

DV500 Plus

- Pinnacle Systems, \$799
- DV Editing System

Score: 4.0 ◆◆◆◆

Pros

Inexpensive. Easy to use. Solid logging and capture tools. Bundled with Premiere 6.0.

Cons

Realtime effects only available in analog output—not supported through FireWire. No realtime chroma or luma keying.

Bottom Line

A robust and inexpensive DV editing solution. Works well in DV mode (even without realtime effects). Inclusion of Premiere 6.0 makes it a solid winner.

System Requirements

Windows 98, 98SE, NT, Me, or 2000; Pentium II 450MHz or faster compatible processor; 1x32-bit PCI 2.1 slot; 128MB RAM (196MB RAM for Windows 2000); 500MB hard disk; 4GB video hard disk (SCSI 2/UDMA-IDE); 16-bit display adapter with DirectDraw drivers; CD-ROM drive; sound card; and external video monitor.

BY CHRIS MANNERS



The DVTools interface. In this screenshot, one tape gallery is open, and a clip has been selected for viewing with the Device Control Window.

The Pinnacle Systems (www.pinnaclesys.com) DV500 Plus is a native DV video editing system that provides a 32-bit PCI video capture and output card, and a breakout box. Adobe Premiere 6.0 is bundled with the package as an editing solution. Getting the whole system up and running was relatively easy—the card installed into a dual-processor IBM IntelliStation in a straightforward manner. The software drivers proved to be a slightly complicated proposition: The test machine already had a copy of Premiere 6.0 installed, and the drivers didn't want to detect it properly. Once the existing version of the program had been removed and replaced with the copy Pinnacle Systems provided, the drivers and all

the software installed without a hitch.

The DV500 Plus features digital and analog I/O, with two FireWire connectors directly on the back of the card. The analog connections are provided by the external breakout box, which includes connections for composite video (RCA), S-Video, and stereo RCA audio. The breakout box comes with 10 feet of cabling, making it suitable for a variety of studio setups.

Capture and realtime features

While the DV500 can be used with Premiere's capture tools, Pinnacle Systems provides DVTools, a standalone application that's a robust system for logging and capturing clips. DVTools can scan DV

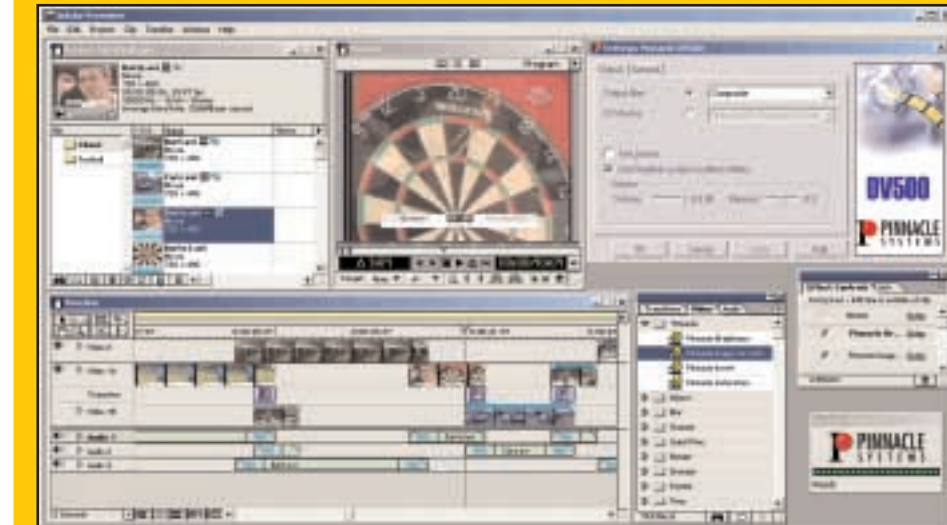
tapes, store clip locations, display individual clips, edit clip in- and out-points, and reorder clips. Tapes are scanned and logged in realtime as the tape is played back at normal speed. When you scan a new tape, you're prompted to name the new clip for future reference. Other clip-identification aids include the timecode location and a thumbnail of the first frame of each clip. Once scanning is complete, the ▶

