

# Spinning into control

Actify's SpinFire Professional 2004 improves the usability of project data throughout an enterprise by publishing it within a single .3D folder

Sharing project data throughout an organisation can only be effective if it abides by some simple rules. Chief amongst these is ease of use. Different departments have different skills - and different requirements from the system. Buyers may have no CAD skills, but would like to see what they are spending the company's money on. The manufacturing department needs accurate detail to check the quality of the components they are producing - and the marketing department needs realistic visualisations of the products they are trying to sell. Designers, themselves working increasingly in collaboration with others, need tools to be able them to highlight and comment on work in progress.

Current collaboration and visualisation tools enable all of these, and other departments, to get involved in the product development cycle at a much earlier stage in the design process - enabling them to contribute opinions and advice almost from the conceptual stage. By enabling them to contribute, design engineers are faced with an increased demand for information to support their ideas, which can only be satisfied using the most advanced, flexible and easy to use 3D viewing tools available.

There are a number of solutions on the market. The ones that fit the manufacturers needs best are those that make it easy for the user. Hence the development of features in such programmes to parcel up all of a project's

data into one easily distributed, easily managed package.

The ability to share 2D and 3D design data is, therefore, immeasurably simplified and speeded up if all of the documents relating to a project are available within a single folder. It allows everybody concerned about the design throughout the enterprise, and those in the supply chain, to view and mark-up CAD files from multiple CAD systems, and to extract whatever information they require, whether they have those applications on their own systems or not.

The provision of a .3D WorkSpace is one of the major features of Spinfire Professional 2004, the latest release of Actify's CAD visualisation software. Actify, based in San Francisco, is a privately held company, founded in 1996, that supplies a suite of client/server design visualisation and collaboration software throughout America, Europe and Asia Pacific - with authorised channel partners in 45 countries and over 200,000 users worldwide.

Actify's SpinFire range of solutions provide cost-effective tools for companies involved in automotive, high technology, industrial automation and discrete manufacturing industries. The solutions help provide cost-savings and productivity gains across the manufacturing chain through faster and more efficient communication of 2D and 3D design data.

Besides the ability to combine files within the .3D WorkSpace, SpinFirePro 2004 adds numerous other features, designed to enhance Mark-up proce-

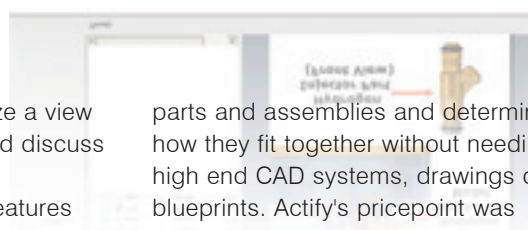
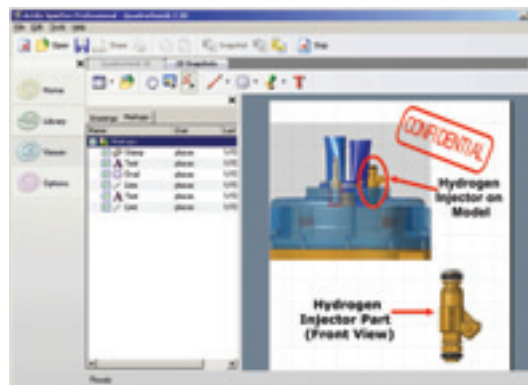
dures and measurement capabilities, add flexibility to model set-up and aid assembly navigation. There is also a new feature that allows snapshots to be taken of 3D models, so that they can be used in PowerPoint presentations, manuals and in other media.

SpinFirePro 2004 is accompanied by Actify's server solution - Actify Server 2004. Other products within the SpinFire line-up are the SpinFire Reader, the tool that allows occasional users access to CAD files in .3D format, and Actify SDK, that enables SpinFire solutions to be seamlessly integrated within PDM, ERP and Supply Chain Management solutions, and also into the web.

## THE .3D WORKSPACE

Distributing documents to all of those concerned with a project, including procurement, accounts, sales, marketing and support, is made very much simpler with .3D WorkSpace. And that includes MS Office Documents, PDFs, GIF and TIFF files, as well as CAD files from multiple CAD vendors. The .3D format is a well-known compressed and secure CAD visualisation file format. Being able to use a single software solution to view, mark-up and share CAD and related documents without the need for native CAD software speeds up communication, and ushers in a genuine 'paperless office' scenario. System administrators are able to create projects, specifying those users that are associated with the project as recipients of the folder.

Organisation of files under Actify Server 2004 is also improved, by stor-



ing the .3D WorkSpace folder on the central server. Files from all of the major CAD suppliers are published into the .3D files, although native CAD files can be viewed on the server without going down this route, as importers can be automatically imported whenever a CAD files is opened on the server. Whenever native CAD files are updated the software creates a new .3D file, ensuring that revision levels are automatically kept up to date.

Support for the various CAD file formats that are available can be added individually, using the Professional Importer Pack for industry standard formats or the Professional Plus Importer Pack for many native CAD file formats.

Having all of the files on a central server saves considerable space on local desktop PCs, and allows users to continue working whilst the server takes the processing strain. It also allows them to access shared data without interfering with other users, and provides a more secure shared environment. Administrators have access to who uses the system, and when. Upgrade and maintenance costs are also reduced. As the .3D WorkSpace folder can also be published to the web, suppliers and other collaborators have similar access to the project, even though they do not have direct access to the server.

A useful feature, introduced in SpinFirePro 2004, is the ability to take a snapshot of a 3D model, saving it to a .3D file. Besides making the 2D image available as a presentation image, it

allows collaborators to freeze a view so that they can highlight and discuss specific issues.

Redlining and annotation features have been enhanced to provide new redlining tools for 2D mark-up, enabling users to link comments, approvals and other notes to specific features in a 2D format. The software upgrades its measurement features, adding the ability to read line thicknesses and other measurements to its core dimensioning tools, enabling users to access accurate part data, away from the CAD programme to produce estimates or to inspect final parts. Actify has also upgraded its user defined co-ordinate system, adding to the flexibility of model set-up.

## DELTA TOOLING

One company that recently took up Actify SpinFire Professional was Delta Tooling, based in America. After evaluating half a dozen CAD viewing solutions they decided to use Actify's software, for a number of critical reasons. The first was Actify's ability to import design information including part names, part numbers, assembly structure and version numbers. The second was the ease of use with which non-CAD users could easily work with the Actify solution. Delta Tooling also felt that Actify has allowed them to eliminate drawings entirely - creating the paperless engineering office they were aiming for - and providing CAD visualization to the rest of the company. Employees are now able to bring up

parts and assemblies and determine how they fit together without needing high end CAD systems, drawings or blueprints. Actify's pricepoint was another consideration.

Delta Tooling's quality control has also improved tremendously since they took on SpinFire Professional, as they can now design everything in 3D and keep up to date with modifications through proper revision control. And, with workers on the shopfloor also having access to the software, accurate measurements can now be extracted directly from the 3D model - as opposed to the previous method of taking them by hand from drawings. More accurate measurements enable Delta Tooling to identify and correct manufacturing issues before the part is machined.

## SCALEABILITY

Actify's users testify to the low cost and maintenance of their system, the purchase price per seat including the first year's support. SpinFire Professional also includes a high degree of scaleability, enabling users, for instance, to start out with the software in their manufacturing department (as was the case with Delta Tooling) and then to progressively build the system throughout the entire organisation. This is true for both smaller scale tool manufacturing companies or for worldwide enterprises such as Lockheed Martin, Daimler Chrysler, Bosch, Ford, General Electric and many others. **CU**  
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