By Jim Maivald

Creating HTML5 Animations with Adobe Edge Animate

With Adobe Edge Animate you can create animations and interactivity for web pages, digital publishing apps, EPUBs, and more. Here's how to get started.

On September 24, Adobe unveiled the first official version of its latest HTML5-based web animation and development tool: Edge Animate. This in itself was no big surprise— the program has been in development for over two years and had been available as a free public beta from Adobe Labs for over a year, under the name Adobe Edge. The big news is that Edge Animate is only one offering in a new suite of tools released by Adobe, geared for designing and developing fully responsive web content for the modern web. Today, Creative Cloud subscribers can download a perpetual (non-expiring) version of Edge Animate for free. That means you can download the program and get started right away replacing your existing Flash-based content.

But why would you want to? Because HTML5 is not just the future, it's what's happening *now*—whether you're producing websites or interactive apps and documents for tablet devices such as the iPad. Adobe DPS, for example, can create some neat effects, but many of the coolest elements in DPS-based apps you may have seen on your iPad or Android device come from embedded HTML5—if you can't make HTML5 animations, you're out in the cold! So what are you waiting for? Let's jump in.
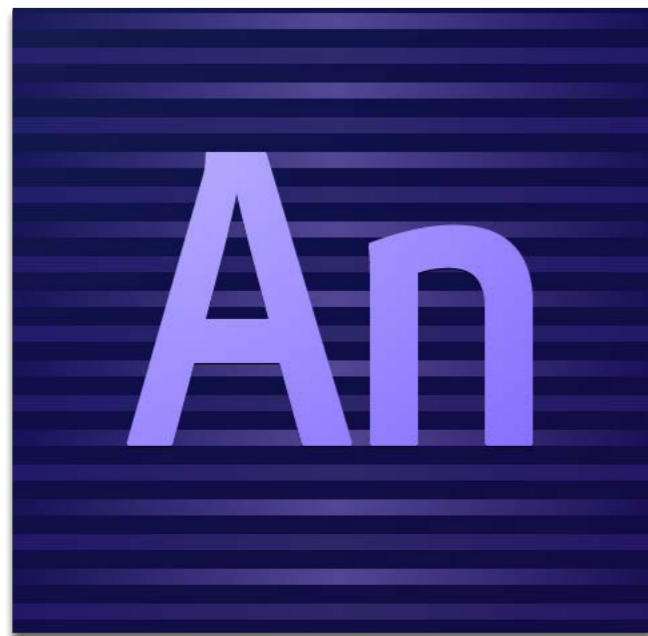
Creating Your First Animation

The first step is to download and install Edge Animate from Creative Cloud. However, if you have an older beta version of the program, the following instructions should still work fine (with the understanding that some features may have been slightly changed or updated in version 1). Since version 1 is free, the installation procedure is simple and straightforward, without the hassle of entering any serial number or product key.

