



Figure 1—MoviePack's interface: Canvas; Browser; Sound Monitor; Timeline; Preview; Monitor; Video Control; and the Effect Box palettes are all visible. Effects have been applied to video track 2 and are displayed in the Effect Box. Window layout options would help reduce this busy screen.

parameters—all to no avail. Using different versions of the software didn't have any effect on the audio issue.

I tested with a variety of other systems to ensure the problem didn't reside in my external hardware, and I tried a slew of tapes to make sure my media was in good shape. Nonetheless, the problem continued. I was even more confused when an earlier version of the program (MoviePack 3.0) continued to operate correctly on my system.

Tech support workers were understandably confused, particularly after seeing the application work on a variety of systems at DV Expo in December 2001. My suggestion to potential purchasers is to obtain a demo copy of the program to ensure that it will function on your system.

Using the program

Capturing clips is simple. The program supports a variety of capture protocols, including FireWire and analog AVI capture. A panel at the head of the screen includes Storyboard, Capture, Compose (canvas), and Finish (render)

MoviePack eXtreme 4.0

Video Editing and Compositing Tool • AIST, \$1299

BY CHRIS MANNERS

MoviePack eXtreme 4.0, manufactured by the German software company AIST (www.aistinc.com), provides many of the features of a motion graphics program and a video editing application. It includes the ability to preview multiple layers in realtime, without rendering and without a special acceleration card. What's also different is the fact that the realtime preview is scalable to full-screen display when you use an OpenGL graphics card, and the preview is viewable on an external monitor.

I'm rarely stymied by a program. Usually problems can be resolved with the help of tech support, but not in this case. Although MoviePack eXtreme 4.0 installed easily on my off-the-shelf IBM Intellistation Z-Pro (with an Intergraph Intense 3D 16MB graphics card and 256MB RAM), I quickly discovered that after capturing via FireWire from a Sony miniDV player, the audio wouldn't play back from the timeline or play back to tape. I was more confused when I opened the

captured file in another video NLE (Adobe Premiere) and the audio track was intact and audible. MoviePack

eXtreme even rendered out QuickTime files that could be opened with the QuickTime Player and played back with the audio without a problem.

Numerous calls to AIST's tech support group provided a plethora of fixes: performing a complete, clean reinstall after editing the Windows registry; reinstalling audio drivers and the Windows Media Player; upgrading my system with Windows 2000 Service Pack 2; changing the program's capture and playback settings; and fussing around with other system

Score: 1.5 ◆◆

Pros

Helpful tech support. Fast preview capabilities.

Cons

Audio preview doesn't work, making the program essentially unusable. Transfer modes aren't easy to apply. Busy interface is cluttered.

Bottom Line

Glitches mar an application that otherwise might provide a solid, entry-level path to editing FireWire video on a Windows system. Try a free demo to ensure it works correctly on your system.

System Requirements

Pentium III 400MHz or compatible processor with MMX; Windows 98SE, NT 4.0(SP5), Me, 2000 Pro, XP; 64MB RAM; OpenGL- or Direct3D-capable graphics card.

tabs (see **Figure 1**). By default, the Storyboard takes precedence, while you can set up capture parameters and initiate the procedure with the Capture tab. The program supports batch capture and batch list features, but it doesn't include EDL export or import. The tape analysis feature automatically scans DV tapes to digitize into separate shots (see **Figure 2**).

The program's interface is full. It's possible to have as many as eight windows open: the Canvas; Browser; Sound

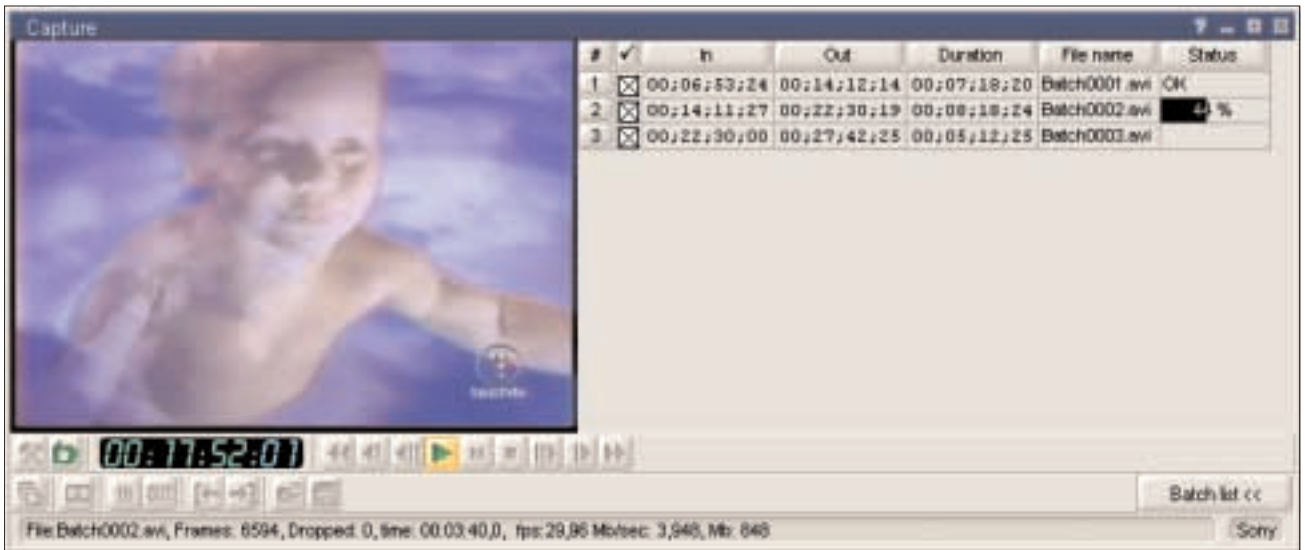


Figure 2—The Batch Capture window. The image window displays the video as it is captured. The first clip in the list has been recorded to disk, and 44 percent of the second clip has already been captured.

