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The camera never lying went out with Stalin deciding Trotsky wasn't his mate anymore and wanting him out of the wedding photos. In politics, entertainment and fashion, believing what you see is almost 100 years out of date.

These days, though, we want the camera to lie to us. We want our models and celebrities to be glossier and sexier than they really are. We don't want the best photography can offer – we want a digitally enhanced version of how the world *should* be: sans wrinkles, blemishes, and flabby abs.

As creatives, it's our job to build this fantasy for the public. We turn models into the perfect people that anyone can aspire to be if only they buy the product shown on-screen now.

Everyone's doing it now though, so you've got to do it better. But don't push it too far – remember Kate Winslet on the cover of *GQ*. Perfection is hard, though not unattainable. Turn to page 34 to learn more.

TEAM DIGIT



contents september

ISSUE 91



cover illustration
by Sarah Howell, www.debutart.com,
Photographer Chris Lane



reviews

- 80** Alias Maya 7
- 84** Tivity Xtivity
- 87** JVC Professional
GY-HD100E
- 88** El Technology Group
EIAS 6.0
- 90** Ikivo Animator 1.1
- 93** Alias Sketchbook 2
- 94** Vertus Fluid Mask

news

- 6** **Adobe shows design talent** Winners of the fifth Adobe Design Achievement Awards are announced
- 8** **Microsoft in design move:** A second public beta of Acrylic looks to take on Adobe, Macromedia, and Corel
- 10** **Ladytron looks to Destroy:** Absolute posts the cooler-than-thou group's latest, chilly promo
- 12** **Microsoft Vista FX:** Graphics underpins the new OS
- 14** **Events:** The only guide you'll need to creative events
- 16** **3DS Max 8 adds character:** Autodesk boosts the 3D suite's character animation and asset management tools

- 17** **Softimage|XSI takes aim at Maya users:** Version 5.0 adds 64-bit support, map generation and more
- 18** **Panasonic debuts Lumix camera trio:** An 8mp SLR-type, an 8.4mp compact and a pocket-sized 6mp unit
- 20** **Studio 8 adds Flash and Dreamweaver:** Upgraded suite offers new versions of Macromedia's Web tools
- 22** **Stock:** feast your eyes on the latest stock image collections and fonts to aid your creative work
- 26** **Pulse:** quirky gadgets, essential exhibitions, and cool toys to while away your down time

features

34 ■ PROFESSIONAL RETOUCHING

A behind-the-scenes guide to the dos and don'ts of improving photos for magazines and adverts

42 ■ FINDING CREATIVE ZING

Stuck for an inspired solution to a brief? Top creative talents tell you how to turn a good idea into a great one

48 ■ BRINGING THE DEAD TO LIFE

Creating a *Land of the Dead* for zombie-master George A Romero

52 ■ AARDMAN MAKES THE FRUBES FRUITY

The animators take on full 3D for the Yoplait campaign

55 ■ HIBERNATION EMERGES

Coldplay *Trouble* director John William's latest short

59 ■ ORCHIDS FOR THE WHITE STRIPES

Kroma's work on the promo for duo's *Blue Orchid* single

60 ■ INSIGHT: AIRSIDE

Life is sweet for the studio creating campaigns for clients including Coke, Orange, and Lemon Jelly

64 ■ INTERVIEW: STORM THORGERSON

Top creator of album covers from Pink Floyd to Muse profiled

96 ■ PHOTOGRAPHY IN B&W

A masterclass on making the most of B&W photos

100 ■ BRING IT TOGETHER

Which video production suite works together the best?

106 ■ LARGE-FORMAT INKJET PRINTERS

Create and sell gallery-quality prints using the latest tools

ONLINE: every week at www.digitmag.co.uk

Powerful cameras, lower prices

How an influx of low-cost digital SLR cameras is shaking up the market

How to create a 'vodcast'

Podcasting is so last month. We tell you how to take video blogs to the masses

See your photos better

An introduction to colour calibration for photographers and other non-techies

Better audio burning

Create top-notch audio CDs and DVDs with our guide to the best burning tools

regulars

29 ■ Matthew Bath: rational and irrational opinions on the design industry

30 ■ Letters: speak, attack, defend, and rant – creative communication ahead

32 ■ Badges: small, flat, round surfaces begging for the best in design on them

68 ■ Subscriptions: Digit delivered to your doorstep every month. What could be better?

70 ■ Showcase: the cream of your creative work as readers show off

113 ■ Buyers Guide: the industry's biggest guide to creative products

123 ■ Back issues: hole in your Digit collection? Fill it here

127 ■ Next month: find out what's in store

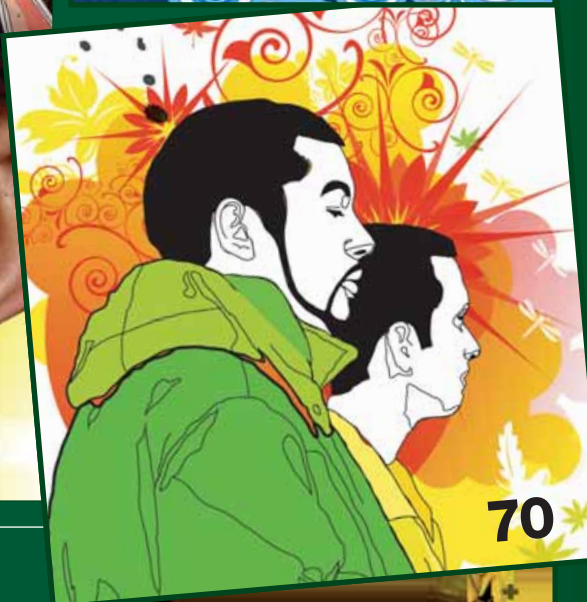
128 ■ CD pages: complete guide to this month's 50 stock images and showcase



48



42



70



106



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creative

Adobe shows design talent

Adobe has revealed the winners of its global student design competition – shown here for the first time.

Adobe has revealed the winners of the fifth annual Adobe Design Achievement Awards – a contest geared towards honouring talented student graphic designers, digital filmmakers, photographers, illustrators, and computer artists – according to the company. Adobe says that the competition attracted over 1,500 entries, with students from Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland, the UK, and the US competing using Adobe's creative software products.

"The Adobe Design Achievement Awards recognizes the talents of future creative professionals from around the world," said Melissa Dyrda, senior vice president of corporate marketing and communications at Adobe. "As we celebrate the programme's fifth year, this competition continues to serve as a powerful way to recognize a new generation of creative professionals, showcase remarkable student work, and kick start some promising young careers."

Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk



12



Creative winners

- 1-2 Sophie Clements (time-based media).
- 3-4 Andreas Gaschka (broadcast design).
- 5 Chean Wei Law (self expression).
- 6-8 Yibi Hu (animation).
- 9 Roxane Zargham (print).
- 10 Hildegard Brinkel (environmental design).
- 11-12 Jeff Krichmar (interactive).
- 13 Micah Ganske (digital photography).
- 14 Klaas Neumann (digital illustration).



6 DIGIT



11



Sophie Clements



Klaas Newmann



Nibs

20th Century goes Blu-ray

Perhaps it's not a huge surprise, since filmmaker Twentieth Century Fox has been sitting on the Blu-Ray Disc Association board since last October, but the company has formally announced that its home entertainment subsidiary will release new content on the Blu-Ray disc format.



BBC touts for hot Web talent

The BBC is inviting online designers to enter a competition to create new Internet-enabled ways of using TV and radio schedules. Part of an ongoing series of UK noncommercial initiatives under the backstage.bbc.co.uk umbrella, the competition ask entrants to take the provided seven-day listings information, in a format called TV Anytime, and present them in innovative ways. Suggestions include combining schedules with alerts, SMS, and email broadcasts. The winner of the competition will receive a rackmount server and will discuss their idea with the BBC. Backstage, <http://backstage.bbc.co.uk/>



HP to buy Scitex Vision

HP has announced that it has signed an agreement to buy substantially all of the assets of Scitex Vision, a market leader in super-wide digital printing, for \$230 million. The purchase expands HP's lead in large-format printing into the industrial super-wide category. www.hp.com



Xbox boosts MS revenue

Microsoft posted solid growth for its fiscal fourth quarter 2005. Revenue for the quarter ended June 30 was \$10.2 billion, a nine per cent increase over the same period last year. Strong sales of the vendor's Xbox electronic game console contributed to 22 per cent growth for its entertainment arm.



Avid completes Pinnacle capture

Avid has announced that its acquisition of old video technology rival Pinnacle has been completed, following European Commission clearance in August.

"The completion of this acquisition immediately strengthens Avid's ability to serve the industries that make, manage and move media," said David Krall, Avid's president and CEO. "Broadcasters who are transitioning from analog to all-digital production will now have immediate access to a wider selection of capabilities from Avid, and in the months ahead, they'll experience tighter interoperability between Pinnacle's broadcast and Avid's production environments."



technology

Microsoft in design move

Microsoft in August posted the second CTP (community technology preview) of its Acrylic design tool, adding support for XAML (Extensible Application Markup Language) to benefit users of the planned Windows Vista OS. Microsoft is positioning Acrylic as a graphic-design tool that can both compete with and complement offerings from companies such as Adobe, Macromedia, and Corel.

"Acrylic is particularly good at graphics that have a very artistic visual treatment, making images that look like they were drawn with paint or acrylic or chalk," said Forest Key, group product manager in the Microsoft developer tools division.

For example, an Acrylic file featuring organic chalk or watercolour illustrations could be used with a high-end printing product such as Adobe InDesign, Key said. Products such as Macromedia Fireworks, meanwhile, have some overlap with Acrylic.

"I think [Acrylic is] going to give the Adobe products a run for their money," said Kerry Bodine, senior analyst at Forrester Research. "It's just got a lot of new features that we haven't seen before in Photoshop or Illustrator." Acrylic's ability to combine pixel- and vector-based images gives it an edge in flexibility, Bodine said. "Acrylic combines both of these in the same tool."

A CTP enables users at large to try out a specific technology. The initial CTP in June was downloaded 200,000 times, according to Microsoft, which has not yet announced final release dates or pricing for Acrylic.

Acrylic is based on the Creature House Expression technology, which Microsoft acquired in 2003. It can import a range of popular graphics formats.

Microsoft Acrylic, www.microsoft.com/products/expression/

Manga game for a laugh

A Web site has been launched as a promo for a new episode of Manga's *Ghost In The Shell Stand Alone Complex*. Based around a hacker called the Laughing Man, the site has a hacking game. The site includes art by Terrortag – the first UK designer to work with IG – the production house behind *Stand Alone Complex*. laughingman.tv



competitions Creative contests for design winners



ADCANDY, the world's first virtual ad agency is holding an unofficial online competition to create an integrated global campaign for the Coke brand. The competition – which isn't sponsored by Coke – runs until October 31, with a number of prizes on offer. Adcandy says it is dedicated to the art of advertising, allowing designers from all walks to enter creative pitches reserved for brand agencies.

Adcandy, www.adcandy.com



WITH A PRIZE FUND worth over £60,000, the Travel Photographer of the Year 2005 is open for entries. Started in 2003 by photographer Chris Coe, it aims to showcase the best in travel photography and raise the profile of travel photography and travel photographers. The 2005 edition includes categories such as human spirit; travellers' tales; and the natural world.

Travel Photographer 2005, www.tpoty.com



LIGHT HOUSE MEDIA Centre, Wolverhampton, is calling for animators to submit work to Flip, the West Midlands' animation festival, now in its second year. Flip celebrates animation in all its guises with showcases of work, industry talks and events, workshops and screenings and aims to raise the profile of animation in the region. It runs in late October, and the deadline for entries is October 7, 2005.

Light House Media, www.light-house.co.uk



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MEET THEM AND BEAT THEM

Nibs

Mac OS X in Intel drama

Instructions on how to install Apple's Mac OS X operating system on any PC with a chip from Intel or AMD have surfaced online – and could pose a problem for Apple. The company, which is moving to Intel chips, is aiming to lock the OS to its Mac products. Details are at www.xplodnet.com

**First ProHD cameras roll**

The first film in the world to be shot with two JVC GY-HD101E ProHD cameras is now in production. The film entitled *Reality Check* stars Paul Mercurio (lead actor of Australian film, *Strictly Ballroom*) and Dieter Brenmar (actor in Australian television drama, *Home and Away*).

**Soho Shorts reel winners**

The seventh Rushes Soho Shorts Awards Night was held in August at The CC Club, in London's Piccadilly. The Rushes Soho Short Film Festival is a week long festival, and the celebrity-packed awards ceremony was hosted by Terry Christian. Winners can be found at sohoshorts.com

**Absolute Ladytron effect**

Post house Absolute has created effects for the latest music video by electro foursome Ladytron, *Destroy*. The video promo was directed by Exposure's Adam Bartley. The promo complements that band's emotionally detached sound by placing the band in a chilly, self-contained world of no escape. The band members attempt to make their way through this landscape, but are constantly rebuffed by ice and snow blown by hills shaped like each member's face.

Absolute created two types of snow: a realistic one matted from stock footage and a stylized one to fit with the feel of the promo, which included using pictures of the moon as snowflakes by putting them through a particle submitter. It composited bluescreen footage of the band with the sets and elements. This was complicated by fast camera moves that blurred edges, making tracking difficult. Absolute ended up buying The Pixel Farm's PF Track software to accomplish the task.

BBC scores for Belgium

BBC Broadcast has created a brand for all Belgian national football television coverage. The football brand, which launched in early August, is broadcast by three broadcasters across five channels. Belgacom purchased the rights to broadcast Belgian national football as part of its move into broadcasting and will be streaming matches on its newly launched channel, 11, which is available through Belgacom TV. Belgacom Skynet has sublicensed some rights to Belgian public service broadcasters VRT (Flemish-speaking) and RTBF (French-speaking), enabling them to cover Belgian national football both through live match broadcasts as well as magazine programmes.

At the centre of the visual brand is the distinctive Belgian white football, on which each channel or programme can stamp their logo. According to BBC Broadcast, the ball embodies the passion and excitement involved in the game and in the title sequence expands out like an atom to reveal highlight clips from matches, which are suspended in the air surrounded by the ball's hexagons. Coverage of Belgian national football will air on Belgacom Skynet's channel, 11; VRT channels, één and Canvas.

**Coffee, cake, and kink**

A coffee house that combines home baking with an interest in S&M isn't exactly Starbucks, and it's one of the more unusual clients that post house Absolute has worked for. Created by appropriately-named production house Love, the commercial combines B&W S&M imagery, which uses its lack of colour to hide anything too disturbing, with recipe ideas. These are dictated in a Delia Smith-type voice, with the emphasis very much on words such as 'beat' and 'whip'. The commercial is more complicated than it seems, including over 150 edit points and obscuring of any parts of footage that wouldn't get past the BACC.

**technology****Softimage's Robot face**

Avid has shown Softimage|Face Robot at the Siggraph show in Los Angeles. The company won't confirm that it's destined for a future release of XSI or a separate plug-in. Face Robot was created in tandem with Blur Studio, the animation studio behind the Oscar-nominated short film, *Gopher Broke*.

Avid claims that the software is the first to allow artists to achieve realistic, lifelike facial animation for high-end film, post and games

projects. It's a new computer model of facial soft tissue that mimics the range of emotions portrayed by the human face.

Softimage|Face Robot supports both keyframe animation and motion capture, which are the main two ways of creating 'digital acting'. Avid says that the soft tissue model at the core of the technology removes the need to manually create dozens or even hundreds of 3D shapes for different facial expressions.

Softimage, www.softimage.com





Gorillaz in passionate *Dare*

Passion Pictures and the Mill have created the latest music promo for cartoon band Gorillaz. *Dare* was recently described by the NME as an electronic pop masterpiece, and features Shaun Ryder dueting with regular singer Noodle voiced by Damon Albarn.

The video is set in the cartoon world of the band, where Noodle brings the disembodied head of Ryder to life and then dances while the floating head sings.

Ryder was filmed in a neck brace, which became part of his 50's sci-fi style 'head-holder' against a blue screen. The rest of the sets were created in CG, while all of the characters – bar Ryder – were animated in 2D to fit co-creator Jamie Hewlett's style.

The sets were modelled and textured in LightWave by Passion Pictures. As with previous Gorillaz videos, scenes are given preliminary lighting to create atmosphere in the scenes. The majority of the 2D, CG and live action elements were composited in house at Passion Pictures using After Effects. The Mill composited the video's front and end sections, and for graded the video in Flame.

Passion Pictures, www.passion-pictures.com

The Mill, www.the-mill.com

CafeFX helps the Fantastic Four to cinematic victory



Summer blockbuster *Fantastic Four* saw the villain of the piece constrained in the climactic scene by a stretched Mr Fantastic, with effects from CafeFX. In the scene, Mr Fantastic stretches himself into a blanket shape, which falls over villain Dr Doom then twists around him binding him tightly. The 'blanket' then tightens, with Mr Fantastic's head and hands emerging from the front edge and Dr Doom struggling and shooting lightning while trying to escape. The sequence ends when The Thing pulls Mr Fantastic off and unwraps Dr Doom. The majority of Mr Fantastic's morphing was created by, Soho FX, so CafeFX has to ensure that its work matched that of the other house using Maya.

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Maya™ 7

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Image created by Mitsu Meier (www.3dartist.com)

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Extensis unplugs creative plug-ins

Creative plug-in maker Extensis has revealed it has sold its range of plug-ins to an independent software maker staffed by ex-Extensis employees. The products offloaded to onOne Software include pxl SmartScale, PhotoFrame, Intellihance Pro, Mask Pro, PhotoTools, and QX-Tools Pro. Extensis will continue to develop Portfolio, Suitcase, and Font Reserve.



Sony ramps up PS3 design tools

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc (SCEI) has promised better hardware and software tools to help designers make games for the company's upcoming PlayStation 3 games console, the company has pledged. SCEI will release two upgraded evaluation systems that will help designers accurately gauge how their games will perform on the console. The evaluation systems are versions of hardware made available for developers well ahead of the model that will go on sale. The nearer they are to the real thing, the easier it gets for developers to make games. The PlayStation 3, which won't be in shops until next year, will use a powerful processor called Cell and a graphics chip developed by SCEI and Nvidia to deliver very realistic graphics, according to SCEI.



Nibs

More Xbox games zoom

Microsoft has detailed more Xbox 360 games, as the company tries to avoid another console flop in Japan. The 360 is scheduled to launch before the end of this year. Headlining the game previews was Bizarre Creations's *Project Gotham Racing 3* by the Liverpool-based studio.



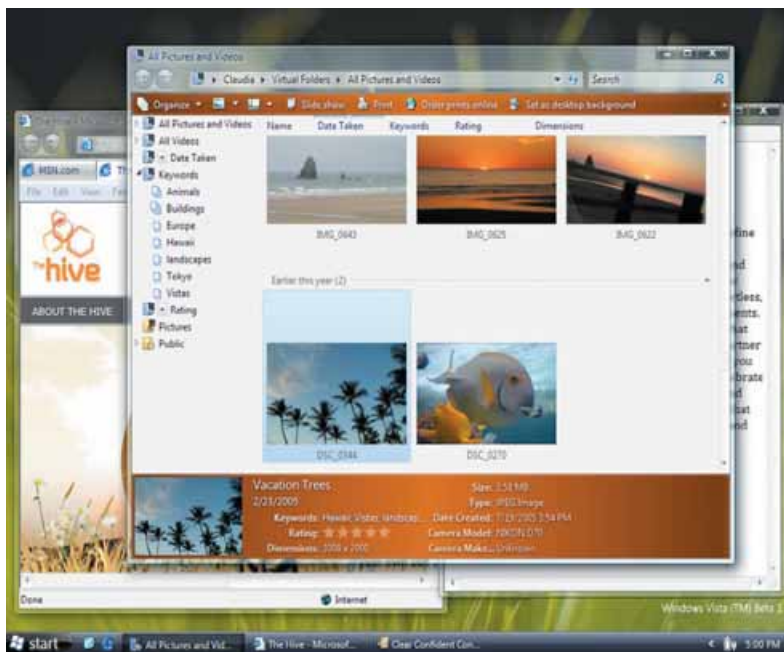
Top Banana is appealing

Top Banana has finalized a deal that will see it move to a new facility and expand its services. The Stourbridge-based company is to lease a 9,000ft studio in Broome, as well as acquiring Optical Image's equipment and client list. The move means it can offer studio and editing facilities to clients.



Weblogs are wooing rich

Did you know? There's good news for Web log publishers with aspirations of making money off their sites – compared to the average Internet user, visitors to Web logs, or blogs, tend to be younger and to belong to a wealthier household, a study has found.



technology

'Whizz-bang' FX in Microsoft Vista

Windows Vista has hit a major milestone with the release of Beta 1 code. Microsoft's new version of Windows, originally codenamed Longhorn, is accompanied by the release of the first beta of Internet Explorer 7.

Missing from Beta 1, though, are significant features such as a new version of Windows Media Player and support for tablet and Media Center PCs.

But, Beta 1 does mark the first public appearance of several technologies that Microsoft has been discussing at various developer and customer events over the past few years – and Digit took a sneak peek to see how it measures up for Windows PC-based designers.

People who load the OS will immediately be struck by the whizz-bang graphics of the Avalon display engine. Search is ubiquitous throughout the user interface. Every window has a small search field to the right of the address bar, and there's even a search window at the bottom of the Start menu. Most of these search fields are context-sensitive. For example, if you type in the name of an application in the search field

on the Start menu, you'll get a list of all matching executables, so you can avoid scrolling through the huge list you'd get by clicking on the All Programs button.