The first thing you will see is the Edge Animate splash screen (Figure 1). Like most Adobe Welcome screens, this window gives you access to standard commands, a list of recently created files, in app tutorials and other resources to help you learn and get the most from the program.
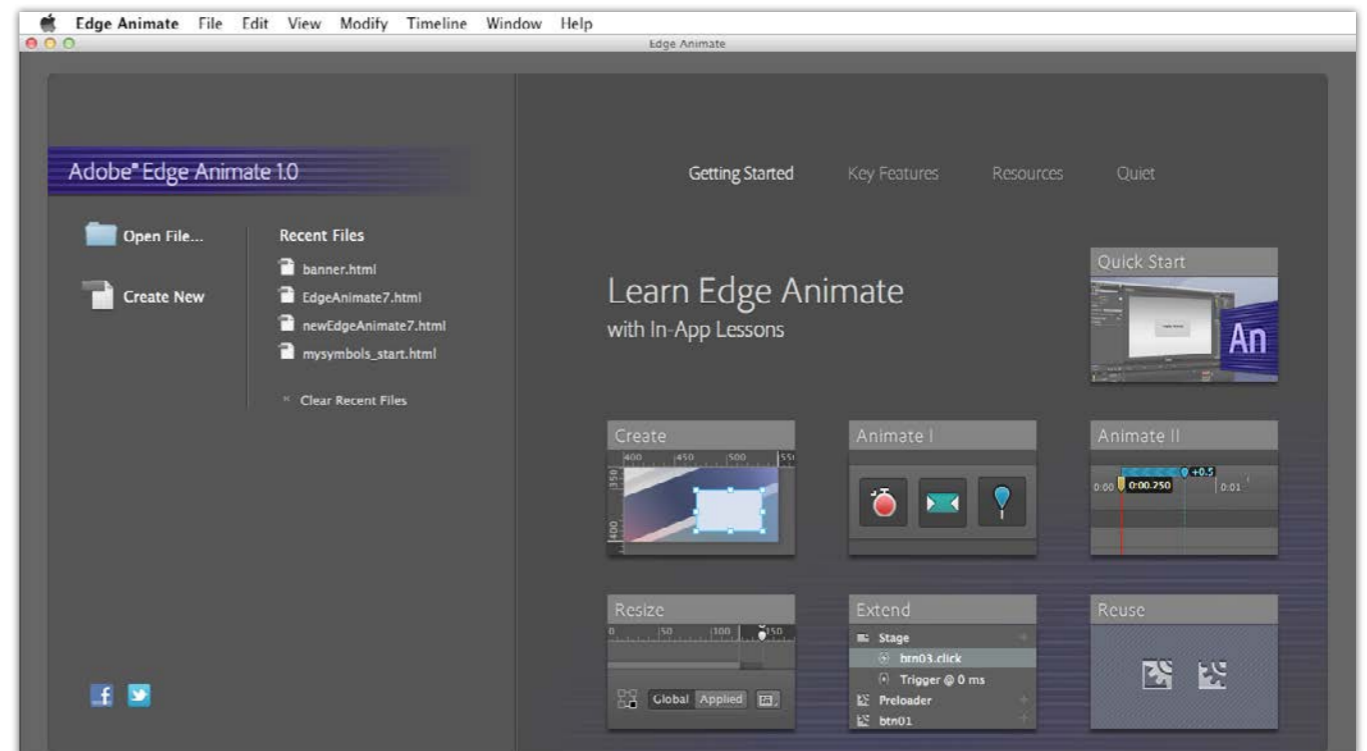
1. Launch Edge Animate