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software creates a visual gallery with thumbnails for each clip. From the gallery view, clips can be chosen for digitizing and captured to disk as AVI files. These galleries can be saved and appended, and new galleries can be created for each tape. Because DVTools features device control, clips can be viewed directly from the gallery—the program will automatically find the start of a clip, which then can be trimmed with the DV Device Controller before capture to disk. It can also capture single frames, and it provides a straightforward print-to-tape feature.

InstantVideo is Pinnacle's name for its realtime system, and it's a playback plug-in for Premiere with its own menu. The main feature of the playback system is that a number of video filters can be applied and previewed on an external monitor in realtime: brightness, contrast, saturation, invert, and image correction. In addition to these image filters, Pinnacle Systems provides a large number of realtime transitions (many of which duplicate those already found within Premiere), including cross dissolve, additive dissolve, the Iris group of transitions, and a variety of wipes. Among these wipes is Pinnacle's Alpha Magic FX plug-in. Essentially, this plug-in takes advantage of the existing Premiere gradient wipe transition by providing around 400 PNG bitmaps that can be used as an alpha channel for the wipe.

The small interface panel that includes the Pinnacle logo provides access to the InstantVideo menu for device control and includes a visual indicator to show whether a composition needs to be rendered before playback. The small filmstrip below the logo has three states: green indicates the



project can be played back in its entirety in realtime; green and red indicate that portions can be played back in realtime; and red indicates that the entire project must be rendered before it can be viewed. In addition to the realtime video options, the solution also provides a realtime multitrack audio mixer with VU meters and pan and volume controls.

The package is also bundled with other software goodies, including Title Deko, a useful addition that's more robust than the regular titling tools that come with Premiere. Title Deko creates titles that can be superimposed over video and previewed in realtime. Another plug-in, Hollywood FX Copper, is also included to provide 3D transitions and effects with basic control over flight direction, as well as lighting and shadows. These 3D transitions, however, must be rendered prior to viewing.

One drawback of the system is that the realtime effects are only available if your system is set up to output and view your clips through the analog output connectors. During output to a DV device, the realtime effects are not available. If you're working on a project you plan to output to a DV device, it's possible to preview in realtime on an analog device and

then reconnect the FireWire device for final output, but this is a slightly cumbersome workaround. That said, the realtime effects are effective for quickly developing a project without waiting to view rendered sequences.

The output options provided by the DV500 are relatively robust. It exports MPEG-2, MPEG-1, MP3, RealMedia, and Windows Media file types, and it also provides more standard QuickTime and AVI support. The MPEG-2 export feature supports the 16:9 aspect ratio for CD and DVD authoring, and the system includes realtime Web streaming directly from Premiere's timeline. To round out the delivery options, Pinnacle System's Impression CD-Pro for CD-R and DVD authoring is also included.

Conclusions

While the general experience of working with the DV500 Plus was very positive, some anomalies occurred during testing. Lags in audio sync happened while working in DV mode through the FireWire connection: The audio from the computer speakers substantially lagged behind the audio monitored by the external NTSC system, which was correctly in sync

The InstantVideo Preferences window is open on the right. The Pinnacle video effects are visible, as well as the green filmstrip under the Pinnacle logo. The filmstrip is indicating the project doesn't need rendering for realtime playback.

with the video. It was simple enough to turn off the computer speakers, but this sync problem was nonetheless disconcerting. In analog mode, everything worked fine.

The DV500 Plus is an inexpensive and robust DV FireWire solution for Windows-based machines. While the realtime playback features make it simple to quickly move through a project, the DVTools are a useful addition to the tools provided by Premiere. With its extensive list of supported export formats, the DV500 Plus covers all the bases. And don't forget the \$799 price tag includes both the card and Premiere 6.0. ■

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