As before, Windows Explorer shows your folder system; but in addition to holding the folders you create, it comes prepopulated with a number of virtual folders that let you peruse documents by file metadata – information gathered by the file system – regardless of their actual location. For example, opening a virtual folder called Authors lets you check out all documents by specific authors, as identified in the file metadata. In another virtual folder, you can peruse documents according to keywords that you assign to files.

Internet Explorer 7, which integrates an RSS feed reader and such long-awaited features as tabbed browsing, is designed to prevent drive-by spyware installation. Other fundamentals in Windows Vista will include faster and more secure startup, improved user-mode, and an antiphishing filter, which will identify suspect sites based on their behaviour and will identify confirmed phishing sites.



Future uncertain for FreeHand?

Macromedia's impending merger with old rival Adobe may cast a shadow over its new suite of products, but the Flash maker remains upbeat about them. Jim Guerard, vice president of product management and marketing, told Digit that it was impossible to speculate how the Adobe deal would affect Macromedia's stable of products, but the company has made some shifts in the latest release. Macromedia FreeHand, the creative design tool for print and Web has been cut in Studio 8, being replaced with Contribute 3 and FlashPaper 2. "FreeHand continues to be an important and successful product for the company and we will continue to sell, support and maintain it as a standalone product," said Guerard. However, many pundits have commented that Guerard didn't specifically include "develop" in his talk - leading to speculation that FreeHand will be left to languish due to the Adobe merger.

Skillset gets inside pictures

Skillset's Inside Pictures, the film business training programme now funded by the Skillset Film Skills Fund, is accepting applications for its latest programme. Comprising three intensive one-week modules, Skillset's Inside Pictures takes place in London and Los Angeles between November 2005 and May 2006. Seminars, workshops and studio visits are hosted by some of the US and UK's most senior industry professionals and the programme covers all aspects of the international film business, and provides networking and profile raising opportunities for the participants. According to Skillset, successful applicants will be 14 executives and producers who display ambition, a determination to broaden their knowledge of the global film industry, and expand their network of contacts. They should have a minimum of a five year track record in film or an associated creative industry such as television. Application forms can be downloaded from www.inside-pictures.com and www.skillset.org or requested from the Skillset's Inside Pictures office on 020 7440 5924.







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thursday

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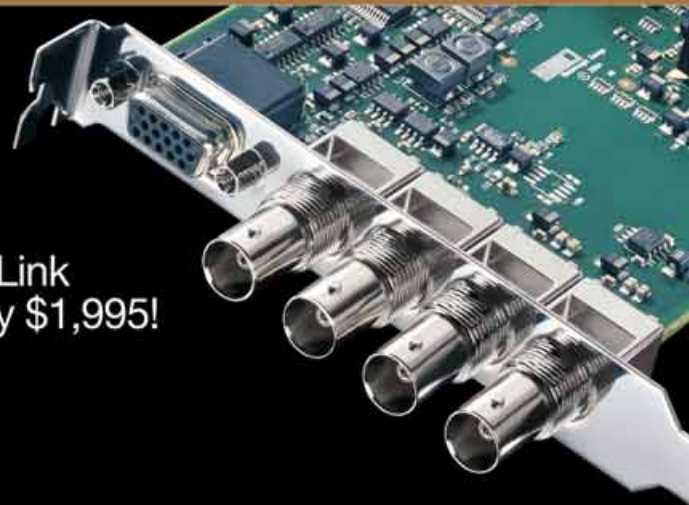
saturday

sunday

			01	02	03	04
05	06	07	08	09	10	11
IBC (INTERNATIONAL BROADCAST CONFERENCE) 2005 AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS Europe's largest video conference and exhibition offers a first look at new products and conferences debating the future of editing, effects, television and film www.ibc.org						
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
IBC 2005 AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS The conference and exhibition continues www.ibc.org		INTERACTIVE KIDS 2005 LONDON Forum looking at child-focussed media www.centaurconferences.com			LOUD TATE LONDON Teen-inspiring event www.tate.org.uk	
JONATHAN HAYES LONDON Xbox 360 design talk www.designmuseum.org					MARTELLO TOWER CLACTON-ON-SEA New venue opens www.deluxe-arts.org.uk	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
THE SEVEN AGES OF DESIGN LONDON Seven speakers from seven ages offer opinions on the future of design www.vam.org.uk		ROGER FENTON: 1852-60 LONDON Exhibition of work by the major Victorian photographer. Runs until January 2 www.tate.org.uk		LAND OF THE DEAD Romero's return to the zombie genre open nationwide CLUB SERIES LONDON Club photo showing www.photofusion.org		
26	27	28	29	30		
THE BUSINESS OF DESIGN LONDON The Design Council's Futureproofing series of events continues www.designcouncil.org.uk		ENHANCED TV SHOW & MOBILE TV FORUM LONDON A conference and exhibition on interactive and mobile television www.enhanced-television.com		SIGNPOSTING THE FUTURE, LONDON 21st Century design www.designcouncil.org.uk		
				THE CORPSE BRIDE Tim Burton's new stop-motion film opens nationwide		

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New Sony Vegas 6 support for Windows
Adobe certification for Premiere Pro 1.5

DeckLink HD Pro Features: HDTV and standard definition support in 4:2:2 or Dual Link 4:4:4 • All HDTV formats including 1080/24p, 50i, 59.94i, 60i, 720/59.94p, 60p • Standard definition SDI format support for NTSC and PAL • Precision 14 bit analog monitoring output. Switches between HD or SD • True 10 bit RGB 4:4:4 or YUV 4:2:2 HDTV capture • Instantly switch between SMPTE-259M SDI and SMPTE-292M HD-SDI • Dual HD-SDI input and output for Dual Link 4:4:4 and 12 bit support • AES-S/PDIF output, AES-S/PDIF input and AES word-clock output • Sony™ compatible RS-422 serial deck control port included • Black burst & HD Tri-Sync compatible genlock input.

Dual platform compatibility.

Includes drivers for Microsoft Windows XP™ and Premiere Pro 1.5™ and Sony Vegas 6™, and on Mac OS X™, QuickTime™ and Final Cut Pro™.

Support for all leading broadcast applications. Apple Final Cut Pro™ • Adobe Premiere Pro 1.5™ • Sony Vegas 6™ • Adobe After Effects™ • Discreet Combustion™ • DVD Studio Pro • iDVD™ • Discreet Cleaner™ • Color Finesse™ • Microcosm™ • Apple Shake™ • Motion™. And most other QuickTime™ and DirectShow™ based applications.



Blackmagic Design's industry leading range of 10/12 bit Dual Link 4:4:4 products for HD and SD

DeckLink HD Pro

Introducing the world's highest quality video card with amazing Dual Link HDTV 4:4:4 SDI for 10/12 bit RGB workflow. DeckLink HD Pro instantly switches between HD and standard definition. Now you can afford the best quality HDTV card available, even if most of your work is in standard definition. DeckLink HD Pro does both!

DeckLink HD Pro features an unprecedented 14 bit 4:4:4 analog monitoring output, retaining the subtle detail of film originated video. Combined with high speed converters adds up to the world's best HDTV monitoring. Monitoring instantly switches between HD and SD. Great features like AES-S/PDIF audio, and black burst & HD Tri-Sync input helped DeckLink HD Pro win 4 leading industry awards at NAB 2004.

New Single Link 4:2:2 model of DeckLink HD Pro available! Only RRP US\$1,495

Workgroup Videohub

Workgroup Videohub eliminates manual cable patching by connecting everyone together into a fully featured professional routing switcher. Also includes independent monitoring outputs so you can instantly see any deck or editing system in your facility. Workgroup Videohub has 12 fully independent dual rate SDI inputs and 24 independent SDI outputs that auto switch between HD-SDI and Standard Definition SDI.



RRP US\$4,995

HDLink

HDLink connects SDI video to any supported DVI-D based LCD computer monitor for true HDTV resolution video monitoring. Featuring Dual Link 4:4:4 HD-SDI, 4:2:2 SD-SDI and a fast USB 2.0 input with de-embedded analog RCA audio outputs. Because every single pixel in the SDI video standard is mapped digitally onto the pixels of a 1920 x 1200 resolution LCD display, you get a perfect digital pixel for pixel HDTV image quality. There's simply no higher resolution HDTV monitoring possible! Now features SD anamorphic mode for 16:9 display.



RRP US\$695

DeckLink HD

This world leading 10 bit HDTV SDI card has changed the broadcast industry. It instantly switches between HDTV or NTSC/PAL SD eliminating your upgrade risk to HDTV.



RRP US\$595

DeckLink Extreme

This amazing video card features 10 and 8 bit SD-SDI, HD-SDI down conversion, analog composite and component I/O, balanced analog audio I/O, DV, JPEG, internal keyer, genlock and so much more.



RRP US\$895

Blackmagicdesign



Nibs

Quadro FX4500 card

NVidia has released the Quadro FX 4500 graphics card. It has 512MB of frame buffer memory, a 128-bit floating point buffer and 12-bit sub-pixel precision. The 4500 supports 32x full-scene anti-aliasing, up to four displays running from a single system, and multiple GPUs using an optional G-Sync board.

www.nvidia.com

**Sound Blaster X-Fi**

The Sound Blaster X-Fi Elite Pro costs £210 and features 64MB of RAM, and a 116dB signal-to-noise ratio. It ships with a breakout box and supports a series of technologies for improving sound quality – including 24-bit Crystalizer, CMSS-3D, 3DMIDI and EAX. The £125 X-Fi Platinum offers a 109dB S/N ratio and an internal drive bay frontpiece. The £85 X-Fi Xtreme Music offers the board alone.

www.creative.com

**ClayTools**

ClayTools for Maya will ship this autumn. It comes with the Phantom Omni device, a true 3D interface with force feedback, so users can use their sense of touch to model virtual clay just like real clay.

www.sensable.com



3DS Max 8 adds character

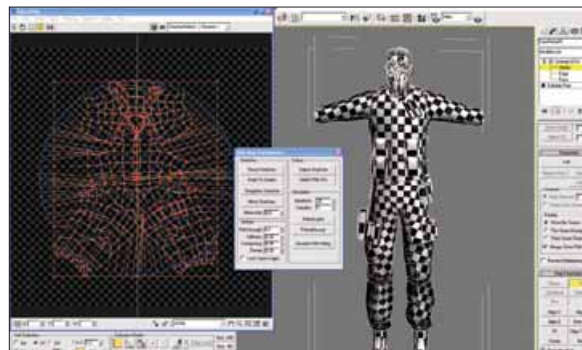
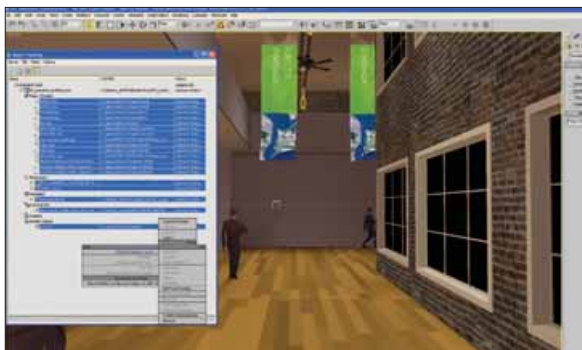
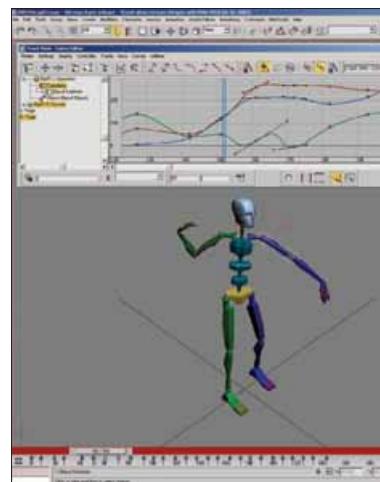
Autodesk Media and Entertainment, formerly Discreet, has launched version 8 of its 3DS Max suite. The upgrade to the 3D modelling, animation and rendering suite is focused on character animation and asset management – plus modelling/texturing and development tools for large teams – according to the company.

Character-based additions include a non-linear animation engine for applying animations by pasting them onto models, and advanced rigging tools such as a weight tool for skin. UV pelt mapping is designed to make texturing characters easier and quicker, and DirectX and .fx support has been added to create real-time shaders within a 3DS Max viewport.

3DS Max's asset management tools have been greatly improved by the addition of Vault, a large-scale engine brought in from Autodesk's CAD software range that's used worldwide by engineering teams. Larger teams will also benefit from Autodesk's improvements to Max's SDK, according to the company. These include XML support for exchanging scene and animation data, an interactive MAXScript debugger, and support for the freely available Autodesk DWF viewer – so users on computers that don't have Max installed can view objects and scenes.

The upgrade also includes all of the features added in version 7.5, which was only made available to members of Autodesk's subscriptions scheme. These include cloth, hair, and fur tools and version 3.4 of the Mental Ray rendering engine.

Autodesk, www.discreet.com





Mighty Mouse

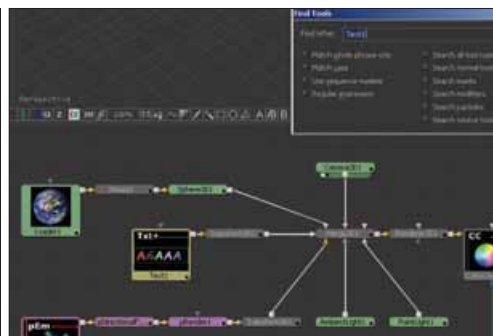
Apple has introduced Mighty Mouse, the company's first multi-button mouse. Mighty Mouse offers users up to four independently programmable buttons and a Scroll Ball that lets users scroll in any direction – vertically, horizontally, and even diagonally. It features programmable touch sensors that act as primary or secondary buttons. With a click on the upper right or left side of the mouse, users can access features such as contextual menus found in Mac OS X and other applications. Mighty Mouse's two other buttons are activated by pressing its Scroll Ball and squeezing its sides. It costs £30 plus VAT. Apple, www.apple.com/uk



Eyeon Software releases Fusion 5 compositor

Eyeon Software has finally released the next version of the company's flagship compositing software. Fusion 5, which was announced last summer, has gained a full 3D workspace – and more – and lost the Digital part of its name.

The display views have been rewritten to be fully OpenGL accelerated in order to support the new 3D environment to be introduced by Fusion 5. The 3D environment allows users to move 2D image planes around in 3D. It also supports geometry.



Fusion 5 now boasts improvements to its node-based Flow system, text-based composition editing, a number of masking improvements and the addition of b-spline to Bézier curves, which offers improved flexibility in the construction and manipulation of polylines.

Eyeon is currently running a special offer allowing owners of Digital Fusion 4 to upgrade to Fusion 5 for £305. The full product costs £2,650 plus VAT. Eyeon, www.eyeonline.com

SoftimageXSI takes aim at Maya users



Avid has unveiled SoftimageXSI 5.0, which includes a set of 'Maya migration' tools designed to tempt 3D artists over from Alias' application. The upgrade includes native 64-bit support, a new map generation tool, a property transfer system, improved hair and cloth tools and better rigid body dynamics, according to Avid.

Tools aimed at Maya users include a customizable user interface with menu, keyboard and mouse set-ups that will be familiar to users of Alias' 3D suite.

SoftimageXSI 5.0 includes a new architecture, according to Avid, that's designed to take full advantage of dual-core 64-bit CPUs (under 64-bit operating systems such as Windows XP

Professional x64). 64-bit processing allows larger pieces of a scene to be rendered in a single pass, speeding up rendering.

Avid says that the new Ultimapper tool can generate cinema-quality maps in a few clicks. The Gator property transfer system allows the merging of fully-textured and animated 3D models.

XSI Hair gains a grooming tool that allows 3D artists to create and style strand-based objects such as hair, fur, grass and trees with a brush-style pointer – along with an instancing system for replicating the results throughout a region.

The cloth system has been updated with the

Syflex 3 plug-in. Both new hair and cloth tools are only available in the Advanced version of XSI.

Rigid body dynamics have been bolstered with the integration of the Ageiatm Physx physics simulation engine, which includes precise actual-shape collision handling. The dotXSI file format has also been upgraded to include support for shape morphing, subdivision approximation and blind user-data.

SoftimageXSI 5.0 costs £299 for the Foundation version, £1,189 for the Essentials version, and £4,159 for the Advanced version. All prices exclude VAT. Upgrade pricing has yet to be announced. Softimage, www.softimage.com

Panasonic debuts Lumix camera trio

Panasonic will launch three new Panasonic Lumix digital still cameras in late August. The lineup includes a model capable of shooting in a 16:9 aspect ratio, and another model that has a 12x optical zoom.

The six-megapixel DMC-FX9 is the smallest camera of the range at 94-x-51-x-24mm and features a 3x optical zoom and a 2.5-inch LCD monitor. It has five focusing modes, with the high-speed mode enabling the camera to focus in 0.27 seconds, according to the company. The FX9 can also shoot up to 270 pictures per battery charge, the company said.

The DMC-LX1 has an 8.4-megapixel CCD (charge-coupled device) sensor that is able to capture 16:9 aspect ratio images and comes with a 4x optical zoom and a 28mm wide-angle lens that helps add depth and scope to pictures, according to the company.

The 16:9 aspect ratio images, stored on an SD memory card, can be viewed on a wide-screen TV without image distortion. The company is considering offering the 16:9 aspect ratio capability to future camera models if this feature proves popular, it said.

The LX1 comes with a joystick used to set the shutter speed, control manual focus and to shortcut to a menu containing frequently used settings. The camera has the same 2.5-inch monitor as the FX9, according to Panasonic.

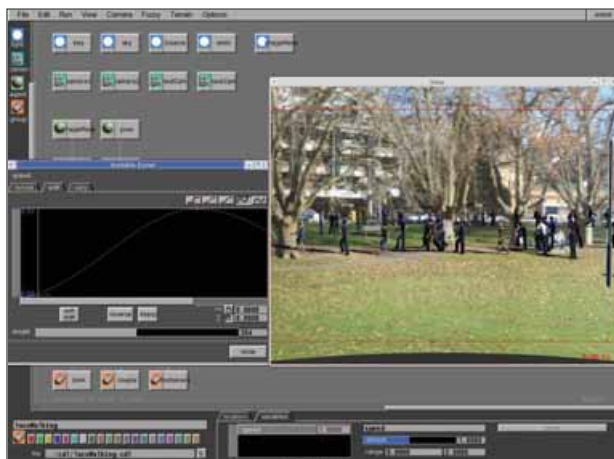
The 8-megapixel DMC-FZ30 is aimed at more advanced users and has an optical zoom that is capable of 12x magnification. The camera has manual focus and zoom rings similar to traditional film cameras and a 235,000-pixel, 2.0-inch LCD monitor, Panasonic said.

The three models use the company's anti-blur technology. UK pricing has yet to be announced. Panasonic, www.panasonic.co.uk



Three of a kind

New additions to Panasonic's Lumix range of digital-still cameras share the company anti-blur features. From top: the 8mp DMC-FZ30, the DMC-LX1 and bottom the DMC-FX9.



Massive Jet brings crowds simulation to the masses

Massive Software has announced Massive Jet, a new 3D animation application that enables the creation of large-scale, believable digital crowd shots out of the box with high quality and a low learning curve, says the company.

Massive Jet is designed to provide an economical solution for smaller 3D shops or post houses with limited 3D capability that may need crowds to comp into a shot.

Massive Jet takes advantage of Ready-to-Run Agents, which Massive customers can use to short cut the pre-production process and create animation automatically for typical crowd scenarios in just a few steps. Each agent is

pre-built with skeletons, geometry, cloth, rigid body dynamics, textures, shaders, controls and high-quality motion capture actions provided by industry leaders Giant Studios and House of Moves.

Users simply load terrain and camera from their 3D package, drop in a Ready-to-Run Agent – or a custom agent built with a licence of Massive 2.0 – then light the simulation and render the scene.

Massive Jet is expected to be available this autumn for \$5,990 per licence. Massive 2.0 is available now, with licences priced at \$18,000. Massive Software, www.massivesoftware.com



Storyviz boost previz tools

RealViz has announced version 2 of its StoryViz 3D previsualization software. The tool enables creatives to build 3D scenes with actors and props to map out a set before construction and filming. It's aimed at a wide range of users from directors and visual-effects supervisors to animators and designers, according to RealViz. The upgrade adds a host of 3D, sound and export features. Support for animated textures has been added, objects can move in 3D trajectories, which can be edited, and a 3D measurement tool has been added. Images and video can be output with cameras and lights shown, to assist scene set-up. GBX and OBJ files can be dragged-&-dropped into scenes, and objects in FBX format can be imported. Sound levels can be edited, and exported with video clips. A fade effect has also been added.

StoryViz 2 will ship in the autumn for €990 (around £680) plus VAT.

Anyone buying StoryViz 1 from now will get a free upgrade.

RealViz, www.realviz.com

Canon releases its first DVD camcorder range

Canon first two DVD camcorders are the DC 20 and the DC 10. The DC 20 has a 2.2-megapixel CCD sensor while the DC 10 comes with a 1.3-megapixel CCD. They both have 10x optical zooms, take still pictures, and can record to a miniSD memory card, the company said. Like other DVD camcorders, the models record to 80mm discs.

Size is an important issue for DVD camcorders. The models are 48-x-86-x-122mm and weigh 465 grams with battery pack installed and DVD and memory card inserted.