Figure 1: The Edge Animate splash screen

2. Create a New Document

Select **File** > **New**. This command creates a new Edge Animate document that focuses around the main workspace panel called the *Stage* (Figure 2). The size of the Stage is set by default and can be altered to meet the requirements of your project. For this example, let's make the Stage 500 pixels by 300 pixels. You should see the current dimensions of the Stage on the left side of the program in the Properties panel. Whenever you want to access these specifications, just deselect all elements, and click anywhere on the Stage itself.
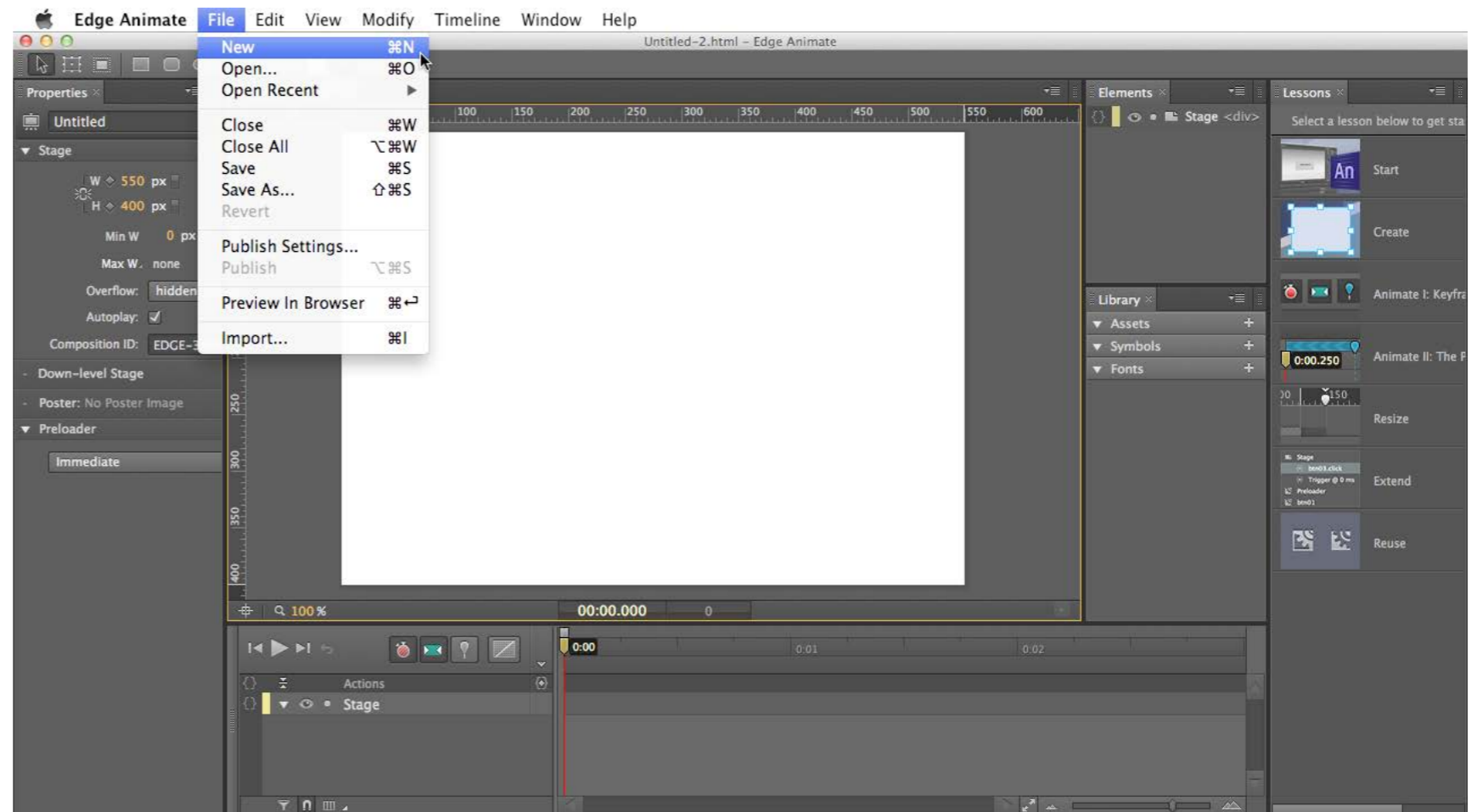

Figure 2: A new Edge Animate document

3. Set the Stage Size

In the Properties panel, set **W: 500 px** and **H: 300 px** (Figure 3).

Beside the Stage, there are four main panels: Properties, Timeline, Elements, and Library. The optional Lessons panel is not needed in most workflows; you can hide it to open more screen real estate (choose **Window** > **Lessons**).
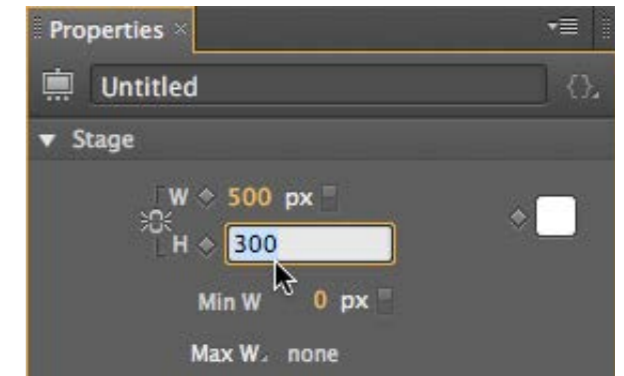

Figure 3: Setting the width and height of the stage in the Properties panel

What About Flash?

Unless you've been living under a rock for the last five years, you know that Flash-based animation for the web is dying. Prompted by a ban from iOS devices by Apple (and a seeming inability for Adobe to get Flash running efficiently on low-powered mobile devices), web designers and developers are also turning away from Flash and toward standards-based animation and interactivity created with HTML5, CSS3, and JavaScript.

