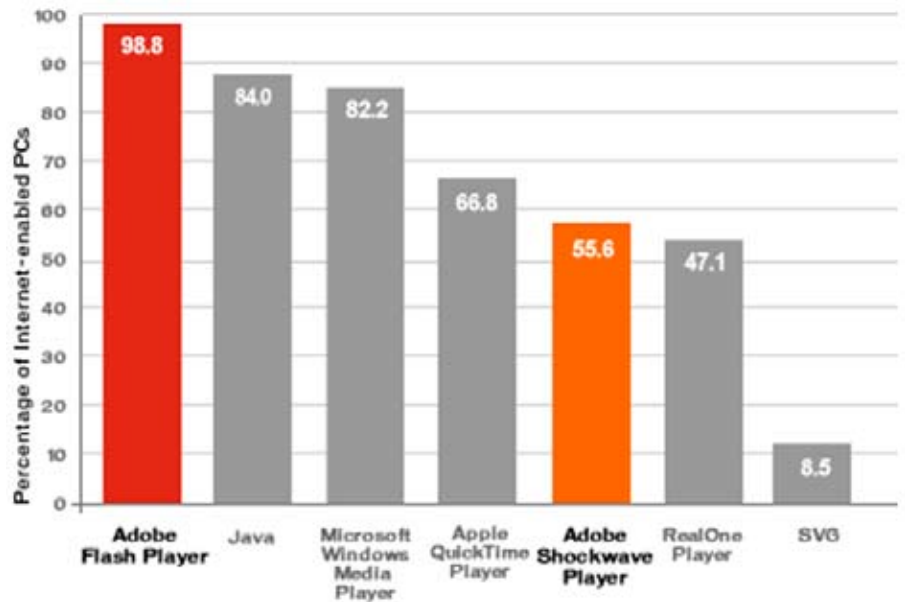
So why should churches use Flash over the other major players? In the chart below you can see a comparison between all four of the file formats. Their distribution across mature markets, the size of the player measured by Mega Bites (MB) and lastly what formats they can play. Flash has a dominant lead over Windows Media Player by 15%, with QuickTime a distant third when it comes to the distribution across Internet users. The Flash player is significantly lighter than the other players, which means it will load that much faster and your streamers will not have to wait to view your video. A common occurrence with QuickTime is the time it takes to load the player and then you have to click the play button to start the stream.

<i>Player</i>	<i>Distribution</i>	<i>Size of Player</i>	<i>Formats</i>
Flash Player	98.8%	1.31MB	FLV, MP4, MP3
Windows Media Player 11	83.7%	24MB	WMV, AVI, MP4, MPG
QuickTime Player	67.6%	32.30MB	MOV, MPG, MP4
Real Player	54.7%	8.08MB	RM, RAM, AVI, MPG

Simplicity & Efficiency

Big corporations are using Flash over the other major formats and for good reasons. These corporations include Google, YouTube, Disney, and what I find really amazing is MSNBC is using Flash to stream their TV shows rather than Windows Media Player. For those that do not know, MSNBC is a joint venture between Microsoft and NBC. Not only is the Flash player faster to load, but it's conveniently made specifically for the browser. It's convenient for the fact it's on almost every computer in the world. Not to mention it will play in any web browser so you don't neglect any particular operating systems

(Linux, Windows, and Macs). Before the popularity of video with Flash, a company or church would need to encode their video in all three file formats to maximize their reach across the Internet. Not only did they have to convert a single video to all three formats, but they had to encode each file for Dial up and broadband. That meant making six files for one video. This way of doing things was not only costly with money, but with time too. This solution requires more disk space to store each video and bandwidth when moving these files, which cost more money to stream one video. With Flash, all you need is one file for each video. Utilizing the Flash Media Server allows for optimum streaming because it only downloads the portion of the file you view, instead of the entire video.



Breaking Down Walls

This is vital when spreading the Gospel beyond your own church walls. Why? People in other countries may not have a particular player installed on their computer or do not have the time or patience to install a player to view your video stream. For example in India they use more Linux computers than they do Windows and Linux does not and cannot have Windows Media Player installed. Some countries like China block specific file formats, such as the WMV format. So if you have a message in a Windows file format (WMV) China can block it from being streamed into their country. But with Flash they can't distinguish if a SWF is a video or not. This enables you to break down the barriers in order to spread the Gospel in China and other countries.

To increase employee's productivity corporations have taken out all media players on their computers. With this they lock down the computers so employees can't go back and install a media player. However; companies do not take Flash out because they build some of their internal applications with Flash and employees need it to function with day to day operations. If you have your videos in the Flash format this allows the Gospel to flow into the work place.

When you stream your services Live on the Internet you want streamers to feel as if they are there with you, in real time. Everyone knows that there is some latency with Live TV and also with Live streaming. Ideally you would like to limit the latency as much as possible and Flash has a very minimal latency when streaming Live on a Content Delivery Network (CDN), usually 3-4 seconds. Compared to other Live streaming solutions which can have anywhere from forty seconds to three minutes latency and this is not Live.

Complete Customization

Another reason Flash rules the streaming video segment is the ability to customize your Flash media player to better fit your ministry. Creating a Flash media player that fits your website theme or having it integrate seamlessly gives a professional look and the ability to expand beyond what others have to offer. This customization allows you to dip into handheld devices too, without worrying about compatibility or having to encode for different devices, which saves you time and money.

Flash has taken the guess work out of installing and updating. Flash now comes installed on all new computers and Flash can be upgraded with a click of a button. What people really appreciate about Flash is the fact you don't have to register or sign in to upgrade or install Flash.

With all that in mind Flash benefits exceed other formats to stream the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations. With the quality of video increasing and the cost to stream decreasing, the time is now for ministries to stream Video on the Internet. With the numbers of broadband escalating at home and also the total of people watching video online, this is a stimulating tool for ministries to utilize.

-Austin Moore
President/Founder of Streaming For Jesus
<http://www.StreamingForJesus.com>
800.592.0468

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