Both will be in shops in Europe in late October; the DC 20 for around £600 plus VAT and the DC 10 for around £550 plus VAT. Canon is also updating its DV camcorder line-up with the IXY DV M5 and the IXY DV S1 models.

Canon, www.canon.co.uk



NewTek launches LightWave 8.5

NewTek has released version 8.5 of its LightWave 3D suite, and announced the first details of what it intends to put in version 9. The company has also reduced the price of LightWave to €795 (around £445 plus VAT), which currently includes a free copy of E-on Software's Vue 5 Infinite landscape creation tool and a free update to v9 when it ships.

LightWave 8.5 is a freely downloadable update for versions 8.x, and adds the first version of the software with support for the 64-bit version of Windows XP. This allows the software to access memory more efficiently for faster rendering and overall performance.

The update adds a new OpenGL hardware shader that allows many render functions to be previewed in real-time using the host graphics cards. Functions covered by this include lights, light falloffs, blending images on surfaces, and per-pixel lighting.

The Parts-to-Surfaces tool is designed to make it easier

to work with models created in other 3D applications. Other new features include a MultiShift tool, a Dynamics control window and more accurate particle dynamics.

LightWave 9.0 will feature a major rewrite and restructure of LightWave's core, says NewTek, plus the addition of mesh-editing capabilities to Layout, faster raytracing, and enhanced modelling tools. NewTek says its decision to extract the mesh-editing core from Modeler, means it can be moved to a common location that can be accessed by both Layout and Modeler – effectively adding mesh-editing to Layout. The move by NewTek could see users stick to Layout as a single workspace for all model and scene creation, admits NewTek – with Layout also able to run existing plug-ins created for Modeler in version 9.0.

The company says version 9.0 will also see faster OpenGL performance and additional OpenGL hardware shader support. NewTek, www.newtek-europe.com

Nattress debuts Film Effects 2.5

Nattress has released version 2.5 of its Film Effects 2.5 Final Cut Pro plug-in. Film Effects is based around a high quality 60i to 24p simulation plug-in and also includes over 20 preset looks, each totally configurable and eight other plug-ins that help make your video more filmic.

The latest version features nine new plug-ins that include four new optimized de-interlacers and three new gamma control plug-ins. Two new plug-ins have been developed to deal with reduced resolution chroma sampling in all video formats, including HDV.

Nattress, www.nattress.com



Studio 8 adds Flash and Dreamweaver

Macromedia has announced Studio 8, the newest version of the company's suite of applications for Web-content authoring. Studio 8 sheds FreeHand, but adds two applications giving the suite a better mix for its target customer, according to the company. Studio 8 now includes Dreamweaver 8; Flash Professional 8; Fireworks 8; Contribute 3; and FlashPaper 2.

With a new, unified CSS panel, Dreamweaver 8 provides a one-stop shop for working with CSS styles applied to pages. The new interface makes it easier to see the styles applied to a specific element and identify where attributes are defined, according to the company. It includes CSS layout visualization, which lets you apply visual aides at design time to outline CSS layout borders or colour CSS layouts. A style-rendering toolbar gives users the ability to toggle to design view and see how a layout will look in print, on a handheld or on a screen.

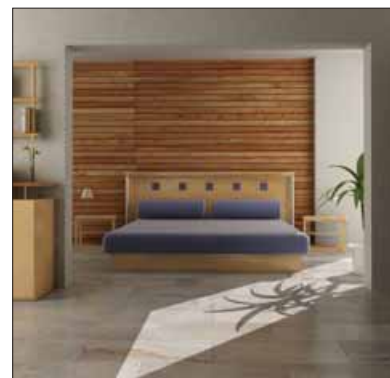
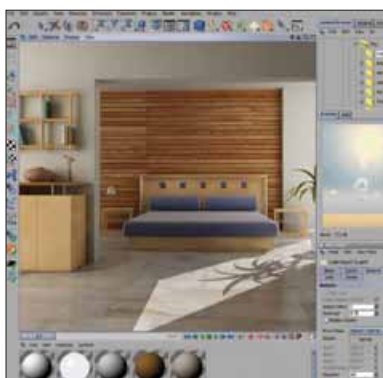
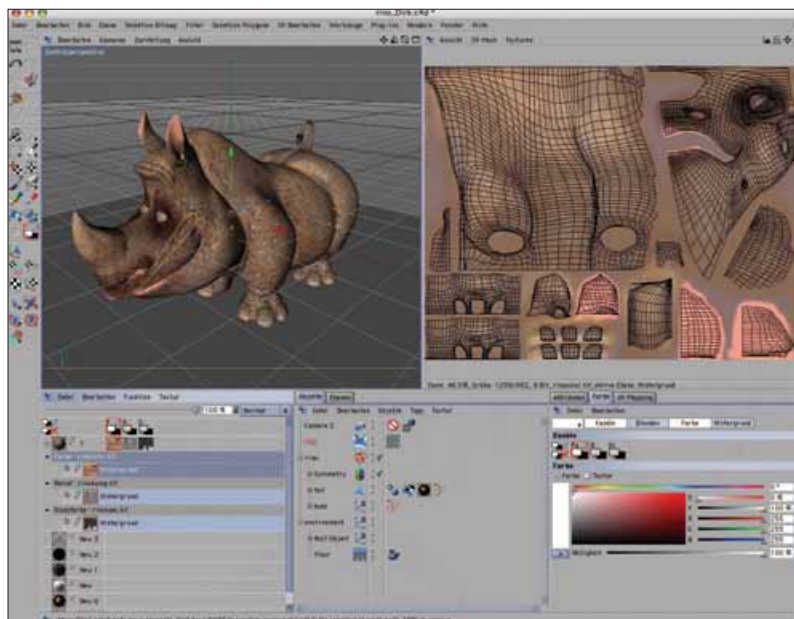
Flash 8 Professional comes with many new features including higher-quality video and improved text tools. It gains Filters, which allow designs to be made with built-in filter effects like drop shadow, blur, glow, bevel, gradient bevel and colour adjust. Adding the filters does not increase the file size of the Flash file because Flash Player 8 renders the filters in real-time. It includes a new font rendering engine called FlashType. Macromedia says that FlashType provides clear, high-quality font rendering, making small fonts look clearer, greatly improving readability. Flash also added a new video codec, called On2 VP6, which provides high video quality, but at a small file size, says Macromedia.

Fireworks 8 gains less new additions. Users can create CSS pop-up menus in Fireworks and export the graphics and CSS code, ready for import into a Dreamweaver document. It adds an image-editing panel, and 26 new blend modes including Overlay, Colour Burn and Hard Light are now included.

Macromedia included Contribute 3 and FlashPaper 2 in Studio 8. Contribute is an easy-to-use visual Web publishing tool that allows collaboration of people in an organization and FlashPaper lets user create Flash or PDF-based files out of any printable document, useful for embedding on Web pages.

Macromedia Studio 8 costs £699, or £299 as an upgrade. For the individual products: Flash Professional 8 is £499 and £249 for an upgrade; Dreamweaver 8 is £339 or £169 for an upgrade; Fireworks 8 is £249 or £129 for an upgrade; Contribute 3 is £99 or £49 for an upgrade; FlashPaper 2 is £49 and Flash Basic 8 is £299.

www.macromedia.com



Cinema 4D and BodyPaint shown

Maxon has announced 0.5 upgrades to Cinema 4D and BodyPaint, and launched a bundle aimed at 3D studios. The Cinema 4D Release 9.5 upgrade primarily aims at lighting, rendering and workflow, while BodyPaint 3D 2.5 focuses on workflow. Cinema 4D Release 9.5 features a simplified lighting set-up, according to Maxon, and lights can be given any shape. Area lights and shadows render up to four times faster than in version 9, says the company. Output frames can be in HDRI or OpenEXR format with 32-bit per channel colour depth, and multipass renderings can be output as compositing files for Shake.

The upgrade adds the Content Browser, which gives users an overview of projects and presets. These can be saved locally or on a central server. Full screen mode is designed to quickly offer the maximum amount of working space. The Baker has been reworked to let users create textures, normal maps and UVs more quickly, according to Maxon.

If users have purchased the Advanced Render module, they gain support for Ambient Occlusion and SKY. Ambient Occlusion enables users to create and quickly render more realistic shadows, and can be rendered or baked as a texture. SKY is a faux atmospheric systems that Maxon claims is fast, easy and creates breathtaking results.

BodyPaint 3D 2.5 also gains the Content Browser for more efficient management of models and scenes and the full screen mode. Other additions taken from Cinema 4D include the Heads-Up Display to view and adjust scene data within the viewport, and a one-touch customizable menu offering access to most application functions.

The upgrade adds support for n-gons, and individual layers and masks from Photoshop documents. The layer shader allows multiple images, layers, filters and procedurals to be mixed into a single texture, while detachable projection layers make it easier to fit an existing texture over geometry.

Cinema 4D Release 9.5 and BodyPaint 3D 2.5 will ship in September for Mac and Windows. Cinema 4D costs from £425 and from £120 to upgrade. Maxon, www.maxoncomputer.net

HP™ xw4200 Workstation with ATI FireGL™ graphics



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HP: "Top Config"

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Best mid-range price/performance graphics card for 3D modelling

The HP xw4200 workstation delivers a powerful combination of industry leading technologies that deliver world-class workstation performance for an amazingly low price. It features the Intel® Pentium® 4 processor with Extended Memory 64 Technology and Windows® x64 support. The award-winning FireGL V5100 PCI-Express workstation graphics card from ATI delivers the power to handle the most detailed models and datasets. Options such as SCSI drives and RAID controllers ensure that you can configure the system to meet your needs. HP has formed strong alliances with all key software vendors to provide you with a fully optimised and supported platform.

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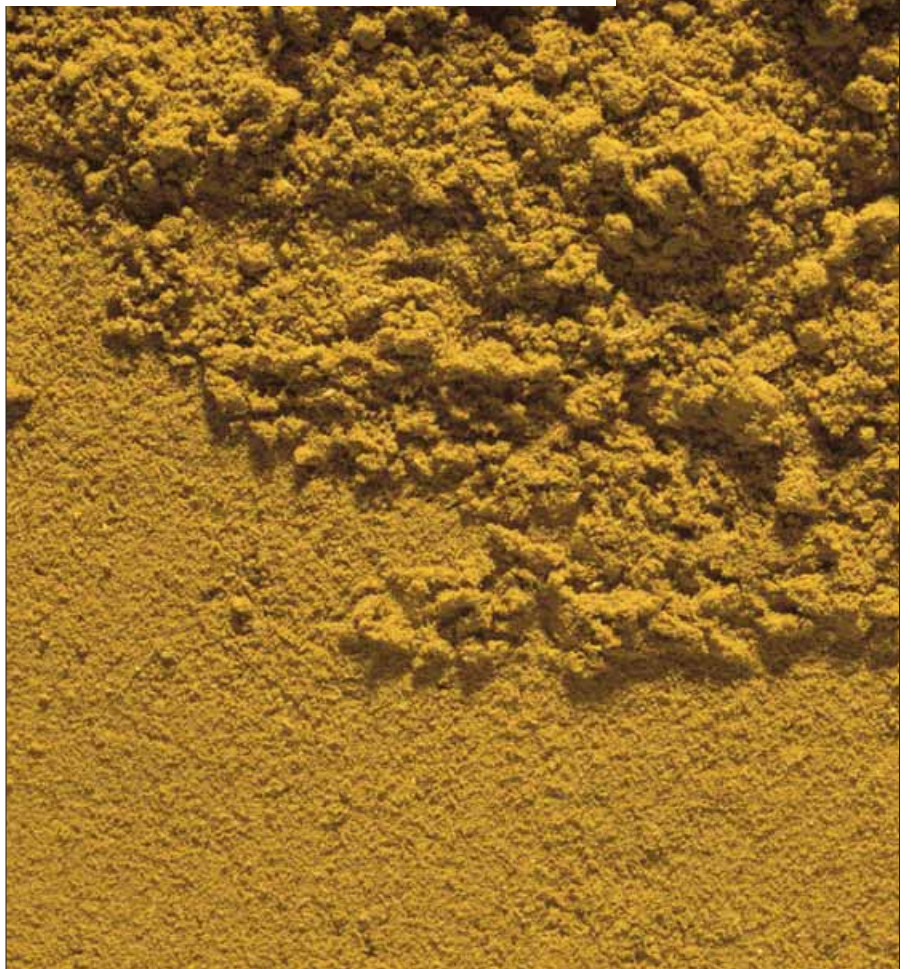
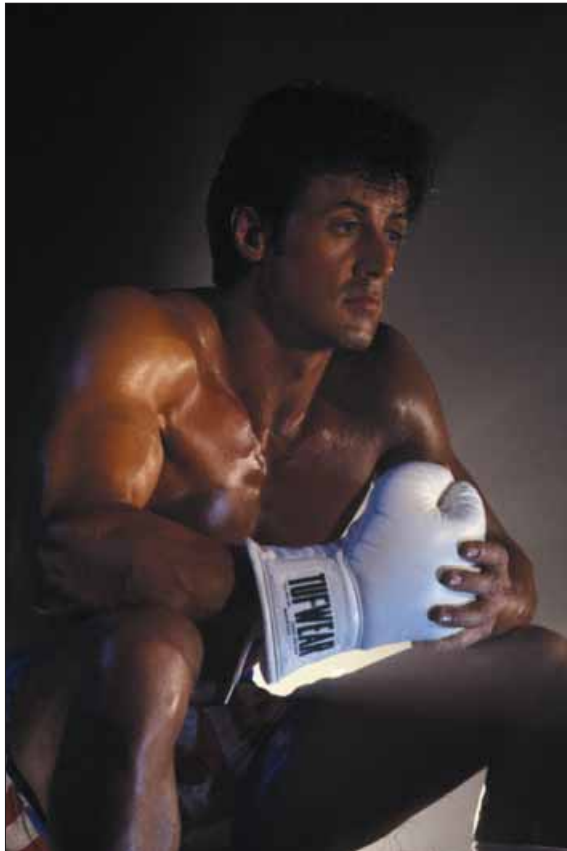


CORBIS WINS LICENCE FOR MGM FILM LIBRARY

www.corbis.com, 0800 731 9995

Corbis has agreed a deal with MGM Studios that will see the image company license stills and footage from the MGM Film Library. The library includes media from the *Rocky* series of films, as well as the *James Bond* movies, and over 4,000 other titles. The deal covers editorial and advertising clients.





FRESH FOOD FROM PHOTOLIBRARY

www.photolib.com, 020 7836 5591

The Photolib Group has launched a new collection of images based on food. *Fresh Food Images* offers over 25,000 food, beverage, and lifestyle pictures. The images are rights-managed, and can be purchased from the Photolib Web site.

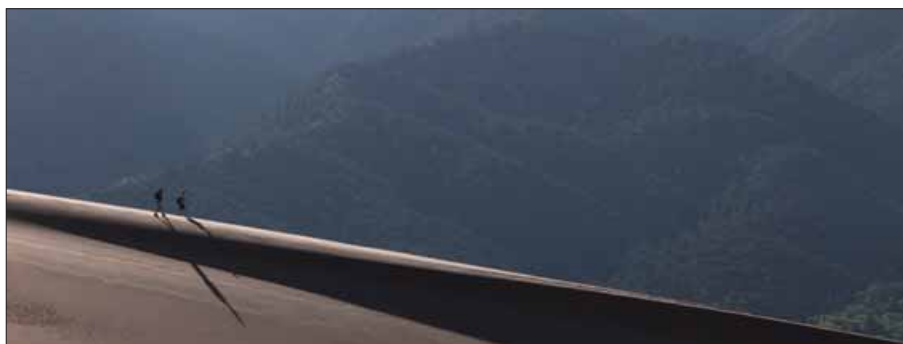
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NEW MAMMOTH FOOTAGE

www.mammothhd.com

Mammoth HD has added the new *Z1 Collections* to its MHD Footage Library. The new titles were shot with the Sony Z1 HDV camera, and titles include *Columbine*, *Flame Volume 1*, *Crested Gecko*, *Medana Creek*, and *Great Sand Dunes National Park*. They are available in HD and HDV-2 formats from the store at the company's Web site.



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CHEMIN DE FER NF

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NUMANISTIC

P22 www.p22.com

The P22 type foundry has released two new fonts, Larkin, and Numanistic. The latter is shown here. Numanistic was a font offered by the Devienne Press in 1905, and was based on Arabic figures and ornaments. Both fonts are available in Mac and Windows formats from the P22 Web site, and cost \$19.95 each.

MENTOR FAMILY

Monotype www.fonts.com

Mentor was designed by Michael Harvey. The font comes in both serif and sans serif versions. Harvey says the serif font was inspired by Eric Gill and Reynolds Stone, while the sans shapes were inspired by Hermann Zapf. Mentor and Mentor Sans each have four weights. The families cost \$408 (\$505 for OpenType), and are available from the Fonts.com Web site.

BACK FENCE

Bogusky 2 www.myfonts.com

Back Fence is a new addition to the MyFonts.com library, from the Bogusky 2 font foundry. It is available from MyFonts.com in Windows and Mac PostScript and TrueType formats, and costs \$15.

SNOOTY FOX

Nick's Fonts www.myfonts.com

A new font from Nick's Fonts, Snooty Fox is available via the MyFonts.com font resource. It is available in Mac PostScript and Mac TrueType formats, as well as OpenType. It costs \$20.

SMACKEROO

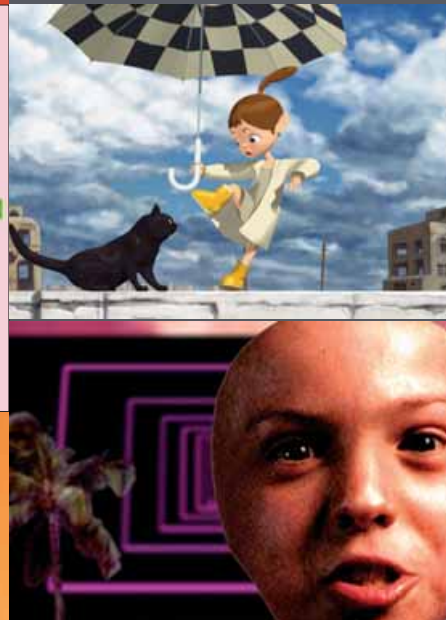
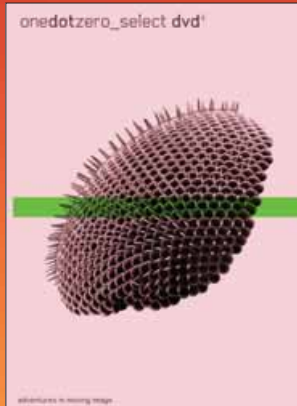
Nick's Fonts www.myfonts.com

Another new font from Nick's Fonts, Smackeroo is also available on the MyFonts Web site. As with Snooty Fox, it is available in Mac formats and OpenType formats, and costs \$20.

CHEMIN DE FER

Nick's Fonts www.myfonts.com

Chemin De Fur was inspired by a 1920s French poster for an unnamed artist. It costs \$20, and is only available in Mac PostScript and Mac TrueType formats.



<< ONEDOTZERO_SELECT DVD

onedotzero, the hybrid festival and production company that showcases the best and most innovative talent in moving image work, has released its fourth compilation DVD.

The material on the *onedotzero_select 4* has been selected from the last two years of ondotzero, and features inspired works from directors at the forefront of the new wave of moving image, music video, motion graphics, and indie filmmaking from around the globe. These include Joji Koyama (aka Woof Wan Bau) *Airside*, Intro, Pleix, Daniel Askill and Nakd, with rising stars Hendrick Dusollier, 12foot6 and Dominic Hailstone.

Music featured on the DVD include The Prodigy (*Girls*), Lemon Jelly (*The Shouty Track*), and Air (*Electronic Performers*), The Phoenix Foundation (*Hitchcock*) and Afra (*Digital Breath*).

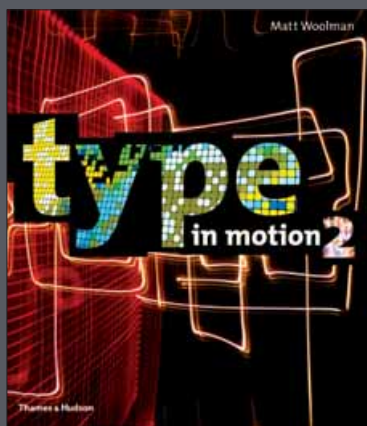
The DVD is priced at £17.99 and is available from major record stores and selected bookstores.

www.onedotzero.com

pulse

Be inspired by the latest happenings in the world of creative design

by Lynn Wright



<< TYPE IN MOTION 2

It's been six years since the publication of the successful *Type in Motion*, which presented an overview of animated digital typography and motion graphics. *Type In Motion 2* showcases the huge steps that have been taken in this field and presents over 80 projects from top studios around the world. Work is arranged into five main chapters that review particular briefs facing today's designers such as public service announcements and commercials and the use of kinetic typography in the art of branding as well as a wide spectrum of experimental projects at the cutting edge of type and lettering design. The book features 1,350 illustrations in colour and B&W over 176 pages. Available in September, *Type In Motion 2* costs £24.95. Thames & Hudson, www.thamesandhudson.com



POWER ON THE GO >>

Running out of power is no longer a problem thanks to a cool little device called Solio from Better Energy Systems. From mobile phones and digital cameras to iPods, PDAs and portable games consoles, Solio can top up juice levels quicker than the man from Del Monte. It works on solar power, generating energy from sunlight and storing it within its integrated Lithium Ion battery. Unlike other bulky portable chargers, Solio's fan blade design allows it to be folded neatly to the size of a small mobile phone. Solio features Apple's 'Made for iPod' logo, Apple's new certification program that standardizes all accessories for the iPod, and uses an interchangeable tip system to accommodate other devices. A wide range of tips are available online. Prices start from £49.99/€79.99 including VAT.

www.solio.com



^ ARTFUTURA 2005

Take a trip to Spain this October and enjoy discussing the future of digital culture at this year's ArtFutura conference. Now in its 15th year, ArtFutura offers more than 14 hours of conferences, panels and special presentations with more than 30 leading industry figures from such areas as multimedia design, electronic art, digital cinema, 3D animation and videogames. These include science fiction author and digital culture pioneer Bruce Sterling, and Pablo Helmen, creative director of Industrial Light & Magic. ArtFutura takes place between October 27-30 in cities across Spain.

www.artfutura.org

<< WISH YOU WERE GAMING?