Adobe didn't completely abandon the industry's once-stalwart animation standard. Diehard Flash users were put back on partial life support with the introduction of a standalone AIR app named Wallaby, which allows you to convert FLA files to HTML-based animations. Unfortunately, the current iteration of Wallaby can't convert every type of Flash component or action, and works best with simple animations.

Another solution to this dilemma is Adobe's Flash Professional CS6 Toolkit for CreateJS. This extension installs directly into Flash, giving users the ability to export assets and animations to JavaScript using the open source CreateJS framework. The result is nicely formatted, readable, editable JavaScript code that can jump-start the process of creating expressive HTML5-based content. But neither Wallaby nor the Toolkit for CreateJS is a complete solution, especially for average web designers or non-coders. That's where Edge Animate comes in.

4. Draw an Object.

Let's start by creating and animating a simple object. Edge Animate provides three drawing tools: Rectangle, Rounded-rectangle, and Ellipse. Select the Ellipse tool, and draw a circle approximately one inch in diameter in the upper left corner of the Stage. Hold the Shift key as you draw to force the ellipse to be a perfect circle (Figure 4).
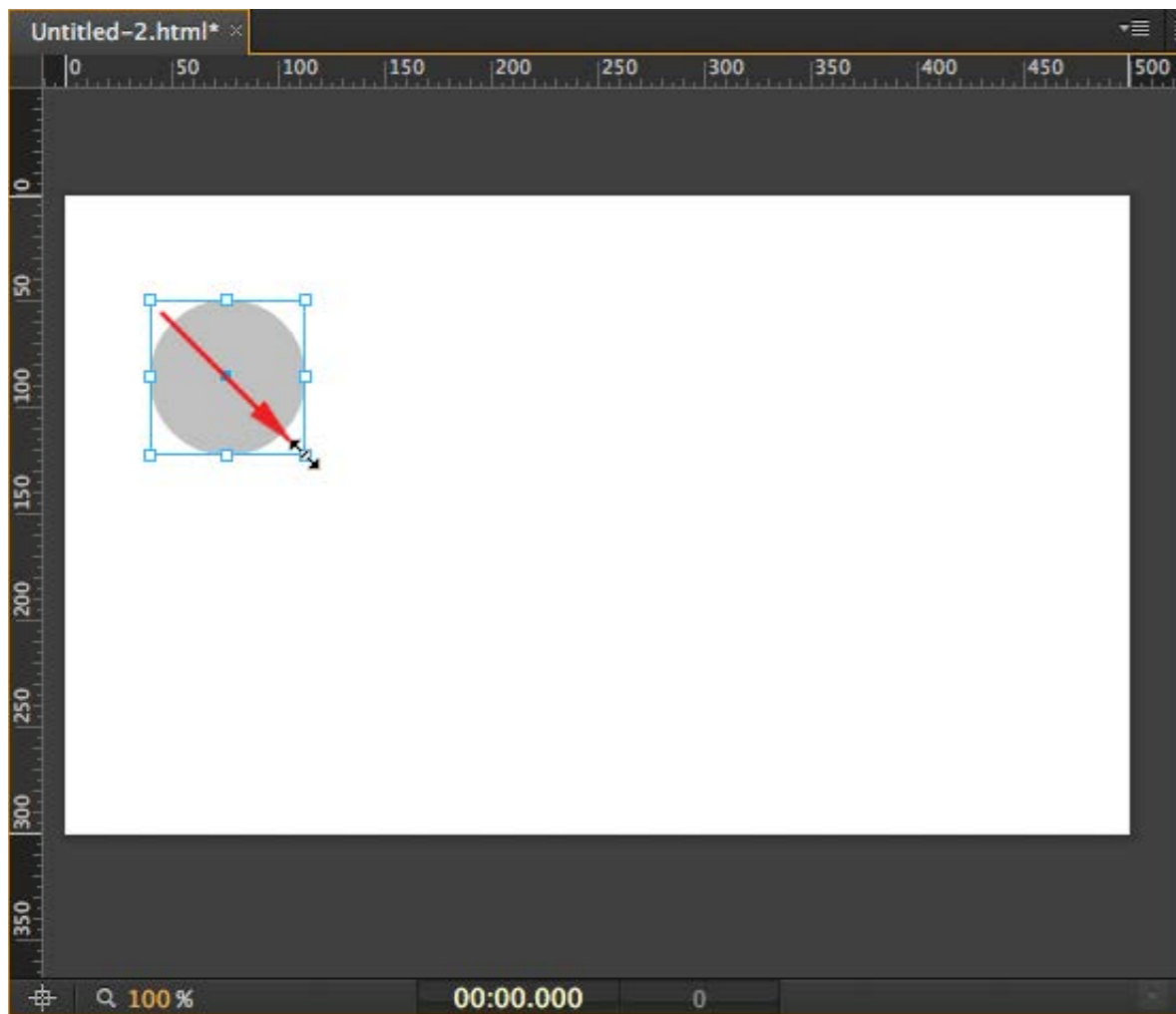
A circle appears on the Stage. If this is the first time you have used the drawing tools, the object should appear in a neutral gray color. Otherwise, Edge Animate may use the last color selected.