Monitor; Timeline; Preview; Monitor; Video Control; and Effect Box.

The interface is customizable and can change from docked panels to a series of floating palettes. The interface is provided with a variety of UI skins. With a screen this cluttered, it would be useful if the program was provided with a few standard window layout options. After a month working with the software and digging through manuals, I couldn't find support for dual monitors, but AIST claims dual monitors work with MoviePack.

Once video has been captured, the editing process is typical of most NLEs: If you drag a file from the Browser window onto the Timeline, it appears on the Canvas. By moving the blue or red marker circles that represent the left and right Monitor windows, the track can be viewed and in- and out-points can be set. Once you trim a clip, changes are reflected in the Timeline. Although clips can be spilled and trimmed in the Monitor window, they can also be adjusted in the Timeline by using the Trim tool, or the Ripple, Slip, Slide, and Stretch tools.

Intelligent rendering enables rendered video and film clips to be played directly from the Timeline and captured directly back to tape. If you make changes to a project, only the modified frames are re-rendered.

The timeline defaults to three video tracks and one audio track. Video tracks A and B are separated by a transition track, and track 1 is above them. It is possible to add an unlimited number of

additional video tracks to the timeline by dragging a file from the browser onto an existing numbered video track.

You can save unrendered projects as scenes that you can then pull into a new composition. This is conceptually similar to precomposing an animation in Adobe After Effects. Lights and cameras appear on the timeline, but the cameras really are zooming and cropping tools, and the lights are strictly two dimensional.

You can directly position, scale, rotate, and add motion to clips in the Canvas. However, the program lacks strong tools to smooth out the motion. There are no built-in ease-in and ease-out tools. Motion is jerky and animations start and stop abruptly. There are other features, including a tilting component, but some more elements are missing that would really bring this product up to spec. For example, it would be great to be able to view the keyframes for more than one video track at a time.

Effects and compositing

MoviePack has a large set of effects and transitions that can be applied to video tracks. They're grouped in sets and are accessed only through the Browser window. Within these groups are standard sets that include stylize, glow, artistic, and blur effects, as well as wipes, rolls, and distortion transitions. What's notable about this grouping is that it also includes the alpha keying compositing effects, the chroma keying capabilities, and the transfer mode tools.

Once you've applied an effect to a track, it appears in the Effects Box, where you can make changes and tweaks. Scrubbing along the timeline to different points and changing parameters creates keyframes. Sometimes, though, specific effects are hard to find—it can take some hunting through the folders in the Browser window to find the one you're looking for.

MoviePack's color keying capabilities are limited in comparison with reigning

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compositors because only four types are provided: a linear RGB keyer, a differential keyer, a chroma keyer, and an "advanced" keyer. The chroma keyer provides the ability to select a specific bluescreen or greenscreen color with an eyedropper, and then adjust that key using tools that include a matte choker, a chunky choker, and a gamma adjustment tool to tweak the final outcome of the generated mask. The linear RGB and differential keyers

work in much the same way, providing tools to soften and either contract or expand the generated mask.

Compositing video tracks together using transfer modes is more tricky. Instead of stacking video clips in the timeline and then deciding how they interact, you add a single clip to the timeline and then apply the Image Arithmetic effect. Then you specify the kind of file or effect and select the specific movie clip on which you want to perform the operation. Once you take this step, you can choose the transfer mode via which two clips interact: add, subtract, multiply, difference, and so forth. This technique makes it difficult to mix more than two clips; and, for the two clips to provide the right effect, they must be exactly the same duration.

MoviePack eXtreme has some keyframe capabilities. Whenever an object is added to the timeline, it is simultaneously added to the Timegraph, where two keyframes are automatically generated at the beginning and the ending of the object's duration. Creating a new keyframe is as simple as dragging the

If you're working with synced keyframes over multiple video layers, you must open the Timegraph for each individual object to make changes to each track.

preview slider to the appropriate moment and then changing parameters. However, the Timegraph only shows one element at a time.

If you're working with synced keyframes over multiple video layers, you must open the Timegraph for each individual object to make changes to each track. The program supports Bezier curve adjustments, but these soon become

tedious. Again, better controls for keyframe adjustment would help. There are no velocity graphs or the ability to ease in and out of effects and transformations.

Conclusion

MoviePack eXtreme 4.0 could be a strong, entry-level NLE, but the fact that audio playback wouldn't work under any circumstances for my common configuration makes it hard to give this program a good recommendation. Although it provides capabilities not found in most standard video editing applications, it still doesn't meet the high standard required to replace or supplant the leading motion graphics packages.

In fact, the glitches are a shame because the application otherwise provides a solid way to edit video captured via FireWire on a Windows system. With this program, you should test a demo version on your system before you shell out your hard-earned cash. ■

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