If you're planning to hit the beaches to catch some rays for the last time this summer, there's no better accompaniment than one of Nokia's gaming deckchairs. Currently touring festivals and beaches around the country, these hi-tech deckchairs are aimed at the hordes of holidaymakers suffering withdrawal symptoms from having to leave their games consoles behind at home.

The chairs are equipped with N-Gage games phones on extendable arms, a mini parasol to avoid sun glare and drinks coolers allowing gamers to get their quick fix of gaming while away sunning themselves on the beach.

The Nokia N-Gage deckchairs build on the 'Wish you were gaming' campaign, which saw the 'Queen of Travel' Judith Chalmers as the face of computer gaming last summer in a series of tongue-in-cheek holiday ads reminding gamers that they can play while away sunning themselves.

www.nokia.com



<< A NEW VISION FOR VIDEO

Creative Technology continues its assault against the iPod with the launch of the Zen Vision MP3 player. Available in pearl white and black finishes, the 30GB digital music player features a 3.7-inch colour screen and the ability to play video content as well as view digital-still images. Measures 4.9-x-2.9-x-0.8 inches, weighing 8.4oz, the Zen Vision plays back MP3 audio and has a built-in FM radio with 32 presets and FM recording. The Zen Vision can play back video formats including MPEG-2, MPEG-4 'Simple Profile' formats including DivX and Xvid, WMV and MJPEG, and can view digital photos. It ships with rechargeable, removable battery, AC adaptor, USB 2.0 cable, earphones, AV cable, and protective pouch. Available in September, UK pricing has yet to be confirmed.

www.creative.com



<< CHINESE CULTURE IN FOCUS

Video art and photography from China will be the focus of a major exhibition at the Victoria & Albert museum in London. Opening September 15, and running until January 15, 2006 *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China* showcases works by 39 Chinese artists. The works reveal individual responses to the successive waves of change that have swept through China's economic, social, and cultural life. In addition to introducing a remarkable body of work to UK audiences, the exhibition will provide insight into the dynamics of Chinese culture at the start of this century – a culture in which video and photography have become an important means of expression.

www.vam.ac.uk



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Creating the hyper real

Digital manipulation is changing the face of reality – often quite literally

The debate that swirls around digital photo manipulation was brought home to me on a personal level last month. In a bid to capture the images of our children for future years, the family and I duly trudged down to the local photographer, plonked the kids in the middle of a huge studio, and let a cracking photographer snap away for an hour. The results were great, and also funny – watching the resulting shots, complete with baby drool was, in many ways, rewarding. But, some shots were alarming.

You see, I rather unwisely made a guest appearance in some of the photos, and the old adage – how you look is different to how you think you look – was terrifyingly apparent. We all suffer from it: all of us have an image of how we look, move, and act in our minds eye that often has little grounding in reality. You see that photo of me at the top of this page? Looks nothing like me – I don't picture myself with glasses, for example, when thinking about how I look. It's the same with our voices: record yourself speaking, and very often the first reaction is "I don't sound like that!". But you do, and it's unnerving.

My first thought was a quick trip to Photoshop, and the various blemishes, spots, unruly strands of hair (what's left of it) would be a thing of the past. Yet, is this really what the photographic arts is all about? Just because we can, should we alter reality into something that serves us better thanks to the painless application of the Patch tool and Healing brush? Or, should life through the lens be an accurate historical portrait, warts and all?

Personally, and it was probably the green thing between my teeth that swung it, I think that photography and digital manipulation in the 21st Century have moved beyond their crude use of rewriting history into an artistic endeavour that allows us to paint a better world.

Digitally manipulated images are the new visual currency – and truly accurate photos of the world are an increasingly rare thing.

Almost every image in the media has been warped, corrected, tweaked, and improved to serve a purpose. Models want to project an image of perfection – it keeps the money rolling in from the fashion mags – while clients demand fresh-faced figureheads to adorn products and brand campaigns, whether its flogging jeans or punting pizzas.

And in our business, creating the hyper real from the seeds of the mundane is something we should be proud of. By changing images we improve things, we meet client needs, pay our bills, and shift products, services, and ideals in a way that straight photography can rarely achieve in today's digital world.

There's a place for the real – we face it every day at the bus stop, in the coffee house, and when sharing a lift with other people. And some of them have really impressive warts.

So, when people challenge the ethics of digital manipulation, they're missing the point. Digital enhancement – while a fine line – is one that is astoundingly creative, and demands a high-degree of skill that is often overlooked when faced with knee-jerk criticism. Digital manipulation – in all its guises – is the new reality. At least until I save up enough for some Botox.

Matthew Beth



Image by David Base, www.sxc.hu

respond

Contact DIGIT. Get issues off your chest.

Send letters to dialogbox@digitmag.co.uk

Please note that personal correspondence cannot be entered into.

Designcasting

After reading the letter about podcasting designs (Digit 90), I approached a client who I design Web sites for about providing automatically updating graphics to fit around the template of his site. He liked the idea of keeping his site fresh, but when I costed it up for him, he soon lost interest. Back to the drawing board I think, literally!

David McDouglas

An imperfect portfolio?

Perfect portfolios (Digit 90) was an interesting read for a graduate such as myself, but was it correct? I am not challenging the detailed comments written, yet it still left me wanting more.

My folio lies underneath my bed, obsessively accurately mounted and changed for every single job interview. The quality of my work is on target – it even featured in your showcase last month (issue 89, page 78).

But what about that underlying feeling of always wanting more? Last month I applied for the a high-profile job and even though my application was well thought about, drafted out and designed, I still felt naked compared to the competition. Unfortunately, I didn't get an interview, so I ask the question: what really wows the big boys and girls?

Alex Haigh

DIGIT: *It's an unfortunate part of being a designer that we often feel that we could do better, and that others' work is much better than our own. This is what drives us to improve our own work, so that each project is better than the last – though what annoys us is that we know it's not as good as the next one will be.*

Do any readers know of ways to overcome this? Let us know and we'll publish your answers next month.

Macro mistake

I'd just like to make a small comment about your Olympus 7070 Wide zoom camera review in the August 2005 magazine (Digit 90).

I have spent weeks reading reviews, visiting stores and poring over ratings charts to choose a digital camera – and the range of features on the market make it an almost impossible task.

There are some very good pieces of equipment out there, with such tiny differences, it almost comes down to whether there is a retaining string holding the lens cap or not (the 7070 has one).

One small error I'd like to point out in your review: you claim that the macro facility is only 20cm, which is "nothing special". This comment



could have been enough to cross this excellent camera of my list. However, it does have a supermacro facility taking it down to 2- or 3cm, which is just so much better than my old SLR.

Andrea Main

DIGIT: *You're quite correct, so apologies for our mistake. We will say instead that this option is buried very deeply in the camera's menu system, and is therefore tricky to use in a hurry.*

We also wrongly stated the price as £315 plus VAT. While the camera can be bought online for this price, it's Digit's policy to print manufacturers' list prices – so this should have been £425 plus VAT.

Freeway flippancy

What an absurd and misleading statement to make (about Softpress Freeway in Letters, Digit 90). What promise does Freeway offer and then fail to deliver?

Freeway is currently behind on its update cycle but it does what it says on the tin. You can design Web sites quickly and well and with good code. If you want you can then tweak the code elsewhere or integrate with databases or various technologies.

It has limitations and may not be appropriate for everyone as it is an HTML publisher, and never claims to be an HTML editor. This is a big difference.

Your editors are unwise to offer such a damning throwaway line with regard to a small independent software company who offers a product that many would be blown away by if they were to discover it. This is in my humble opinion, of course.

Maybe you would let Softpress Freeway have a fair review from someone open to evaluating the application in its strengths – as well as weaknesses when they release version 4.

Brian Steere

DIGIT: *We received more than a few letters about what we said about Freeway. We stand by our comments about the software though – that for the vast majority of designers it's no match for a code-&-design application such as Macromedia Dreamweaver. However, as always, we'll review the next release and give it a full chance to impress us.*





★ star letter: No design for life

While I applaud Matthew Bath's ideals in trying to inspire us to a more holistic approach to working (Digit 90), I don't feel it's realistic for most of us. World-changing charity campaigns are something you pretend to work on at college and the forget about until, if you're lucky enough, you're working for a top agency with the time and resources to let you have a 'sabbatical' on a big charity account. The rest of us, and the studios we work for, are too focused on working on commercial campaigns to pay the bills to worry about the 'greater good'.

Don't get me wrong. I'd love to work for PETA, or the PDSA, or anything beginning with P (or R), ending with A, and doing good work for animals. But I also have a mortgage to pay, kids to put through education and, hopefully, a retirement to look forward too. I'd like to say I could offer some of my spare time to a good cause, but I'd have to have some first. The design business, though charming and glamorous (I wish), is a hard taskmaster that leaves you little time to sleep, let alone work on something else.

Instead, I propose that we do more with what we've got – even if what we've got is a client who wants 'fantasy women and oversized guns'. A pride in what we do – coupled with a subversive temperament to undermine anything in a brief that offends us – is enough to help us make the world a little better. And that's enough for me.

Jenny Grove

Write in & win

This month, the star letter wins a copy of ILEX's latest book, 3D Toons by Steve & Raf Anzovin, worth £17.95. 3D Toons provides a fascinating look at the emerging art form of digital cartooning. Newcomers will benefit from the clear, non-technical discussions of body and facial design, texturing, rigging, lighting, posing, and other aspects of building digital characters that truly come to life. 3D Toons also shows how claymation and other traditional animation media can be given fresh life using digital techniques. Well-designed, profusely illustrated spreads graphically demonstrate how each approach is conceived and evolves to

a final work. A gallery section showcases the latest creations of some of today's leading artists. 3D Toons is an eye-opening overview for any artist on the cutting edge.

To order your copy with a 20 per cent discount and free postage &-packing (usually £3.50) giving you a total saving of £7, just visit www.ilex-press.com/digit to benefit from this great offer, as well as for more information about other new and exciting ILEX titles.



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WORLD LEADERS IN IT PUBLISHING



If we were... retro sweets



Matt Lynn Chris Neil Andy

PIN IT DOWN

BADGES PRESENT A SMALL CANVAS THAT FORCE DESIGNERS TO GET RIGHT TO THE POINT, AS THIS COLLECTION FROM STEREOHYPE SHOWS.

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Badges have been an integral part of every subculture since the 60s. Hippies, punks, mods, metallers, and indie kids have proved their allegiance to a band or a cause by attaching a badge or 20 to their clothes, bags, and other accoutrements. And as bands and movements fall in and out of favour, they can be changed to fit the current trends.

Badges are more than this though. They allow you to modify what you wear without the hassle having to learn how to sew. You can subvert what you're wearing, or reinforce it, or do the former on one day and the latter on another.

For design, as with children, the best thing about badges is that you can make them yourself for very little cash indeed. You can make one, wear it out, get bored of it and throw it away the next day – and then make a new one. As instant gratification goes, it's the Pot Noodle of design – though slightly more nutritious.

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Life isn't perfect – unless you're a professional image manipulator with the power to alter reality. Digit spoke to the best in the business

The well-known adage “the camera never lies” is going out of date. The idea that what you see is what you get just doesn't hold anymore, because what you get with a camera is very rarely what you see on the page. From abs muscles to zits, arses to T-zones, nothing is exempt from the professional retoucher's virtual brush.

Digit took the time to go beyond appearances to ask what kind of changes photos go through before they hit the pages of glossy magazines, and to investigate whether there are any limits to this digital art.

There have been some very public cases of retouching going to extremes. The case of the Kate Winslet cover of *GQ* in January 1993, in which the voluptuous English star was pictured in a black basque with stick-thin thighs, is perhaps the most famous. Winslet received digital surgery courtesy of *GQ*'s art director, 

the g

BY DEBORAH BONELLO



olden touch

Illustration by Sarah Howell, www.debutart.com, Photographer Chris Lane



FAMOUS CASES OF PHOTOSHOP GONE BANANAS

Kate Winslet wasn't the first famous face to fall foul of the retoucher's brush. The history annals have endless cases of retouching gone mental.

MARTHA STEWART & NEWSWEEK

In March this year, a cover of *Newsweek* in the US featuring Martha Stewart and the headline 'Martha's Last Laugh' caused a huge fuss. Stewart, who was released from prison earlier this year after a criminal prosecution, featured

on the front cover emerging from behind some curtains. The problem was the picture featured Stewart's head superimposed on the body of a model, photographed separately in a Los Angeles studio.

The decision by *Newsweek* was labelled a 'major ethical breach' by The National Press Photographers Association. Although it mentioned on page three of the magazine that the image was 'an illustration', the NPPA

argued that the average reader wouldn't know it wasn't Martha Stewart's body in the photograph.

The NPPA guidelines on the manipulation of images read as follows: "As journalists, we believe

1

and ended up looking, quite literally, like a shadow of her former self. This didn't go down very well with the actress, who has flown the flag for full-figured women.

At the time, *GQ* editor Dylan Jones defended the article, saying the image wasn't so different from reality, and that practically all glossy magazine photos are digitally altered in this way.

The professional retouchers contacted by Digit for this feature confirmed this, but interestingly many of the men's glossies – namely *FHM* and *Loaded* – refused to comment at all.

Dave Kelsell, art director at *Bizarre* magazine, was more forthcoming. The latest cover for *Bizarre* featured a model being embraced by a six-foot python. Although the picture was genuine and came from a real photo shoot, it needed some work.

Kelsell said the snake was covering the girl's breasts for most of the time, but in the best shot the animal started to slip, so some adjustments had to be made. The python's tail was also in the wrong place and had to be wrapped around the girl's wrist.

Retouching ranges from a very low to a very high level of complexity – to restructuring snake tails and boobs, to taking out red eye.

Boris Kobrin, who is the co-founder of the retouching agency Touch Of Glamour, which does portrait and beauty pageant enhancements, took us through some of the changes a professional can make with Photoshop. It's a pretty long and exhaustive list.

Skin jobs

"The majority of work includes skin texture correction," says Kobrin. "That's blemishes, wrinkles, creases and bags under the eyes, overall smoothening of the skin, tattoo removal, piercing holes removal, skin hairs removal, eyelashes build-up or enlargement, cleanup eye whites, hair style correction, meaning the removal of hair strings, removal of holes in the hair, increase in hair volume, tiding-up hair line, teeth whitening, removal of teeth gaps, lips gloss enhancement, change lips colour, and make-up correction."

Some more challenging projects may include massive changes to a model's appearance, according to Kobrin. Bust enhancements, body slimming, face slimming, double-chin removal, nose reshaping, mouth closing, changing the direction of the eyes, and opening the eyes up are all procedures that can be performed. Some photos also benefit from a background colour-change, or some sophisticated artistic background with architecture, nature, indoors environment and so on. The complexity of the job varies according to what kind of changes are being made.

"I would say, there are three levels of complexity in photo retouching," says Kobrin. "Level one involves contrast, brightness, colour corrections, blemishes, and wrinkles removal," he says, "whereas level two is more about things like building up eyelashes, hair and teeth." Level three, says Kobrin, is the most complex. "That's body work – breast enlargement, body and face slimming, nose reshaping, eyes opening or changing direction."

Glen Feron, a US-based artist and retoucher, has specialized in retouching



A recent issue of *Bizarre* shows how art directors use image retouching to fix photos to get the perfect image.



Earrings and old piercing holes become a thing of the past after a stint with the retouchers.

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that credibility is our greatest asset. In documentary photojournalism, it is wrong to alter the content of a photograph in any way (electronically or in the darkroom) that deceives the public. We believe the guidelines for fair and accurate reporting should be the

criteria for judging what may be done electronically to a photograph."

As a result of the furore surrounding the cover, *Newsweek* editor Mark Whitaker changed the magazine's byline and crediting policy. Now, bylines and illustration credit lines will appear

directly on the front cover rather than inside the magazine or in the table of contents.



OPRAH WINFREY AND TV GUIDE

In August 1989, the front cover of US magazine *TV Guide* featured the face of one of the most popular TV celebrities in the country – Oprah Winfrey – superimposed on the body of model Ann Margaret. The cover was the source of much amusement and controversy,



Jeff Bennett, founder of the Irish agency Pybol, has created high-level work for the likes of Coke, as shown above, showing that image retouching literally creates the impossible.

photography of both the rich and famous and glossy magazine models. Over the last 20 years, he has worked for a huge array of titles including ABC, CBS, and *Penthouse*, and *Swank* magazines. His Web site (www.glenferon.com) – is an education in the art of photo retouching.

The site features a huge array of before-&-after shots of some fairly well known faces, and illustrates the difference between the image the camera gets and what the photo ultimately looks like to the consumer. From plumping up Beyonce's boobs to putting in upholstery and props surrounding models, the possibilities of what can be done are endless. He says that retouching actually works both ways – that it's not just about making models look better.

"Some magazines will purposefully make them look worse," Feron says. "First they take a bad photo and then they mess with it, making the bags under their eyes look worse and stuff like that."

He says that there are lots of amateurs doing basic retouching with fairly satisfactory results – taking out red-eye for example, or brightening up a picture, but for the hard stuff, which involves reshaping bodies or rendering the skin colour, he thinks an art background is vital.

"You can just use a filter to enhance colour but with the more complex work you have to go in and manipulate the body structure. It's an actual construction of the outline of the body. You have to be an artist to do a body construction."

Take, for example, a cover Feron did for a men's magazine in the States. The front cover featured the mother of the actress Demi Moore. The editors wanted her to emulate the famous *Vanity Fair* cover her daughter posed for when she was pregnant, and Feron created the front cover, based on a shot of his subject, and had to put a pregnant belly on Moore's somewhat more mature mum.

In short, the front cover was a virtual illustration, and not really a photograph at all. This isn't an isolated incident. "I have a lot of clients asking for extreme things," says Feron. "I have to put panties on a lot of girls for magazine covers. It means you would take an image of someone in that same pose and then lift that off and paste it onto the image that doesn't have it."

The 'photo shoot' isn't as glamorous as it sounds. "When you don't have someone willing to pose you have to put the panties on a balloon," chuckles Feron. "Then you've got to make it look real – adding little shadows on the skin that reflect where the hem of a panty is, that kind of thing."

Creative limits

So, are there any limits to how far retouchers will go? Kellsell on *Bizarre* says that it's often hard to know where to stop. "You can keep working on a cover but there comes a point when you have to stop. When I first started doing this I didn't know how far to go, but I've learnt more, the more I've done."

Kellsell insists that *Bizarre* makes a point of putting strong looking women on the cover, unlike the girly and sometimes scared-looking models pictured on the front of more mainstream men's magazines. "I stop at shaving off too much fat or drawing things out to perfection," he says.



EVENING STANDARD FRONT PAGE

On April 9, 2003, the front page of the London *Evening Standard* showed a blurry image supposedly showing a crowd of Iraqis in Baghdad celebrating the toppling of Saddam Hussein. It transpired that the image had been digitally manipulated, with one man

appearing in the crowd three times and smudging to conceal where the photograph had been stitched together.

At the time, the newspaper issued the following statement: "A number of readers have expressed concern that our front page picture on 9 April,

showing Iraqis celebrating the liberation of Baghdad, had been enhanced to depict a larger crowd than actually existed. As it was taken from TV footage, some extra people were added to the image in order to fill the space left by the removal of logos from



Kobrin agrees it can be difficult to know where to draw the line. "This is a tough one. It's very easy to go overboard. We advise our customers to trust us with the level of enhancements, and usually they do.

"Everything depends on the specific customer, the field of use and so on. That's why we request our customers to advise us where they are going to use the photo we retouch and specifically what 'level of enhancements' they prefer. For pageant competitions we're usually asked to go for a 'full glitz' work with 'porcelain-finish' skin, sophisticated eye-lashes and the like. More mature audiences don't want retouching to be so obvious."

Bijan Habashi, who owns the retouching and restoration studio, Bijan's Studio, says he often goes too far.

"What isn't acceptable is to make someone look totally different than she or he is in real life. I have gone too far myself. I made a 50-year-old woman look like she was 20. It's a huge difference. I would not do that if I were her, but that's what she wanted."

He also said an old man insisted his age be dramatically reduced in a photograph – Habashi says it was too much but what the customer wants the customer gets.

Despite some of his work, which turns good-looking people into angel-faced beauties and smooth-skinned babes, Feron thinks that retouching should try its hardest to be natural and should leave some resemblance of the original subject.

Advertising and retouching

Feron says there's a lot of messing about with advertising. Ads that are promoting slimming products are some of the worse culprits and he says that very often, in the before and after slimming pictures, they'll take the head of the original subject off and superimpose it onto a thinner person's body. He says that advertisers are 'going bananas' with Photoshop.