Although it looks like a circle, the objects created by Edge Animate's drawing tools are actually HTML `<div>` elements formatted by CSS3. The program enables you to change their size, position, color, and even shape, and then manipulate these specifications in real time to produce both animation and interactivity for your web applications. To move the circle across the Stage, we first have to establish its starting position.

Figure 4: Drag with the Ellipse tool to draw a circle

5. Set a Keyframe

In the Properties panel to the left of the Stage, click the **Add Keyframe for Left** button.
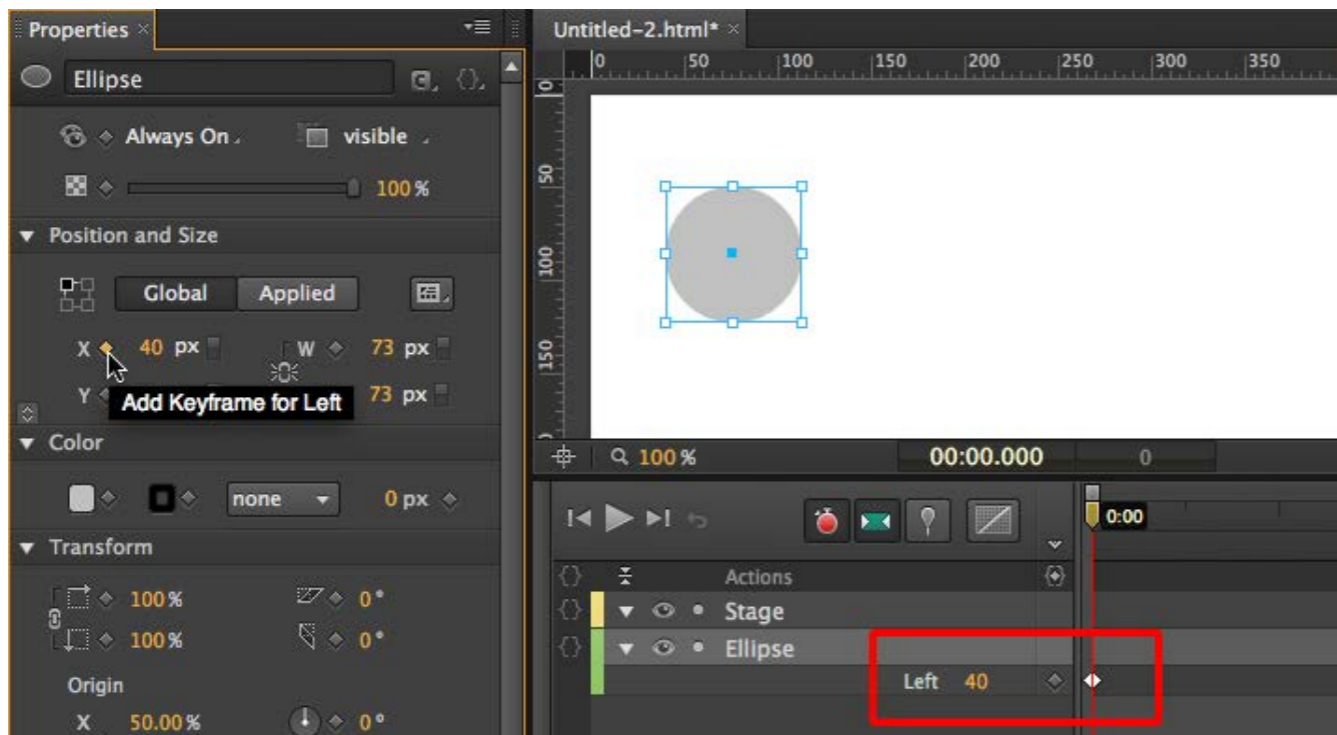
A keyframe for Left (X-axis) is added to the Timeline at zero (0:00.00) seconds. In this case we intend to move the circle only horizontally, so there's no need to create an equivalent keyframe for the Y-axis (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Setting a keyframe in the Properties panel