Jeff Bennett, founder of the Irish agency Pybol, handles a lot of work for outdoor advertising campaigns for brands such as Coke, Smirnoff and BMW.

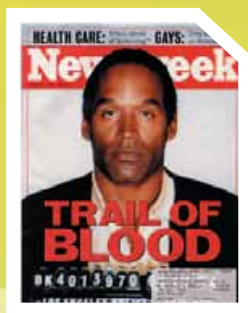
"I think every shot we get has some imperfections that have to be removed. Anything from beer bottles to models or chocolate, every shot will need some attention," he says. "Most of the images we make are a mixture of photography, illustration, and 3D modelling. We tend to find the outdoor advertising work is the most elaborate, and the general print work will usually have a lower



Jeff Bennett, founder of the Irish agency Pybol, has created high-level work for the likes of Fiat, as shown above.



Before-&-after images from *A Touch Of Glamour* showing both eye and lip work on models, usually created for model's portfolios or to correct a photoshoot.



the picture. In our opinion this did not alter the clarity of truth of the picture's message but we are happy to make this clear."

OJ SIMPSON IN TIME VS NEWSWEEK FURORE:

In June 1994, football hero OJ Simpson was arrested for the murder of his ex-wife and one of her friends and both *Time* and *Newsweek* featured the police mugshot of Simpson on their front covers. *Time*'s version of the picture was much darker than that featured on the

front of *Newsweek* and it emerged that *Time* had darkened the picture to make Simpson look blacker, and the whole picture more sinister.

The incident is used as a lesson of 'what not to do' by photo courses and workshops around the world.

SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR & SEVENTEEN

US magazine *Seventeen* retouched a photo of Sarah Michelle Gellar – and somehow warped her hand in the process, making it unnaturally long. The shirt colour was changed from black to purple. Gellar was unhappy, but the furore has since died down.

budget so the photography will have less time spent to get it right. This really dictates the quality of the images we start with.

"With beer images a spritz (condensation on the glass) can be one of the more difficult things to deal with, cutting out thousands of little bubbles and moving them around is not much craic, skin can also be a tricky subject or anything with a lot of subtle blends or textures," adds Bennett.

Digit contacted the Advertising Standards Authority in the UK to see whether there are any official limits to how far advertisers can go in retouching photos advertising their products.

Claire Forbes, the regulator's press officer, says: "Our basic concern is always to ensure that the general public isn't misled by photos. So, we have to judge how people are likely to interpret the ad and its images, and how far they are likely to feel that the images are making a claim about the product being advertised."

The ASA says that most people can make a distinction between advertising puffery and a clearly intended depiction of actual results. An ad for a skin cream, for example, might show a shot of a model with beautiful skin but it's accepted that most people would not necessarily think that using the product would result in identical skin.

However, says Forbes, if the ad used before-&-after shots, the ASA would presume that most people would expect similar types of results to occur if they used the product. For example, towards the end of last year the skin cream company CAT Industries was reprimanded by the ASA for an ad for its eyelift cream which showed the before and after effects of the product.

"We asked the advertisers to provide proof that the product had led to the results shown and they failed to do so," says Forbes.

Another ad for mascara featured a model wearing false eyelashes, which the regulator deemed unacceptable because it exaggerated the effectiveness of the product.

The list continues

"We've also upheld complaints about an ad for a camera phone where it showed a phone handset being used to take a picture. The quality of the picture was being enhanced in the ad, in comparison with the actual quality of the picture the phone is capable of taking," says Forbes.

Whichever way you look at it, the representation of both people and products in magazines is very often not a true one. Pressure from the outside world for perfection coupled with the technology to do so results in the enhancement of almost every image in some way.

"I have a problem with it," says Feron. "There are a lot of young girls who believe that models are really like that and aspire to that and start having surgery. I believe that the whole industry is too extreme at being perfect. Unfortunately, I'm part of that but I don't feel good about it."

Although it's easy to go too far, Feron says he's never had to say no to something, but adds: "If they say put a pitch fork in the Pope's hand, I might say no..."



These before-&-after images by Glen Feron, a US-based image retoucher, shows some of the work that goes into images for promotions. In the original, the models sport tattoos (circled), and the central model's stomach is slightly flabby, along with chunkier thighs and calves. Hair gaps have also been filled in, and a foot position changed.



The top image (Smirnoff) shows some of the talented retouching work from Jeff Bennett.

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Creative Zing

BY MICHAEL BURNS

All truly creative endeavour needs a spark – a moment of clarity or a bright idea that inspires the project, gives the work impetus, and makes sure the results are worth the effort.



Anyone can come up with run-of-the-mill work. It's just a question of doing as the client says, going through the motions, and churning out some "creative" output. The media we consume would be inexorably dull if all creatives went for this no-brainer approach. The spark that turns bog-standard output into standard-bearing output is elusive – how do the creative industry's top people ensure they're on good terms with the inspiration fairy?

"Usually a creative solution is born straight out of the brief and a little research with the client," says Alec East, media director of Tomorrow London. "The finer details and visual identity can come from anywhere: conversations, books, walks, but rarely from sitting in front of a computer screen."

John McFaul, illustrator and co-founder of the Black Convoy design collective, agrees that hunching over a mouse and keyboard saps the mind. "Get away and throw some paint and ink around," he advises.

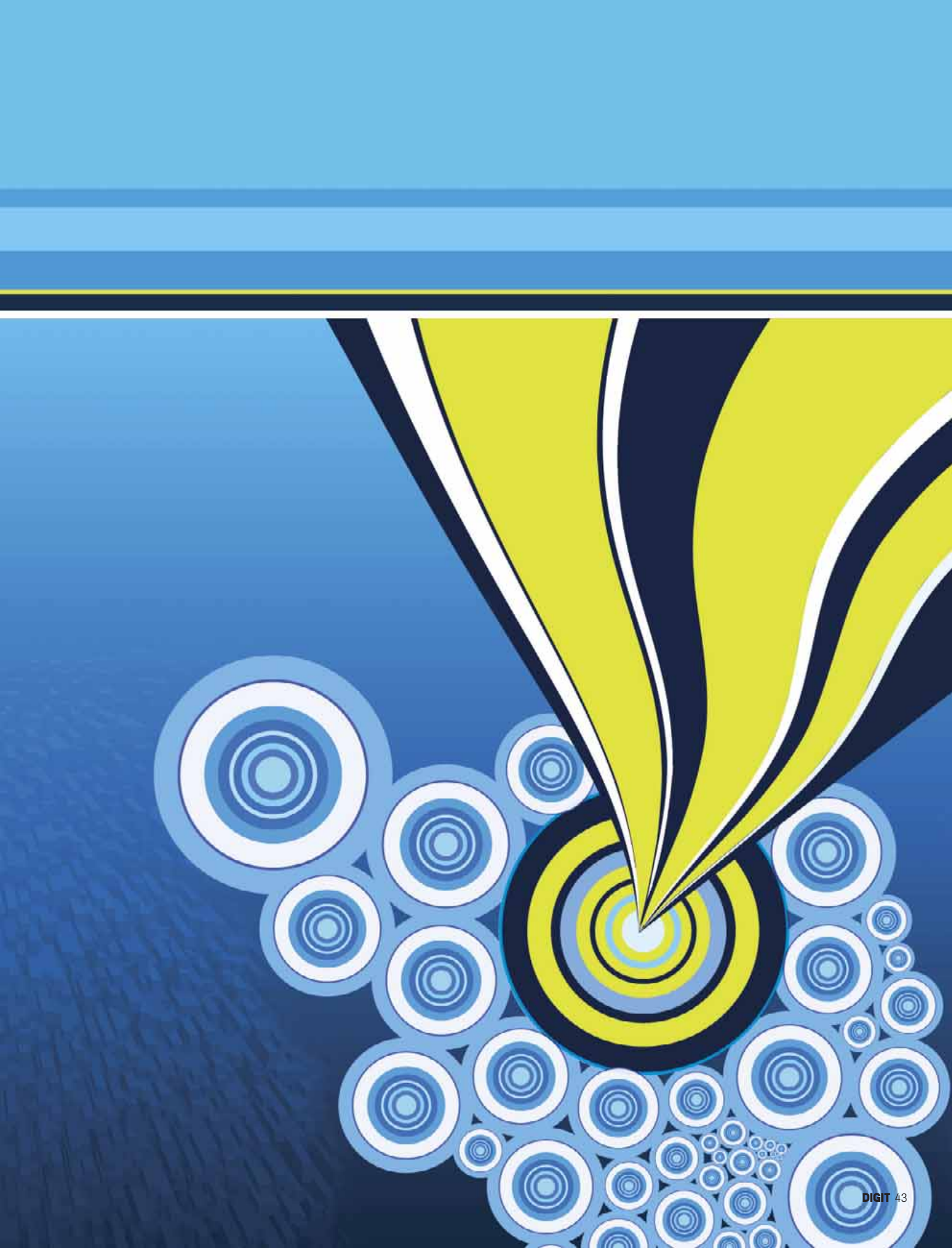
When you're working in the digital creative arena, it's essential to wear several hats at once, according to Dino Burbidge, creative director at Digital Outlook. "You have to be a designer, a psychologist, a programmer, a gamer, a consumer, a lawyer, and more often than not, a salesman," he says. "You have to be constantly grazing the entire width of the industry, and outside it too."

Like many other designers, Burbidge feels it's important to put yourself into places that throw up unexpected inspiration and allow others to be an inspiration to you. "A designer has to try and remain neutral when absorbing ideas and as far as possible use logic and practicality to narrow down the

directions," he says.

"I think inspiration is a mixture of conscious visual decisions and unconscious 'memory flashes' – things you only remember in bits," says animator and illustrator Ben Hibon. "I approach most projects in a similar way; always thinking of what the goal of the project is first. Creative inspiration comes from in between the lines, popping out of the page as you read the brief."

Andy Potts, illustrator and lead designer at Abbey Road Interactive, says: 



"I keep my eye open to random visual inspiration and find imagery wherever I am – a good shot in a film, a piece of architecture, a bit of graffiti or print, an imperfect photo, signage, odd ephemera, textures, or postcards. We are surrounded by design and it's all up for grabs. For editorial illustration, there's always the added bonus of the text of an article and the writer's imagination to spark off good visual ideas."

Ideas factory

Some creatives believe looking for inspiration for any given project limits your potential catchment of ideas. "We get inspiration from all the usual places and a few more random ones besides," says Mark Graham, creative director of ilovedust. "Sometimes, it hits you when you're not looking at all – while wading through the dregs of a Google image search for one project, you may stumble across the perfect inspiration for something totally different."

Tom and Mark Perrett, two directors at Nexus Productions are also big fans of the 'Google image search', because it can trigger things from your subconscious. "You can instantly extrapolate a vague notion into a visual reference," says Tom Perrett. "There's no real bolt out of the sky – it has to come from something that's bobbing around inside your brain already, and it won't if you're seeing the same stuff everyday."

Some designers prefer to avoid consciously looking for inspiration. "How sad

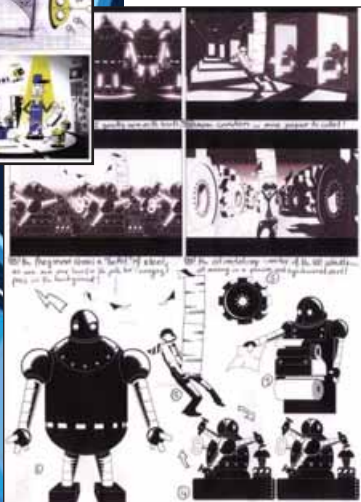
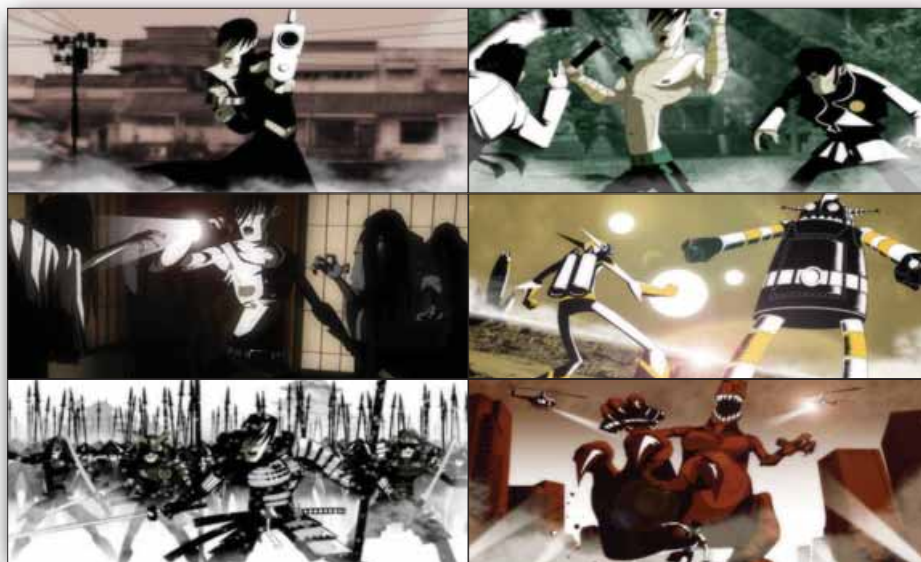
would it be if every film or exhibition you went to you were always thinking 'how could I use this for something?'" asks Ben Priest, creative director at Rainey Kelly. "Stuff you love or that changes your life stays with you anyway."

You just have to have a very open mind and try to be as perceptive as possible. "Mix up new combinations of ideas, and never take things too literally," says Adam Montandon of HMC Entertainment Systems. "I like to look at completely random things and see if they can be applied to a digital context."

When it comes to interactive design, technology can play a creative part in inspiring designers. Simon Crab, creative director of Lateral, says: "For me, a constant source of inspiration is the possibilities offered by new technology, combinations of technology, and the space between technologies. That is, how it all fits together."

For something as hard to pin down as creative inspiration, is it possible to get more great ideas through set techniques? The Google image search can only go so far – and sometimes trying too hard causes its own problems. "I find inspiration is something that is intuitive and hard to define – the more it's analyzed I find the more the inspiration dissipates," says Andy Potts.

However, some designers have their own tried and tested methods for encouraging their brains to dream up a special idea. Ollie Lindsay, of Society Limited and design duo Play Nicely, says he usually flicks through a load of books and magazines, taking photos with a digital camera. "It's the quickest way



BEN HIBON: MTV SCREEN

Ben Hibon was approached for both his character design and directing style to create a 20-second intro animation for a weekly film show for MTV Asia. A completely open brief allowed Hibon to come up with the idea of having a central, fictional character who would

be found in films – a generic hero who saves the day, kisses the girl, jumps from a plane and knows how to fly a spaceship, with inspirations drawing on Asian cinema, from Japanese horror to Chinese cop thriller. Hibon tried to stick as closely as possible to his original drawings

for the animation, but then concentrated on telling each scene with a single different movement – a style common to the Manga tradition.

to collect a whole load of inspiration without trashing your prized collection,” he says. “I have masses of folders on my computer just filled with images that you can pour through and pick stuff out of to create mood boards and sketchbooks.”

“Photography and mood boards help enormously in the creative process,” agrees Lindsay’s creative partner in Play Nicely, illustrator Alice Brisland. “I can play with compositions and themes while constantly referring back to the brief. It’s important to be always developing your ideas – otherwise design becomes stale really quickly. The independent magazines from local groups are always very interesting to look at to see what is really going on in the now.”

Getting the job done

“Sticking ideas into a sketchbook for me is the best way of trying out ideas,” says Ben Hibon. “I always start by writing down thoughts and drawing rough sketches. A good technique is to spread the ‘brainstorming’ time as much as possible over a few days.”

Creating a positive working atmosphere can also assist in the generation of ideas. Samantha Dumont, creative director of Dragon brand agency says: “At the outset of a project we place a lot of importance on creating a fantastic internal brief for the creative team. So rather than an A4 B&W typed sheet, we create a visual briefing pack and kick off the project with a full team briefing. The energy and excitement this creates is fantastic.”

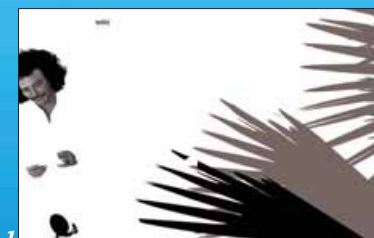
Generating ideas from briefs is an integral part of a creative’s job. Brainstorming is often the main route to creative ideas. “Visual design in response to a brief is a constructed solution to solve a problem, in many ways like other forms of design such as architecture or product design,” says Ben Heap, head of graphics at The Hive. “We work together to come up with as many appropriate ideas as possible. Next stop is brainstorming and mood boards.”

Teamwork, brainstorming, and one-to-one partnerships to build and expand on an idea are all used to generate ideas at Dragon. “This has worked well for decades in advertising and it can be very effective at the conceptual stage of a design project too,” says Samantha Dumont.

“It’s always good to bounce ideas off people to see what they think. Maybe someone else can open it up and take your initial thoughts in a completely different direction,” says James Brocklebank, DVD Designer at TMR Digital. “Even if you haven’t really developed the idea, by talking it through with someone, or experimenting with it in Photoshop, you can sometimes turn what appeared to be a no-hoper into something really worth pursuing.”

“Talking things through often draws ideas out of people,” agrees Mark Graham. “One person’s half-thought-out idea can be turned into something stronger when you work in a team. It’s a bit of an unpredictable process but that’s the fun of it and it generally works for us.”

Adam Montandon says the early stages are vital in idea generating. “It’s



1



2



3



4



5

Developing an idea – John McFaul Commission for Broadcast Magazine

(1) McFaul’s initial build of the composition, grabs imagery and shapes from photos, cuttings and textures. It’s just B&W at this stage, as he’s more intent on getting across the idea of the piece. Further composition of the work (2) led McFaul to create a dynamic double-page spread, adding treated elements where he feels the image needs interest. “My working process now lets me create an image as I go,” says McFaul, so his rough (3) is close to the final artwork (4). “From initial idea to first rough I am constantly evaluating whether the image is communicating what it has to, is compositionally strong, and is aesthetically pleasing,” he says.



6

For The Hive’s ident for Five (5-6), the team started with the idea of a bullet travelling through space and cut together an animatic. The main inspiration came from the visual language of CSI and knowing what current high-speed image technology could deliver.

essential not to be bogged down by any perceived limitations. Rare flashes of inspiration are a lot more effective than brainstorming from concept to concept in the initial stages."

Run with an idea, but don't trip

Lateral thinking is the best way to manoeuvre around obstacles, according to Ben Heap. "If one approach isn't working, don't force it, try another – anything that will move the project on," he advises. "Sometimes this is also saying what the project should not be or indicating how it shouldn't end up looking."

Handily, taking a day off can help to move a project forward, according to Ben Hibon. "Another simple way is to share the problem with another creative head," says Hibon.

Getting another perspective is particularly easy when you work in a studio environment. Katie Tang and Mike Doney of Tado see a definite advantage in being two rather than one: "Of course, we both have blocks and off periods every now and again like anyone, but the other one is always there to help us snap out of it by administering a quick slap."

Peepshow co-founder and illustrator Miles Donovan agrees. "Being in a studio with lots of other illustrators is ideal," he says. "Sometimes I'll send out a quick work in progress JPG to other illustrator friends in other studios for their input or thoughts."

Stubborn design briefs can have the effect of dampening creative potential from the start of the project. Adam Montandon thinks these appear simply because a client isn't always aware of the possibilities. "When we have a particularly stubborn brief we create a 'Dreamsheet,'" he says. "This is a brief outline of completely wild and unusual ideas that would be perfect to incorporate into the project and helps educate clients as to what is possible."

Andy Potts says there's nothing more soul-destroying than creating an image that will bore the creative and the client in equal measure. "If I'm not happy about a brief or the subject appears dull at first glance I'll look for an angle that gets me excited to be working on it," he says.

Of course there will always be stumbling blocks in any creative endeavour, but Alec East welcomes them: "Design is largely about overcoming problems, finding solutions and workarounds. If you haven't got a hefty obstacle, you have nothing solid to push against."

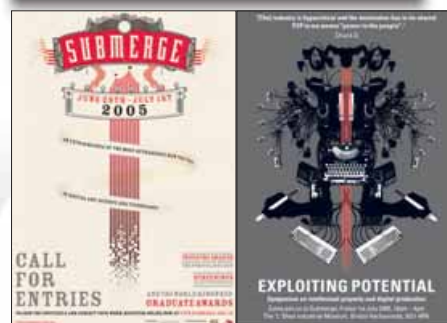
Turning inspiration into results

The production process is a question of turning ideas into reality. "Ideas by themselves are nothing, its turning those ideas into reality that is the real skill," says Adam Montandon. "Anybody can have a great idea, but very few people can execute them."

However, inspiration doesn't always go hand in hand with commercial concerns. "Sometimes it really is hard to put work you love into projects," says Mark Graham. "We often chuck a personal idea into the mix and sometimes it may well find its way into a commercial project."

"It's a fine line, but you have to be honest about whether what inspires you is actually helping or hindering," warns Dino Burbidge. "Results from user testing often throw up situations where you have to let go of innovative concepts because they get in the way of the final objectives. If you're inspiration doesn't seem to have a clear path to realization, one can argue it's maybe not the best thing to be inspired by. It has to be relevant."

You do have to learn to defend your corner, though. Creative thought shouldn't be held back because your client fears innovation. "They have commissioned you to deliver a certain something," says McFaul. "Something that nobody else can deliver. So don't let someone direct you so much that you lose creative interest."



OLLIE LINDSAY: SUBMERGE IDENTITY AND GRAPHICS

The annual Submerge showcase of digital art, media, and technology for graduates in the UK took up about seven months of Society and Play Nicely founder Ollie Lindsay's time. Originally agreeing just to develop the concept for this year's show, Lindsay eventually produced a large percentage of the

branding, and some screen-based animations. The inspiration was his enthusiasm and admiration for the goals of the Submerge project. "Being part of a small team of people who are so truly passionate about a single thing made it such a great project

to be a part of," he says. "It's not often you get a chance to experience such extreme emotions while working on something. I wanted to try and help propel forward the exhibition and help raise its profile."

Contacts/Thanks to:

Andy Potts, www.andy-potts.com
HMC, www.hmc.uk.net
Nexus Productions, www.nexuslondon.com
Ben Hibon, www.statelessfilms.com
Lateral, www.lateral.net
Tomorrow London, www.tomorrowlondon.com
Dragon, www.dragonbrands.com
The Hive @ VTR, www.vtr.co.uk
TADO, www.tado.co.uk
McFaul Ltd, www.mcfaul.biz
Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R, www.rkcrjr.com
ilovedust, www.ilovedust.com
TMR Digital, www.themachinerom.co.uk
Play Nicely, www.play-nicely.co.uk
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land of the dead

George Romero's latest chapter in his zombie film series sees the director embrace the magic of digital effects with over 300 shots in total. Visual-effects house Spin Productions led the way.

Zombies are set to return to UK cinema screens this September with the release of George Romero's *Land of the Dead*. The fourth installment in the director's 'Dead' series (following on from *Night of...*, *Dawn of...*, and *Day of...*), the latest film sees the world overtaken by the living dead and the last humans alive walled up in the city for their own protection.

Despite revisiting his old zombie genre, the film marks something of a departure for Romero in its use of digital effects. In the past, the director had relied on practical shots and animatronics, and was wary of the digital fakery on offer. Yet the visual-effects specialists at Spin Productions quickly won him over.

"This was George's first use of digital effects and he was a little apprehensive at first," explains Jeff Campbell, visual-effects supervisor at Spin Productions. "He felt better when I told him we would only be enhancing the live action, and soon became very comfortable with the new digital tools available to him."

Romero's apprehension was further eased by the knowledge that his movie was in capable hands. A full-service visual-effects house based in Toronto, Spin Productions creates effects, animation, and motion graphics for feature films, television series, and commercials. The Spin team working with Romero, led by experienced digital artist

Campbell, can together list film credits that include *Fight Club*, *X-Men*, *The Cell*, *Spiderman 2*, and *Chicago*.

The studio originally quoted for 67 shots, which then increased to 300 VFX shots for the movie in total. Campbell and his crew completed 119 key shots while a secondary tier of effects houses worked on the rest. The film saw four months of production and four months of post work. Before this, thorough shot planning and previsualization work proved essential says Campbell. For key effects sequences such as the army of zombies emerging from the river and ariel shots of zombies swarming into the city, previsualization allowed the team to establish the number of zombies needed and the correct camera info to use such as heights, distances, angles, lenses, focal lengths, and planning camera moves.

"George loved previs," says Campbell. "It's such a creative and cost-saving tool being able to plan difficult shots out before the shoot day. The rough comps I did throughout production also boosted his confidence to do more digital effects. By the end of production you would have thought this was a greenscreen movie. We were shooting up to three greenscreen sets at one time, and I was running around like a headless chicken."

As working digitally afforded Romero greater creative freedom, more shots were given over to CG, including the bird's eye POVs of the zombies



GEORGE REALLY HAD A GOOD EYE AND VISION – THERE WERE NO GRATUITOUS EFFECTS. WE KEPT IT REAL

JEFF CAMPBELL

entering the city. Hired stunt men were also cancelled in favour of using digital doubles. After all, you can't blow apart real stuntmen.

"When you compare the costs of a day's shoot with 150 extras, wardrobe, catering, all the production gear, film, crane rental, 60-foot greenscreen verses a week of CG, there's no question," he says. "Working with CG meant we were also able to make creative changes and even camera moves after the fact."

Product shots

Although, admits Campbell, Romero didn't use many camera moves. "I did try versions on shots with camera moves but George would always catch me and ask for a locked version," he says. "He also hates shots that look setup, or 'product shots' as he calls them. That's why I respect him so much. It's more powerful and realistic to catch a glimpse of an effect rather than sitting on it just for eye candy. George planned all his digital shots the same way he would practically."

The Spin crew used a raft of software tools on the production including Maya, Combustion, Shake, Photoshop, Flame, Inferno, and Burn.

Combustion for the rotoscoping, and Flame and Inferno for the compositing were used on the 12 shots of crowd replication, which made hundreds of zombies look like thousands. The zombie extras were shot in

groups of approximately 85 in a pool and repositioned on set in order to have enough layers to fill the composition, explains Campbell. The group layers were 400 to 600 frames long and offset so duplicating movement was avoided. Inferno was used to finish these shots as its ability to handle hundreds of 2K 12-bit layers gave the team more time to experiment creatively.

One of the most challenging and time-consuming sequences involved creating a 3D zombie priest. The sequence sees an almost headless priest sitting in the back of a truck, fighting off a live human by throwing his head, which is attached by muscles and tendons. Originally, Romero had planned to use animatronics for this shot, but was concerned that the half-severed head looked fake in the footage. The sequence was then reshot as live-action with a priest dummy and a green-hooded actor.

The full-body dummy was scanned using Eyetrionics' portable 3D scanning system to create a 3D model and 6K textures. All specular lighting from the scanned 3D textures were then painted out so the team could use their own.

Campbell created an animatic in Inferno using a grey shaded 3D generic head for timings and, as Romero was concerned that the audience wouldn't get what was happening, extra scenes were added to help sell the premise.

"The biggest problem we ran into when rendering was that the original texture resolution was too high and kept causing Maya to crash due to low memory," says Nick Perks, 3D technical director. "We solved this by downsizing some textures maps – in some cases from 4k down to 1k or less."

"We also ran into a few problems with 3D motion blur using a lot of memory, this was partly related to the large texture sizes, but we switched from 3D blur to 2D blur in a few shots to get around this problem and it worked fine."



image 5



image 1



image 2



image 3



image 4

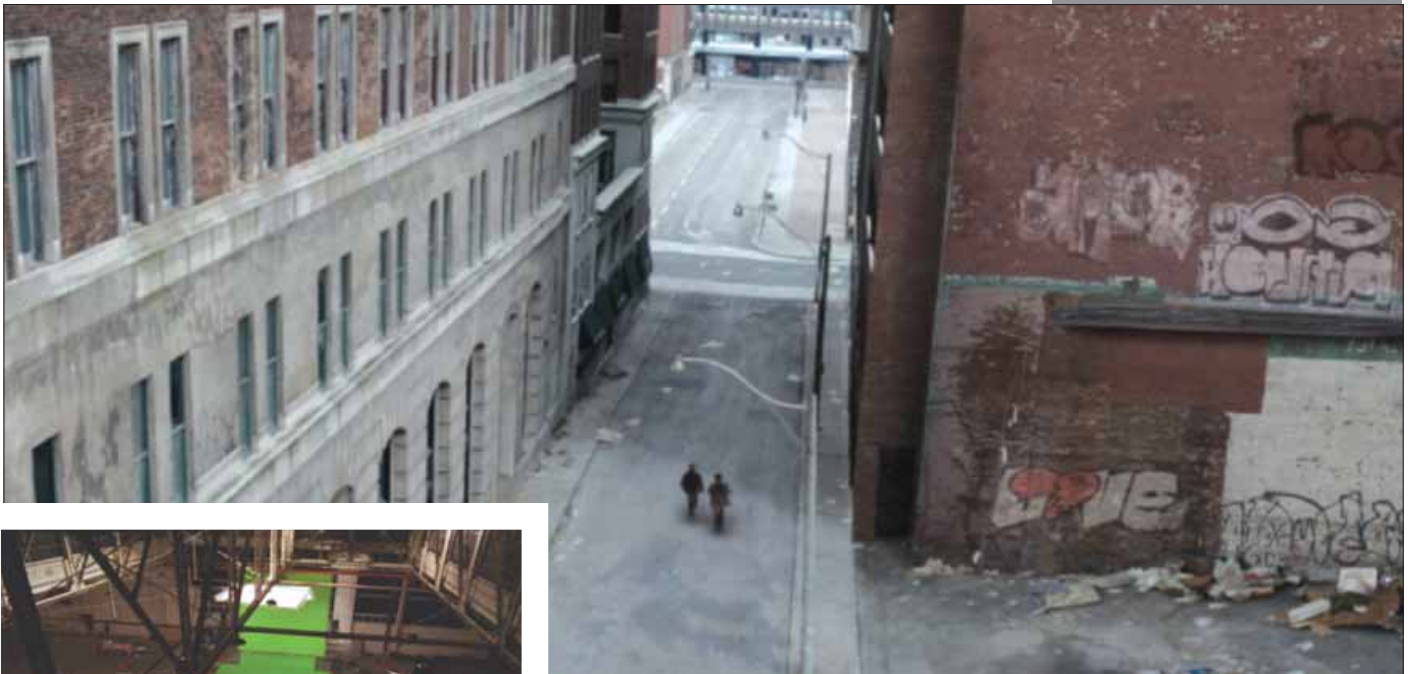
Creating a matte painting of the 'dump' – body parts and rubbish

To create a matte painting of the 'dump', Bojan Zoric, matte artist at Spin Productions, began with a blank 16-bit canvas measuring 2,048-x-1,556 pixels at 72dpi. After putting in a temporary foreground element, he started to work from back to front of the matte, layering features in the landscape as if he were creating a landscape in oil. "Only here I have the convenience of the undo button, the lasso and cloning tools and a slew of different brushes," he says (see image 1). "The main features are blocked in by using elements from reference photographs that have been masked out, colour corrected, warped and blended to create a desolate, overcast atmosphere (see image 2). Balancing out the values is my first priority as I'm trying to make sure all the landscape features are clearly visible while at the same time obeying the laws of atmospheric perspective."

Zoric then added detail by incorporating textures from photos of rocky fields, mountain ranges, and construction sites. Tree, earth mounds, water puddles, wooden crates and prosthetic bodies that had been shot on set were then added (see image 3 and 4). The photographs of the prosthetic bodies had been shot from various angles which allowed Zoric to populate the ground with body pieces, while making sure all the detail is 'grounded' by painting in blends and shadows and carefully matching colours and values. The borders of the set were then concealed and jarring shapes and hues muted so they wouldn't distract the viewer's eye.

"All this time I had been careful to leave all the main features in the landscape including mountains, mounds, trees and larger objects on separate layers so that Jeff can bring life to the matte by animating the clouds and compositing smoke and fire elements behind or in-between those layers," explains Zoric. "Having the main features in the landscape thus separated also makes adding the final touches very easy."

"Then I applied grain here and there, sharpened or softened the edges of certain objects or features or re-adjusted contrasts and colour corrects to make sure everything was well balanced (see image 5 above). In the end all the layers were saved out separately with the corresponding alpha channels and imported into Inferno ready for the compositing stage of the process," he says.



"We used an eight-node Burn render farm for the Discreet boxes," says Campbell of the huge amount of rendering time required for the project. "We couldn't have done without it. It must have doubled our productivity."

Credits
Land of the Dead
www.landofthedeادمovie.net

Spin Productions www.spinpro.com

visual-effects supervisor jeff campbell
on-set producer colin davis
executive producer neishaw ali

visual effects producer chad malbon
visual effects assistant producer terry hutcheson

production coordinator greg behrens

digital effects supervisor doug campbell

composite artist: naomi anderlini, london bootsma, jeff campbell, steven lewis, mark reid, ralph schmidt, chris van dyck

Opening title designer naomi anderlini

matte painting bojan zoric

3D technical director nick perks

animation director peter giliberti
animation marco cantaluppi, mikkil groesland, martin halle, michael lowes

modelling parastu rezaie

lighting/texturing phil dakin

previzualization colin davis, nick perks



The CG head was then modelled, rigged, and animated in Maya 6 and rendered using Mental Ray. Team member Colin Davis created photo-real hair using Shave and a Haircut. The priest dummy was then painted out from all the live-action plates to give a clean background plate for tracking and compositing in the CG priest, which was done in Inferno.

"The model needed reworking to change features that George didn't like. That's what is good and bad about digital effects – you can make changes right up to the end. We were to do nine shots in one month," says Campbell.

Alongside the visual effects for the film, Spin Productions was asked to create the film's opening titles. The brief was to illustrate a historical timeline that gave the audience a sense of the story in the previous films and linked them together without the usual visual clichés of the genre.

The entire 115-second piece had a three-week deadline from concept to completion, but the brief was not to use existing material from the current or previous films. "These limitations gave us the opportunity to shoot our own material for the entire piece," says Naomi Anderlini, designer and Flame artist.

"We used a Nikon D70 stills camera to shoot 3K stills in a stop-motion fashion in order to create the hand-cranked 'optical' feel we were looking for," she explains. "The fast lens reflex of this camera allowed us to do this painlessly, and the 3K resolution helped us to achieve a greater depth in detail."

As a key part of the titles' narrative was to show a dead human returning to life, Anderlini and her colleagues spent a day on a stop-motion shoot that reflected the stages of corpse turning into a zombie. Two special effects make-up artists from the film flew in to help along bringing with them some of the film's zombie dummies, but the real stars of the title sequence were Spin Productions' very own creative team.

"Chad Malbon, our visual-effects producer is the main zombie. Lead modeller Parastu Rezaie is the woman peeking out of a door. I'm one of the feasting zombies and all the people running away are our animators," says Campbell. "Talk about a full-service facility!"

The title sequence was created in 12-bit 2K in Flame. "The resolution and colour depth allowed us to achieve the highly textured look we were aiming for," says Anderlini.

"Since we were working in B&W, it gave us the detail we needed in the highlights and shadows to push the colour correction to where we wanted it to go. This was worth the extra time it took to work and render in this resolution," he adds.

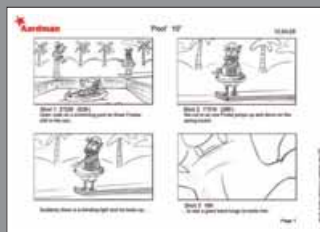
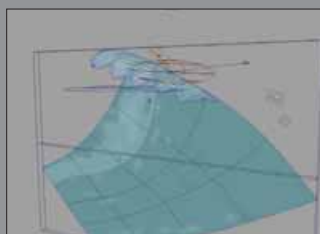
For the crew at Spin Productions, working on a George Romero film was an amazing experience says Campbell. "What's great about George is he gives us our brief and then trusts us to come up with something cool," says Campbell. "It's nice to know he has so much faith in our work." The project has opened a lot of doors in the industry, says Campbell, with Spin currently working on a couple of major feature films.

By Lynn Wright



**WITH A TIGHT
FIVE WEEK
SCHEDULE
THERE WASN'T
MUCH TIME
FOR THINKING
— JUST DOING**

STEVE HARDING-HILL



frubes fruity adventures



client yoplait
product frubes
agency mccan erickson
studio aardman animations
www.aardman.co.uk

aardman crew
producer helen argo
director steve harding-hill
cgi model steven roberts
cgi rigger/compositor phillip child, darren dubicki
cgi animator adam cootes
model makers dave pedley, lee tetzner,
kathryn prince, simon peeke,
rodrigo santos, nicki howells
animator jerrold howard



Yoplait's current TV campaign for its Frubes brand called for four spots starring fun characters who were brought to life by Aardman Animations.

Four TV spots in just five weeks, it's no wonder the creative team at Aardman Animations described their latest project as a "fun-fuelled crazy rush of a job". The Oscar-winning animation house worked its magic on four ten-second long commercials for Yoplait's fromage frais-in-a-tube brand Frubes. Combining stop-motion animation shot on bluescreen, collaged backgrounds, CGI character animation, and live action, the spots see the fun Frubes characters acting cool before being bluntly beheaded by a hungry schoolboy.

"A schedule of five weeks from pitching to delivery meant there wasn't much time for thinking – just doing," explains director Steve Harding-Hill. "We, therefore, purposely kept the approach simple and created a 3D ad without huge expensive model sets."

The brief from Yoplait and its agency McCann Erickson was for a fun campaign for children but one that had attitude, explains Harding-Hill. Working from the characters as they existed as designs on the product packaging, Harding-Hill quickly sketched out new character designs along with backgrounds and storyboards.

McCann Erickson was keen on a stop-motion approach to the campaign so the Frubes characters were brought to life as physical models. However, by combining them with artworked backgrounds, Harding-Hill aimed to create a slightly more illustrative feel to the ads.

Chris Entwistle, head of model making at Aardman Animations, explains how the Frubes characters were made. "The main body of the Frubes characters was initially turned on a lathe, while the arms legs and mouth replacements were sculpted freehand to the director's brief. Then moulds were struck of the component parts, into which the animation armatures were placed and the pre-coloured silicone rubber injected," he says. Free from their moulds, the puppets were then painted individual colours to suit the various characters of the Frubes campaign.

Each puppet had a supporting rig, which made it easier for the animator to create a performance. These were later removed in post production.

The animation side of things went really smoothly, says Harding-Hill. "Jerold Howard our stop-motion animator and Adam Cootes our CGI animator worked really quickly to create excellent results. With no time for re-shoots, Jerold had to crack each shot first time, which he did brilliantly," he says.

Maya was the tool of choice for the CG animation on the project. "Maya was particularly useful for creating quick, flexible procedurally-generated textures for the wave and sea shots," says Philip Child, technical director.

"A basic texture setup was designed to match the director's artwork and then animated and tweaked at any time. Maya's fluids proved invaluable for producing CG water for the pool shots, and yet again the flexibility of the procedural texture networking allowed us to make quick stylized caustics to match the original design."

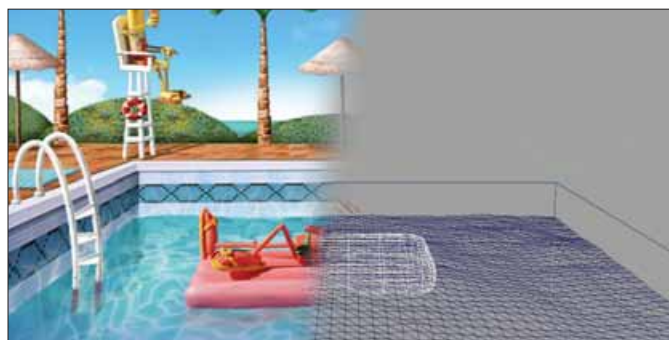
It was Child who faced the challenge of pulling together the various disparate sequences into the scenes and compositing them with the live-action using Adobe AfterEffects. "This was the trickiest part of the job, particularly given the timeframe," says Harding-Hill.

Using Adobe After Effects was an advantage on this project says Child as it meant background art created in Photoshop could be used directly in After Effects. As changes were made to the backgrounds, the files could be updated, which meant Child could work closely with the director to achieve the required look-&-feel of the ads.

One of the main compositing challenges of the job involved dealing with the highly reflective objects in the spots, such as the gold Robin Reliant, against greenscreen, says Child. "We had to shoot two passes so that one could be used as a matte pass and the other – shot against black – as the beauty pass. Fitting the live-action hands into the stop-frame sequences also proved tricky and many of the shots had to be matched by eye."

When asked what he would have done if he had more time to work on the ads, Harding-Hill replies: "I'd had have put pink fromage frais yoghurt spurting out of the characters' necks when they had their heads ripped off. That would've been fun!"

By Lynn Wright



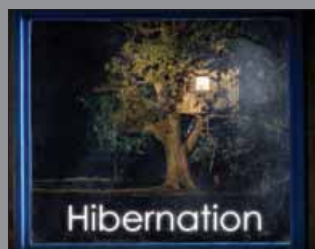
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producer	christos michaelis
producer	andy gordon
executive producer	peter lowe
cinematographer	kate mccullagh
editor	jamie pearson
stop-motion animator	alex smith
visual-effects	angie taylor
	rushes
	vtr
costume designer	robert allsopp
script consultant	adeela sharif



hibernation short

A dark fairytale about innocent minds, *Hibernation* is the latest film from filmmaker John Williams, which combines live-action and CG animation.

Hibernation is the latest short film by award-winning director/writer John Williams. Known for his videos for Offspring, Coldplay, and his effects work on Radiohead's *There There* promo, Williams' won Best Young Director at the Cannes Advertising Awards for a Greenpeace ad (co-directed by David Lea). His previous animated short *Robots* was awarded the McLaren Award at Edinburgh.

A 15-minute live action/animation short for the big screen, *Hibernation* was shot on super 16mm at Pinewood Studio and on location at the end of last year. Sponsored by Working Title 2, Arri Media and Kodak – with Peter Lowe of Screen Channel as executive producer – the film had a crew of over 30 working on the production.

Hibernation is a dark fairytale of two heavily-disguised boys running medical tests on insects in a secret tree house. According to John Williams, the main story draws on a newspaper article that appeared several years ago. It told of a young boy who was undergoing chemotherapy treatments and as a result had lost his hair. All his classmates at school asked their parents if

they could have their hair shaved off, so that one boy wouldn't stand out because none of them looked normal.

"Obviously it's a touching story that highlights the beauty of young minds, and this theme is one that I wanted to hold onto," explains Williams. "However, I knew telling this story literally would have been far too sentimental so the treatment was to tell the story in disguise. And that's where the costumes came in."