6. Enable Options

Before you do anything else, make sure the **Auto-Keyframe** and **Auto-Transition** modes are enabled in the area between the timeline and the Stage (Figure 6).
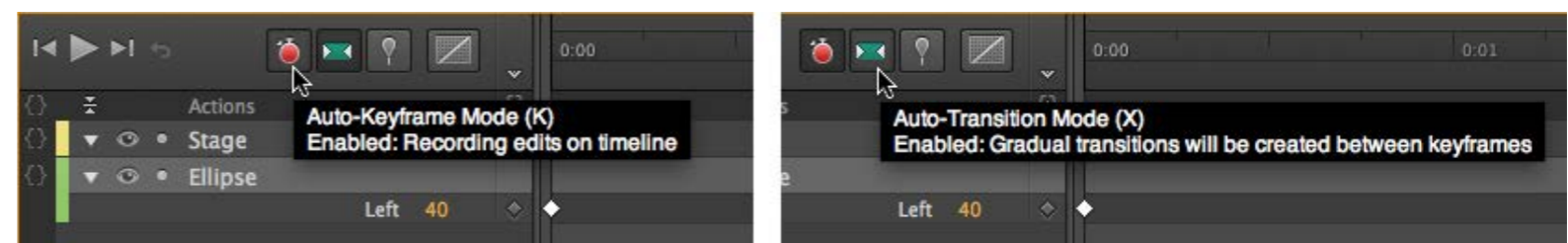