Music was also a key inspiration for Williams when working on the film. "Artists and musicians like Thomas Newman, Phillip Glass, Peter Gabriel, Lemon Jelly, Radiohead, and Moby paint beautiful audio pictures mixing nostalgia and emotion, modern-day synthesizers with classical strings," he says.

"I was messing around with music ideas with Anthony (the composer) long before we finalized the script and it was really great getting an idea for the sound even before any images were shot.

"In the post-production stage, it was really cathartic after having spent nine hours in front of a computer doing effects work to then go and meet up with Ant and compose in the evening. It was really helpful to focus on the emotion and story after a long day trying to do effects that nobody is supposed to notice."

Getting funding for the film, however, was the first obstacle facing Williams and his producers at Sound Films. The film's surreal storyline was something that was proved particularly hard to convey with just words explains Williams.

"We tried pitching the idea to a few people but they just couldn't imagine it. We got feedback saying they thought it should be an animated film and couldn't understand why we wanted to use young actors and animal costumes," he says. To solve the problem,





Williams put together a collage of designs, visuals and reference images, along with a 15-page script and his filmography. Mailing this out saw the team getting more response, along with interest from sponsors who were keen to support the production with equipment and facilities. The film's producers, Andy Gordon and Christos Michaels of Sound Films, were then able to show this, and the list of sponsors, to potential financiers who were to give the production the green light.

The shoot itself was far from plain sailing for Williams and the crew. Losing a pre-lighting day for the studio shoot meant the set had to be lit on the morning of the first day thus losing precious filming time. There were restrictions on the amount of time the young actors could be on set and getting the bee to perform on cue was difficult. "People say don't work with animals or children but we had children dressed like animals and insects all over the place," recalls Williams. "The result of this is that we missed a chunk of shots and so in the edit we had to decide to simplify some story points and lose a sub plot. Jamie Pearson did a fantastic job editing the film, and even quite early on in the process commented that 'we would have to throw the conventional rules of editing out the window for this one.'"

The film's strange storyline meant a great deal of post-production work using Adobe After Effects, Photoshop and Premiere Pro, with the main areas being visual continuity, visual effects, animation, and final grade. Visual continuity involved some very fiddly precision elements being put into shots that were not there, explains Williams, such as lights in the shop tree, the bee buzzing in the jar, and painting out the crew in the background.

The visual effects included electricity and sparks on the homemade



Williams took inspiration for the look of the film from an early 1980s record cover for a group called *Wish Thing*, which featured three fabric toys stood in a small dark wooden room lit dimly by the light from outside a window. "The mood and emotion this conjured was significant in the overall look and throughout pre-production this image was on my 'mood board' to help illustrate what I wanted to create," he explains. "Much of what we see in the film comes from memories of my own childhood or perhaps how I would have liked to have had in my childhood such as the perfect tree house, and therefore the film is set in 1985 with many subtle references to this era."

electrical generator, the animation being composited onto the dirty window and some beautiful sky replacements.

"We were fortunate enough to have Adobe support us with the post production, and Angie Taylor and VTR kindly did some effects shots for us," he says. "But we kept plugging away on the PC as this is the way I've worked for years, and I like the simplicity and control of the Adobe programs. When you've an idea in your head, it's easier just to do it than to try and explain to someone else what you want and how to do it. I think it's a real advantage to be able to understand the software and muck about with it as it is in these times that some of the most unexpected creativity happens."

The penultimate and pivotal scene in the film uses stop-motion animation, in a style derived from classic safety films such as *Tell Mummy* and *Charlie Says*, combined with a touch of *The Moomins*.

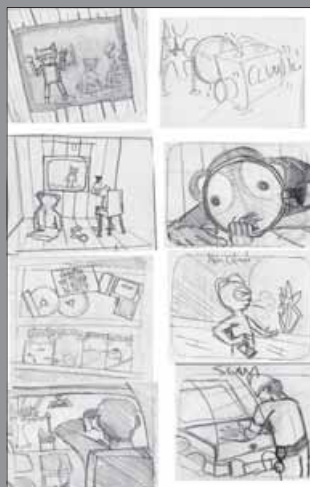
Stop-motion animation

"Part of the reason I used stop-motion was that I made little stop-motion animations when I was a child," says Williams. "When you watch the film it makes sense, but if you take that final scene on its own, it is really quite strange but I like the idea of have strange ideas that you work backwards from in order to explain."

"Stop-motion also has a place in the heart of many people so using it helps people to drop their guard. It also enhances compassion and allows a quirky sense of humour." Alex Smith created the stop-motion animation, which was originally shot on super 8mm, but then re-shot on DV and then degraded to look like super 8 for technical reasons says Williams.

The final grade was done in After Effects at 1,920-x-1,080 HD resolution. "Having over an hour of rushes at this resolution was huge especially when I'm used to working on five-minute projects on PAL," says Williams. "But it was quite a revelation to find we could do such a full-on grade for 35mm film print all on a high-spec home PC in my bedroom," says Williams.

By Lynn Wright



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BERT YUKICH



kroma's blue orchid

White Stripes' latest video features seamless visual effects courtesy of Kroma.

Directed by Floria Sigismondi, the video for White Stripes' *Blue Orchid* is a dark tale full of strange and biblically-inspired visuals. For the promo, White Stripes frontman Jack White is cast as a Lucifer-like character, dressed in black and wielding a white cane that at one point turns into a snake. Meg White appears using a hammer to play a drum kit made up of dishes and other kitchenware.

US visual-effects house Kroma, which recently won a VES Award for its work on the Britney Spears *Toxic* video, was brought onboard by producer Gina Leonard to create the seamless effects Sigismondi required.

"I have a wish list of directors I want to work with and Floria has been on that list for as long as I've had it," says Bert Yukich, Kroma's visual-effects supervisor. "I'm a great admirer of her work for Bjork, Marilyn Manson, David Bowie as well as her photography and art work."

The video was shot by Sigismondi in a single day and went on air less than two weeks later. Kroma was given just two days to complete its work. "As a result, there weren't any storyboards or scripts, we were given verbal instructions for the required effects," explains Yukich. These included a cane that turns into a snake, a horse that rides a woman, and a scene in which somebody's legs had to be removed.

"Floria generally avoids digital effects, preferring a mostly in-camera approach," says Yukich. "She wanted the video to appear as if it didn't have any effects at all, which made our job more challenging. It not only needed to be done well, it had to be done so seamlessly that it wouldn't occur to the audience that they were seeing an effect."

Yukich attended the shoot to supervise the snake-to-cane shot. Still photos of the cane were taken to use as the basis for the CG model and

grease pens used to mark the cane's position on the video monitor so that the snake handler could set the snake in a similar L-shaped line. "The snake assumed more of an S shape, as snakes will do," recalls Yukich, "but it was close enough for us to do what we needed to do to create a morph between the cane and the snake with CG elements bridged in-between." The snake was created in Softimage|XSI and Kroma used Elastic Reality to effect the morph.

The shots in the video that show a horse rearing over a woman, had to be shot as two separate elements for safety reasons and then composited and roto-scoped. Kroma also had to roto-scope another shot where a woman is lying on the ground surrounded by slithering snakes. Only one snake was available, so each image had to be shot individually.

As the video was shot with a lot of film grain, Kroma had to treat the CG elements to match. This was done using Avid DS Nitris. "We really like Nitris," says Yukich. "We find that it's the fastest and most efficient tool for compositing available. We're constantly testing new hardware and software, but we haven't found anything to replace the DS Nitris."

By Lynn Wright

project white stripes blue orchid video
producer gina leonard
director floria sigismondi
VFX kroma
www.kroma.biz





Image taken from Aiside's The Deadman range of shirts, which were initially designed for a label in Japan, but are now available to everyone anywhere via its online shop – www.aisideshop.com.



Inside Airside (starting left with chin-rubbing person and spiralling inwards): Anne Brassier (studio manager), Natalie Hunter (director), Richard Hogg (designer and member of Satan's Cock, a band), Roz Davies (T-shirt queen), Alex Maclean (director), Sibylle Preuss (project manager), Fred Deakin (director and one half of Lemon Jelly), Henki Leung (designer), Colm Larkin (money man), Mark Swift (interactive designer). Missing from this image is new recruit Chris Rain, a designer.

Airside

Having created work for Coke and Orange, Airside is winning over major clients. The team spoke to Digit about creativity and the need for smart hairdressing.

By Matthew Bath

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Airside reckons it has got the secret to a successful design business down to a tee – and, along with its infectious enthusiasm, it's happy to share. "We all cut our hair quite regularly," confides Airside's studio manager Anne Brassier. "We think this makes us look grown up and enhances how we are viewed by major clients."

The thing about Airside – the *unique* thing – you notice is the sheer sense of fun that radiates from the team, which crosses over into its creative work. From knitted toys sheltering in the studio prior to adoption, to describing its collective creative style as a mix of flour, eggs, and water, Airside is certainly fun.

Founded in 1999 by Alex Maclean, Natalie Hunter, and Fred Deakin, who had been working under the same roof and hit on pooling their resources, the company strives to remain close to its principles: to make work it is proud of, and to enjoy the process.

For Airside, the last six years have been a period of intense

change as the company has rapidly grown. This has seen a shift in client expectations, says Brassier.

"The scale of projects we have worked on has grown significantly, with a huge shift towards moving image. Bigger clients have learned that they can trust us; it took a while to establish that we were capable of handling large projects and able to bring them in on schedule and within budget.

"We now have a super-duper efficient project manager whose role is to keep everything moving and schedule our workload so that we don't overload. Clients like project managers. We find that doing the big client jobs allows us to continue to give attention to the small-budget and no-budget jobs that are worthwhile and/or exciting," Brassier adds.

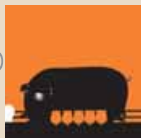
Its portfolio is certainly compelling. From the high-profile Coca-Cola billboards during the summer, to work for Orange and Lemon Jelly, the Airside roster of talent is one that is increasingly attracting big-name clients.

"We like the people who work for us," says Brassier. "They come from varied backgrounds, ranging from traditional university subjects like English or architecture, to fine art and graphics. Talent is the main skill required, be that in terms of general input or hands-on as a designer. Positivity, enthusiasm, and openness are next on the list. It's important we like one another, as it's a small company. Being *very* tall is not acceptable."

That said, the team is pragmatic about facing the growing pains that lesser studios seem keen to ignore.

"A company has to change with its workforce," states Brassier. "It cannot stay the same if they don't. Inevitably, people change direction, and the company must adapt to those fluctuations. We've been lucky to have a consistent workforce so far, and we're aware that this can't continue forever. But, like the bendy earthquake-proof buildings of Tokyo, Airside finds its balance and marches on."

The team has worked on some major projects, including 



Coca-Cola

Coca-Cola could well be the campaign that thrusts Airside into the prime-time, big-time jamboree. Appearing on the sides of buses, and plastered across billboards, it shows a different side of Coca-Cola that only the style of Airside could have pulled off.

"The adverts for Coca-Cola is one of our most recent projects," says Brassier. "The basic premise was 'refreshing', hence the delicious bottle covered in condensation. We kept our designs very simple with beautiful flower-like patterns in various palettes radiating from behind the bottles to suggest an aura of love. The word 'Love' is written on the bottle in the iconic Coca-Cola font."

Yet, according to Airside, the campaign wasn't simply to make bottles of sugar water more tempting – but it had a deeper meaning, explains Brassier.

"One of our aims was to minimize the visual pollution that advertising brings to our streets. We think we have managed to create work that is nice to look at, and is the opposite of a hard sell. It was quite a quick and simple job for us, but what's interesting is how impressed people are by it. I think it's because it's everywhere – in London at least, it's on the side of every other bus, and in every underground station."



Craft Council

"Late in 2004, we decided that it would be good to start working on some exhibition design, and were delighted to win the pitch to design a knitting exhibition at the Crafts Council in London," says Brassier.

"As the exhibition was to be about the non-granny side of knitting but knitting nevertheless, we decided to create a knitted font and a knitted poster to be used for the identity and all print materials. We also designed the internal exhibition space itself, and were the first people to paint the crisp white walls black. We felt this showed off the work to greater effect, as some of it was very wispy. In conjunction with the architects, Mae, we created plinths for the pieces to be mounted on. These pieces of furniture continue the knitting theme, being interlocked parts creating the whole.

"We were pleased with the result, and it was a very interesting process," says Brassier. "We realized that the parts of our brains that are good at designing Web sites, are similarly engaged when designing a real-world experience. The same questions are asked during the design process – how will the user experience the information? What emotion do you want the user to feel? How do we pace the experience? How do we communicate in a meaningful way?"



The word 'airside' is a term used in airports once passengers have gone through passport control, you are then considered 'airside'. It has connotations of travelling and journeys.

in-house favourites JAM: Tokyo-London, and the Orange Playlist commercials. The former was a Web site created for the Barbican, which needed to be factual and informative, but good enough to be part of the exhibit. "We had fun creating pixel characters and making them do daft things like pole-dance and fart," says Brassier.

Orange represented a different challenge for the team – adventures in moving image. Previously, the team had limited animation to bumpers for MTV and live visuals for Lemon Jelly, but the Orange

Playlist gig demanded a different approach.

"The first animated ads we did were for Surf," says Brassier, "and then we were asked to animate commercials for Orange to be shown during the pop video programme Playlist. Obviously, the ads had to show singing farm animals. Our particular favourite is a cow singing *Three Times A Lady* – a rendition Lionel would be proud of, we're sure."

Yet for all its success, Airside reckons the UK creative and design industry as a whole –

while improving – still has a fair way to go.

"Things seem healthy. Exciting companies are springing up and disciplines are merging and mutating to match the advances in technology that are giving us all more power to create," says Brassier. "The public seems to be more appreciative of good design than it was a few years ago, although we have a long way to go before we catch up with Japan where designers (or 'creators' as they call them) seem to be treated like pop stars and the

average person is as design literate as any British art school student."

For Airside, enthusiasm is being matched by ambition.

"Our positive experiences with moving image have made us ambitious for longer projects, and we would like to develop our work on film and TV titles as well. We have always worked across as many different media as possible, so new developments in technology are always welcome; we feel that it's our process rather than our technique that makes us who we are."



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BRAINSTORMINGSESSION

Storm Thorgerson's audacious album covers have made him the music industry's favourite designer. "Of course it's indulgent!" he tells us.

who Storm Thorgerson
see www.stormthorgerson.com
words Andy Penfold

There's an unknown graduate of the Royal College of Art who has been kicking himself since 1968. When a young band asked him to design an album cover for them, he turned them down. The student in the room next door took on the job instead – launching a career that has seen him create some of the most iconic and audacious album covers of all time. The band was Pink Floyd. The man next door was Storm Thorgerson.

Thorgerson has worked for Pink Floyd ever since his neighbour's mistake, and his CV also includes the likes of Led Zeppelin, Muse, Peter Dinklage, and Audioslave. Indeed, he has done what many designers would



kill for – made a career of designing purely for the music industry.

It's a rock 'n' roll story, but it seems a long way away when I catch up with Thorgerson. We meet during an extended lunchbreak in a restaurant next door to his studio in leafy North London. Now 61, Thorgerson is white-haired and fragile, but when he opens his mouth he's contrary and sharp-tongued, and clearly a master piss-taker.

However, get him talking about the industry that has inspired his work and paid his wages, and there's an uncharacteristic romanticism. "I work in music because, hopefully not sounding too pretentious here, we can be artistic. Call me naive, call me stupid – actually call me naive, but not stupid – I believe with most musicians, most of their stuff comes from here." He solemnly pats his heart. "It comes from the heart or head or both, and is an emotional experience."

Thorgerson's sidekick for the interview is his long-serving collaborator

Dan Abbot, a sprightly graphic designer with a indie-boy haircut and a friendly demeanour. He's clearly inspired by Thorgerson's experiences, and is revelling in the wackiness of his working life. "We had to audition contortionists last year," he says. "There's agencies for all these kinds of people. If you want a pregnant woman, you can just ring someone up. 'Can I paint on your stomach please?' 'No problem!'"

The stream of banter between the two is unrelenting, and they say the creative process in Thorgerson's studio isn't much different. "Ideas come from debate, discussion, they come from individual private preoccupations; they come from fantasies," says Thorgerson. "Basically, we're always looking for an image. If you came up with an idea we'd nick it off you. We're not proud."

Abbot says his sleep has been interrupted by phone calls from Thorgerson on many occasions. "When I nod off, and when I wake



BRAINSTORMING SESSION:

How the *Wish You Were Here* cover was realized

For this iconic cover of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*, Storm Thorgerson got close to the band to try and work out what the record was about. He says his work is a question of trying to distil what the music and lyrics are about into an image.

"The record was about the absence of commitment," he says. "Either commitment to the band, or them to their wives. So we devised a set of pictures that were about absence. And I suggested there should be four of them, because there were four of them in the band, and because *Wish You Were Here* was a four-word title. This made me think of the four elements – so we did a picture about fire, water, earth, and air.

"It gave me a limitation – I was trying to think of a picture about fire and absence. So we were thinking around the ideas of not being committed to some cause, or some relationship, or job. It seemed to be that people were frightened of being committed in case they got burnt." When that idea was floated, he says it was very clear what the image would be.

How he then created the image was another matter. "Do you think we're going to burn some fucking geezer to death for a picture? He had an asbestos fire suit on."



up, they're both good times to think," says Thorgerson. "I suppose it's because you haven't got your controls on – you're just in bed. I find those quite useful times. I recommend them – twilight times. When the mind can run free, but you're awake enough to register."

However, the mind-expanding substances that have inspired some of history's great rock stars don't cut it creatively for Thorgerson. "I never worked on drugs," he says. "Your mind runs so free you can never tie it down. You might have some great ideas, but you wouldn't remember them."

He doesn't really rate the computer as a creative aid either. "We put things together in a computer but they're all real in the first place. The computer has been much more of a revolution to text than for graphics. I don't have a political agenda about computers, I'm just not very in favour of them. They make you lazy, and the results are not as good. It tends to make you think less about it."

Thorgerson's work often relies

on staged events, with massive props and big ideas. "It means you can do the photograph the most justice, because you've been there at the event. But they're terribly stressful. You never know if it's all going to come together."

The events are rarely without problems. "Sometimes it's dangerous, sometimes it's seriously absurd. We had this idea about big red balls on a beach. We had 200 red balls on a beach and hadn't calculated the degree to which they would bounce, and they bounced halfway to fucking Devon."

With all the effort he and his collaborators put in, Thorgerson is disappointed if people assume an image is faked. Ultimately, though, it is the image – rather than it's perceived authenticity – that matters to him. "I only hope the image affects people in some way. We are unashamedly related to other people. We like them to like our stuff. But more particularly we like them to respond."

And the music fan is at the centre of Thorgerson's approach

– he refuses to judge the records he designs for. "I think my personal opinion of the music, my judgment, is not very interesting. I taught myself to not judge, on the basis that my opinion is diddly-squat, especially to a fan."

A Google search on Thorgerson will testify that he's been very successful at engaging fans of bands – his designs are analyzed all over the Web. But he's had more difficulty convincing the record company suits over the years. "It took Pink Floyd's record company 20 years to realize that what we did might be helpful. They spent years arguing with us. Unbelievable. Their conservatism would fly in the face of even their own figures."

But despite the frustrations of working with the music execs, it is the mystery and allure of rock 'n' roll bands that feeds his enthusiasm for his work. "As flaky as musicians are in some ways, and as irresponsible as they are in many ways, I think they're fantastic. They play music, and I think that's extraordinary."



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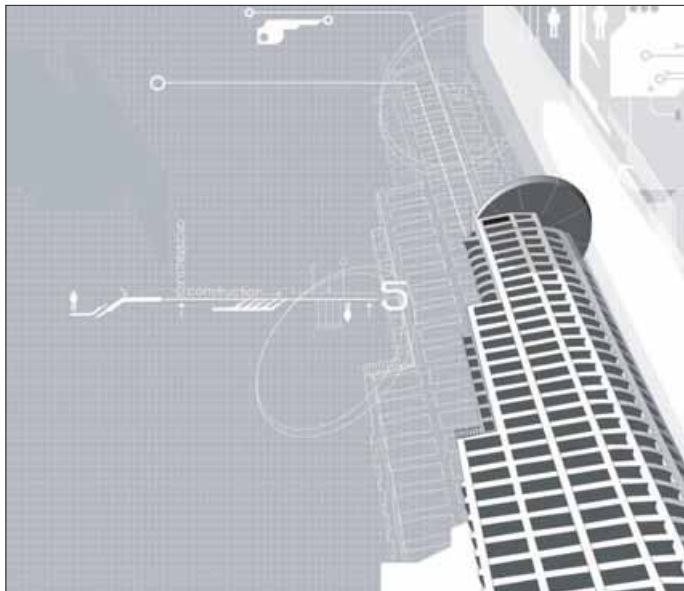
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1-5 SELIM CATKIN

www.selimcatkin.com, contact@selimcatkin.com

Selim Catkin is a digital artist living in Nottingham. Catkin has a masters degree in fine art. "I first met Photoshop about six years ago and I thought it was a treasure for an artist who did not have a workshop. I have

tried a variety of techniques using different graphic applications to create my illustrations, but I mostly focus on vector illustration, which I find more challenging and satisfying," says Catkin.