Figure 6: Enabling Auto-Keyframe and Auto-Transition options

7. Move the Object

Move the playhead to 00:02.00 seconds in the timeline area. Then drag the ellipse to the right side of the Stage, holding the Shift key as you drag it to enforce a horizontal-only movement (Figure 7).
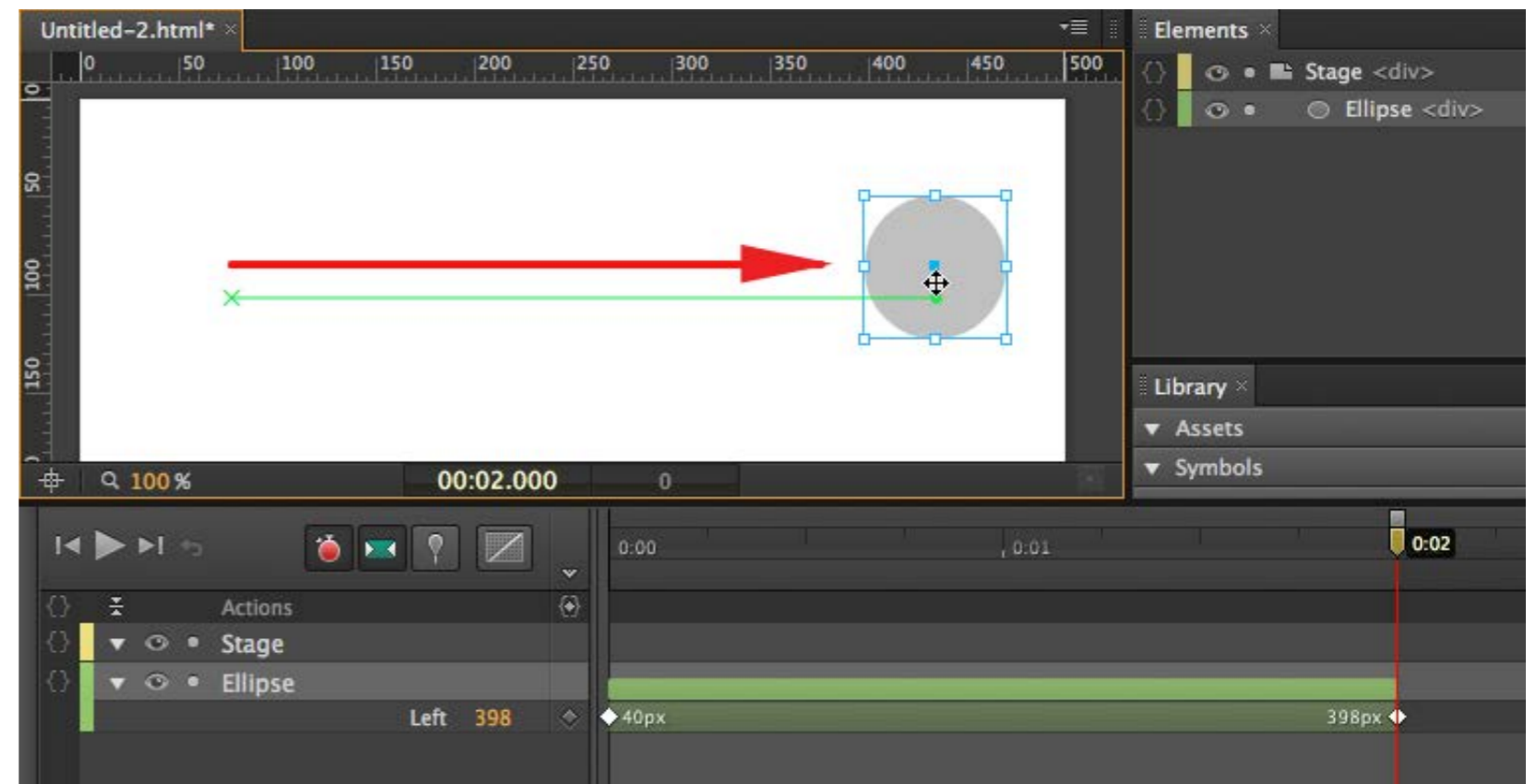

Figure 7: Drag the ellipse to create a transition

A transition appears on the Timeline for Left. If you unintentionally move the element verti-cally (up or down), you'll see a keyframe for Top appear on the timeline, too. You can delete any extraneous keyframes by clicking on them and pressing the Delete key.

8. Preview the Animation

You can preview most simple animations within Edge Animate itself by simply pressing the spacebar. The animation will play, moving the circle across the Stage from left to right. I like to call this "front-to-back" animation, because you begin with the initial position of the element and then set the ending point. In the same vein, "back-to-front" animation establishes the ending point of the animation first and works backward from there. Depending on the needs of your animation, you can select the method that works best in each situation.

Along with movement, you can also alter the formatting of elements. If you can set an element property, you can animate it. For example, let's change the color of the circle.

9. Reset the Playhead

If necessary, select the circle on the Stage, and then move the playhead back to 00:00.00 seconds.

10. Add a Keyframe

Click **Add Keyframe for Background Color** in the Color section of the Properties panel (Figure 8).

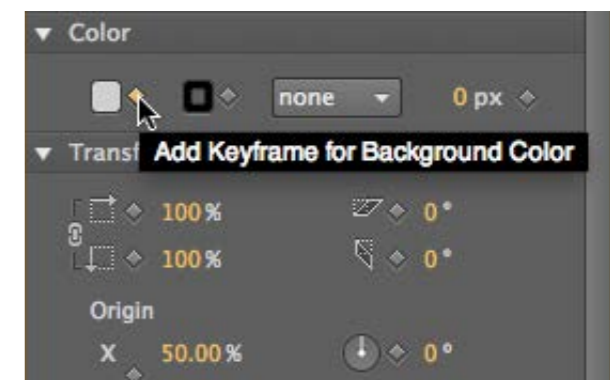The new keyframe establishes the starting point color for the circle.

Figure 8: Adding a keyframe for the color of the circle

11. Add a Background Color

Move the playhead to forward to 00:02.00 once again, click the Background Color picker, and select a bright red from the palette (Figure 9). (Well, if your object is already red, choose a different color.)
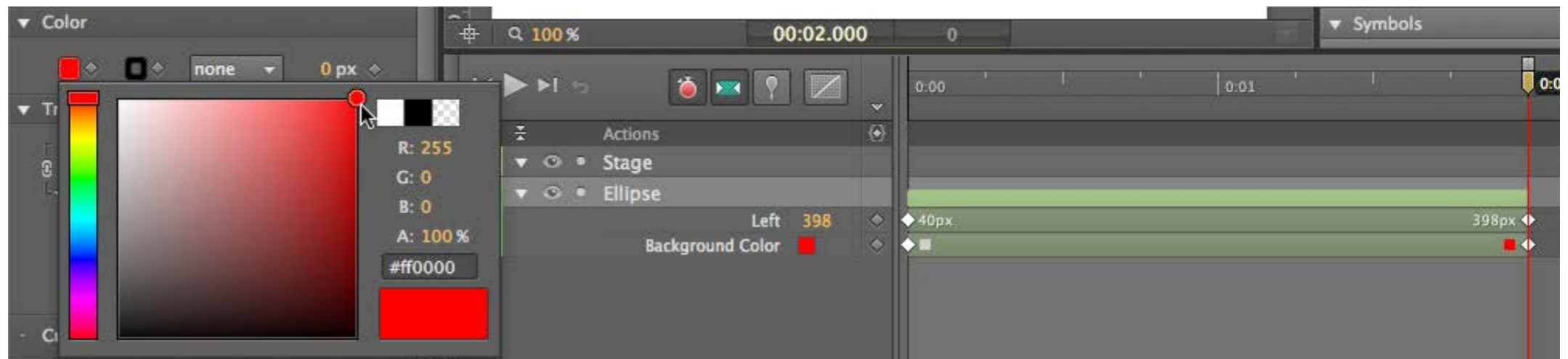

Figure 9: Selecting a background color for the ellipse

Another keyframe and transition appear on the Timeline, indicating that the color is now animated as well.

12. Preview the Animation

Press the spacebar to preview the animation. The circle moves from the left to right, and changes from gray to red.

So now you can see how easy it is to get started with animating… just about anything. What you've seen here is just a tiny glimpse of the possible animations and interactivity that you can create in Edge Animate. But the possibilities don't stop with just standalone animations. Edge Animate content can be inserted in any web page and is supported by

most modern browsers. You can even package your animations and insert them in applications created by Adobe's Digital Publishing Suite as well as the latest versions of electronic books, formatted for EPUB and iBooks Author. In other words, it's not just for the web—it's for everywhere your electronic pages may ever go.

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Jim Maivald is an Adobe Certified Expert (ACE) and Instructor (ACI) in InDesign, Acrobat, and Dreamweaver and is author of several books, including *A Designer's Guide to Adobe InDesign and XML* (Adobe Press, 2007), *Adobe Dreamweaver CS6 Classroom in a Book* (Adobe Press, 2012), and most recently, *Introduction to Adobe Edge Animate, version 1*. You can catch his video training titles on both lynda.com and TotalTraining.com. Based in the Midwest, Jim is a frequent guest on the conference circuit, speaking on a variety of topics concerning graphic design, print, web production, and workflow automation. When Jim is not lecturing or writing books and magazine articles, he runs a full-service graphic design and consulting firm that assists clients across the country and around the world to develop efficient and cost-effective workflows in all aspects of print and web design. Contact Jim at info@desktopdesign.cc.