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1-6 BEN SUMMERS

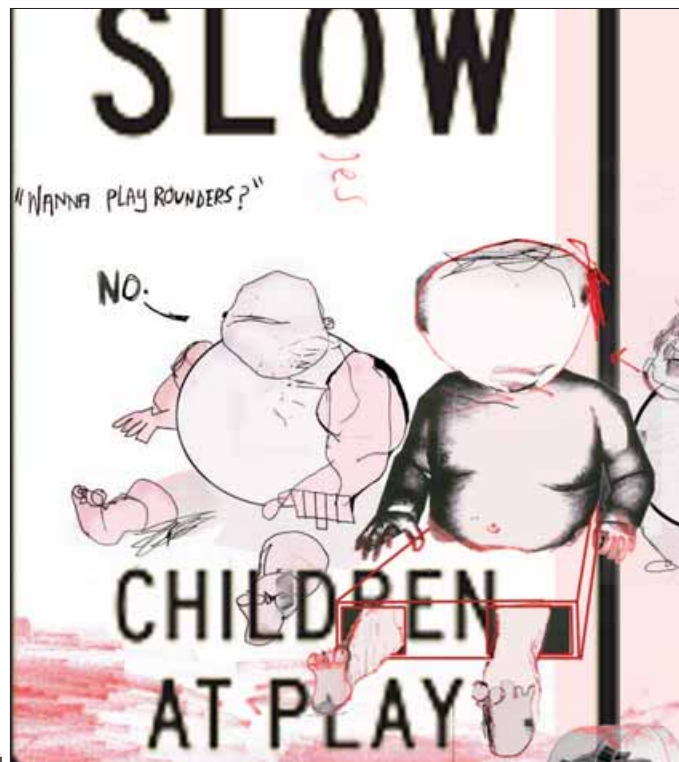
www.benishere.co.uk, ben@benishere.co.uk

Ben Summers is a 20-year-old illustrator/designer from Bristol. He is new to the industry, and currently works independently, predominantly in Web design and creations for clients such as *blocparty.net*.

"With the daunting amount of talent in the UK, I'm in for an exciting time," he says.



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1-4 TANAWAT SUTTASOONTORN

tanawat@optusnet.com.au

"I think of myself as an image maker, because I don't have a preference for any one medium," says Tanawat Suttasoonorn. "So long as I can get my ideas across, I'm happy working in whatever media best suits the look I am trying to achieve." Suttasoonorn starts by sketching ideas on paper, then uses painting, drawing, photography, or digital software to create images. "Everything around me is an inspiration, be it nature, people, the places I've visited or the city I live in. I take great pleasure in creating my images and want others to enjoy it too."



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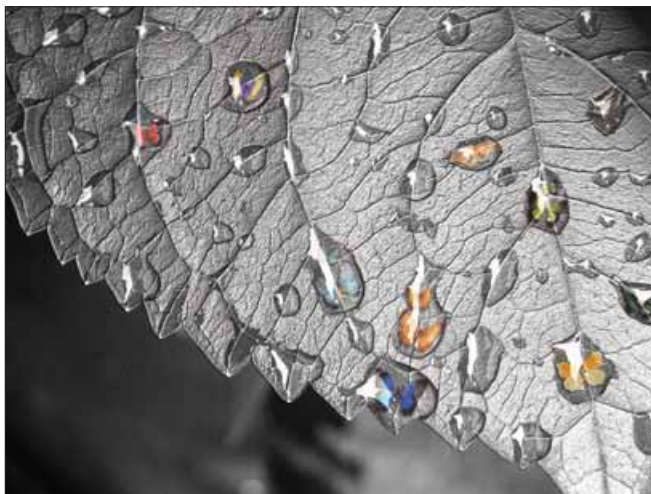


1-3 RYUNEO DESIGNS

www.ryuneo.com, info@ryuneo.com

Ryan Forshaw first discovered digital art through Paint Shop Pro 6. Graduating to Photoshop a few years ago, Forshaw has never looked back. "Learning Photoshop is a constant learning curve," he says. "Once you're familiar with the array of tools and what they can achieve there are still endless techniques that you can learn." 2005 saw Forshaw start up his own design company, Ryuneo Designs.

A number of source images used in Ryuneo's work shown here are from contributors on istockphoto.com and www.sxc.hu.



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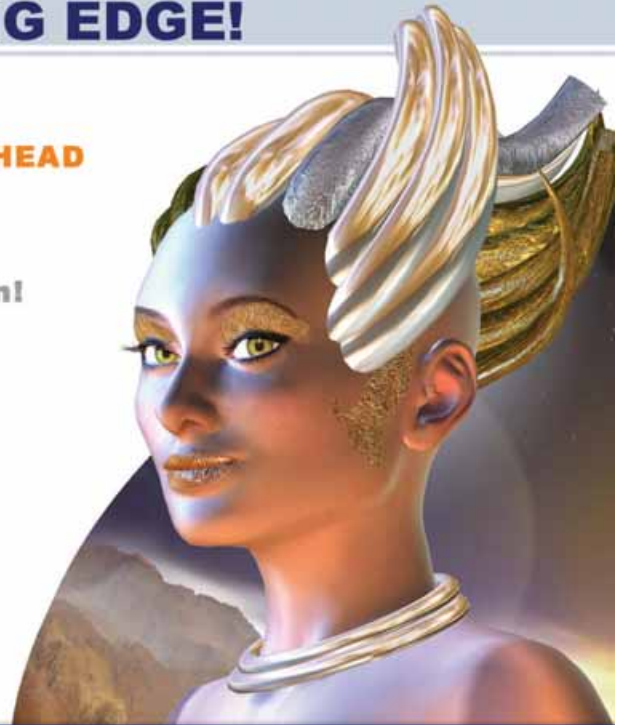
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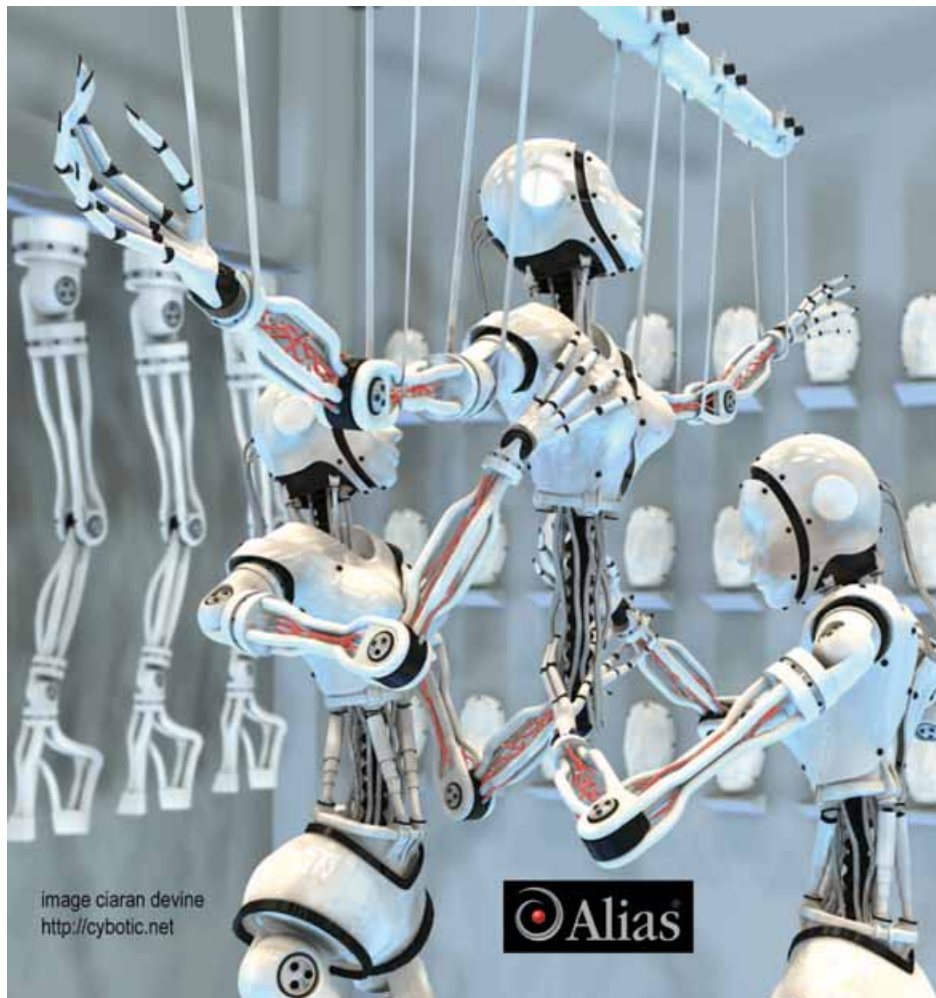


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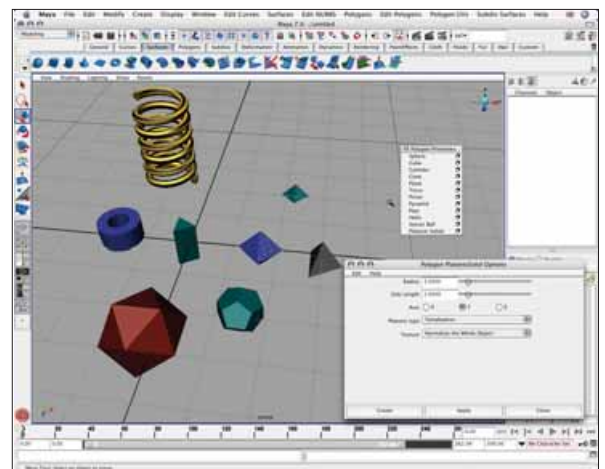
pros *Maya 7 is a comprehensive update with wide-ranging improvements to just about every area of the program.*

cons *Maya is a serious application for advanced 3D work. As a result it's a necessarily complex tool that casual 3D artists might struggle with.*

Digit Rating ★★★★★ 

A new version of Alias Maya is usually a significant event for the 3D modelling and animation industry. This latest release sees changes throughout, with virtually no major area of the program left untouched. Maya 7 introduces a host of new features as well as changes and revisions to existing ones, and includes some reworking of the UI and workflow.

Maya 7 now sports a small view-manipulation widget at the top right corner of the main view panel. This 3D compass lets you access all six orthogonal views and the perspective view without having to flip the layout between single and four panes. The default behaviour animates the transitions when clicking on the widget, spinning the 3D view to its new position, though this can be disabled. It actually works really well. If an object is selected then the view zooms to that object. The View 



Maya 7 comes with additional polygon primitives including Helix, Soccer ball, and Platonic solids.



Compass preferences lets you customize the behaviour, and change the transition time making it quick, slow, or turned off. The animated transitions apply to all view changes such as Fit All or Fit Selected and to Bookmarks, although each can be toggled on or off in the preferences.

Another view improvement is the ability to tumble the view about a selected object if the tumble cursor is over them. It's a bit hit and miss, though – the Paint Effects objects, for example, don't seem to allow the feature to work

properly. In fact, most of the time it doesn't precisely orbit the view around the selected object's pivot – even if this option is enabled in the Camera preferences. It does, however, work quite well for selected components. You can tumble about them as you work and keep them central in the view.

Origin of symmetry

The Move tool now sports a Reflection option to allow for symmetrical edits about a plane – useful when modelling characters or other object with a single

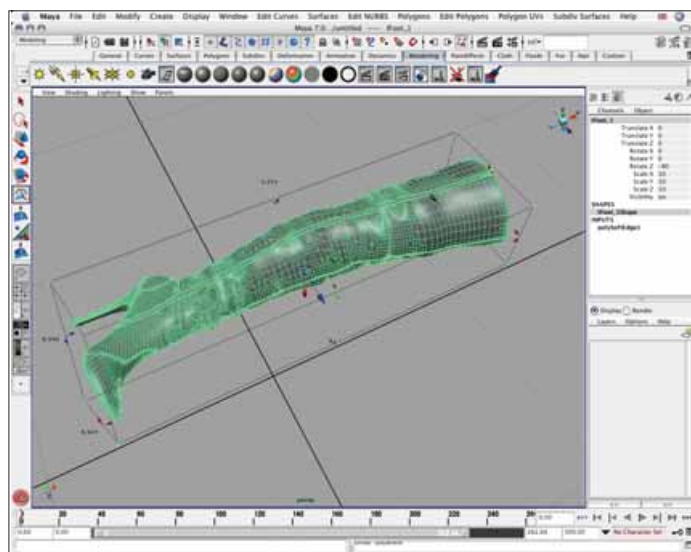
plane of symmetry. You've the option of aligning the manipulator axes for objects and components in various ways, such as pointing to another object in the scene or to the edge/face of any object.

There are other modelling improvements and additions, such as the Text tool and Adobe Illustrator Object, both of which are new additions to the Create menu. The Text tool lets you create 3D type more easily. You can output bevelled geometry as you would with Bevel Plus, except now you can enter the text directly in the object's Attributes.

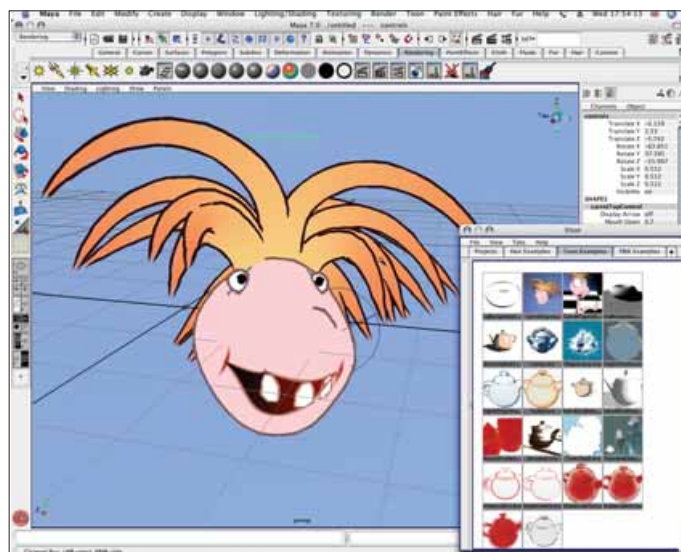
The lack of letter-spacing control is a drawback, as all type seems to have extra wide spacing that can't be corrected. The Adobe Illustrator Object is a better option for more precise control. Maya can import paths from an Illustrator .ai file (saved as Illustrator 8.0), then extrude and bevel it automatically just like the Text option. The node lets you change the file referenced and a Reload button makes it easier to update the scene if changes are made to the original .ai file.

One good feature is the addition of hair presets, with the ability to transplant a handful of preset hairstyles onto different characters. Having presets for hair properties is great, but it's better to have entire hairdos that can easily adapt to different characters, and that's exactly what the new transplant feature has.

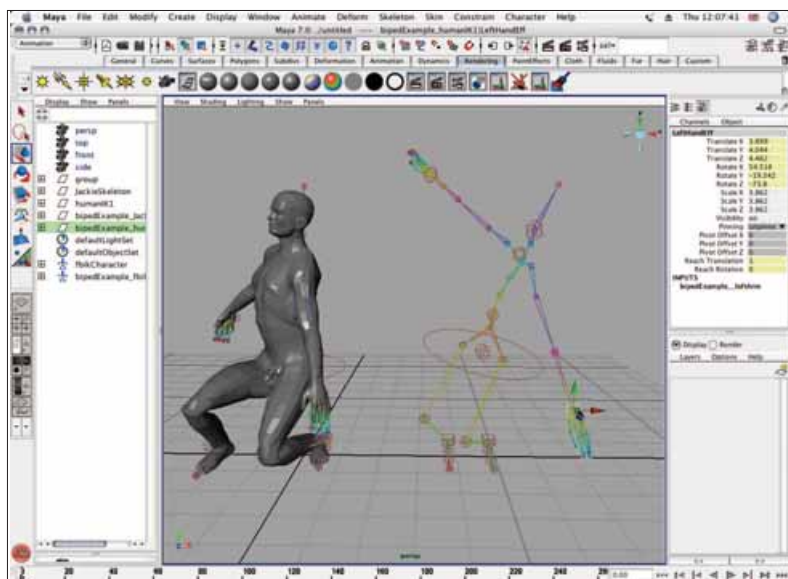
When added to a scene, the hairstyle is attached to a wig-like skullcap. This



A new all-in-one manipulator lets you control TSR operations using a single widget within the Maya interface.



The new Toon rendering offers ink and paint style rendering for your scenes, but can also simulate other non-photoreal effects such as cross hatch or halftone effects.



HAIR PRESETS GIVE MAYA THE ABILITY TO TRANSPLANT A HANDFUL OF PRESET HAIRSTYLES ONTO DIFFERENT CHARACTERS

can be positioned over the head of your character, and then with the hair and character selected, the Transplant Hair command makes the base of the hair attach to the character's skull instead of the wig. It's simple, though there doesn't seem to be the reverse option of saving your own hair presets yet.

Haircut 100

Maya 7, however, does let you render Hair with Mental Ray at long last. This is a necessity for those that use hair and fur in their productions – not only does Mental Ray offer hair as fully integrated entities as opposed to a post-rendered process, the quality of even very fine hair is much better.

Integrated Toon rendering is totally new to Maya. Though there have been plenty of third-party Toon shaders and ways to fudge a toon-look, Maya has been without its own special Toon rendering feature until now. Toon uses a combination of a Ramp shader for the fills and PaintFX for the lines. It's a flexible feature that offers more than just Toon rendering. It includes calligraphic, halftone dots, crosshatch, and watercolour looks. The results are displayed in the OpenGL view too, which makes it easy to judge how it will render, though you could just run Playblast and save the OpenGL view to a file.

Maya's IPR interactive rendering system, which makes use of both the software's own renderer and Mental Ray, has seen some improvement. Now Mental Ray IPR supports light editing and you can transform objects without having to restart the IPR session. Rendering improvements continue with a big update to Render Layers – Maya's multi-pass rendering option.

The new Render Layers let you specify totally different materials to objects in the scene and output them as a separate pass. This makes rendering the same scene with alternate materials a lot easier, and results can be rendered in a single go. The system even goes further, with a full set of rendering overrides so you can set shadow casting/receiving, shading samples, reflection visibility, motion blur and so on separately for each layer.

Shady dealings

There are a number of presets on offer that set up shaders and settings to generate shadow-only, occlusion, specular-only passes for a given layer (and the objects within it). The system works well, and you can set the file format to PSD Layered to have each of the passes saved to a layer in a Photoshop file.

Since Alias' acquisition of Kaydara

and its MotionBuilder application last summer, the industry has anticipated that this technology would become integrated into Maya. Version 7 sees the first steps of this process with the introduction of a new Full Body IK solver.

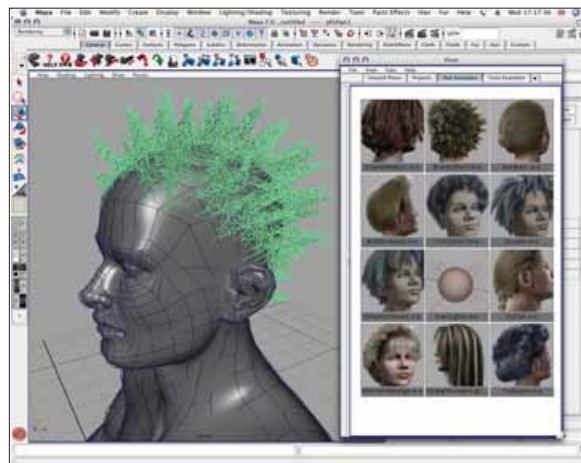
With a Full Body IK rig, dragging arm effectors will cause motion to flow through the rest of the body in a realistic manner, causing the knees to bend if the arms are pulled down past their natural reach, for example. The rig also automatically senses the floor so that the toes bend automatically if they strike the floor plane if you're moving the ankle effector. In the past, the toes would have simply passed through the floor and you would have had to set keys to correct it.

The new system makes setting poses for your characters easier and more intuitive – and it's right inside Maya, so you don't have to learn another software package. Other animation improvements include a Dope Sheet editing tool, and F Curve Normalization, which scales the display of all selected function curves to a -1 to 1 range, regardless of their actual values.

There are loads of other minor new features in version 7 making this one of the most comprehensive updates of Maya in quite a while. Some problems persist – such as slow marking menus on OS X and occasional interface drawing issues – but overall this is an invigorated Maya and the improvements are certainly worthwhile.

Simon Danaher

Left: *The new Full Body IK system taken from MotionBuilder makes character posing much more fluid and natural.*



Hair transplantation lets you transfer a preset hairstyle to your character from a 'wig' object as a starting point for a custom hairdo.

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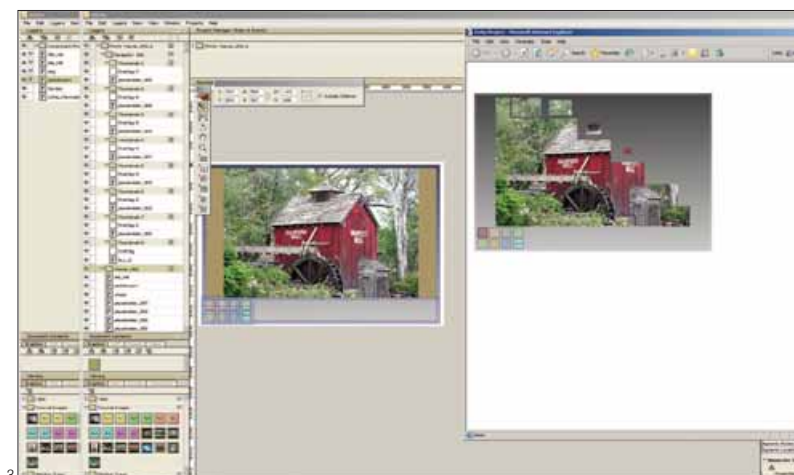
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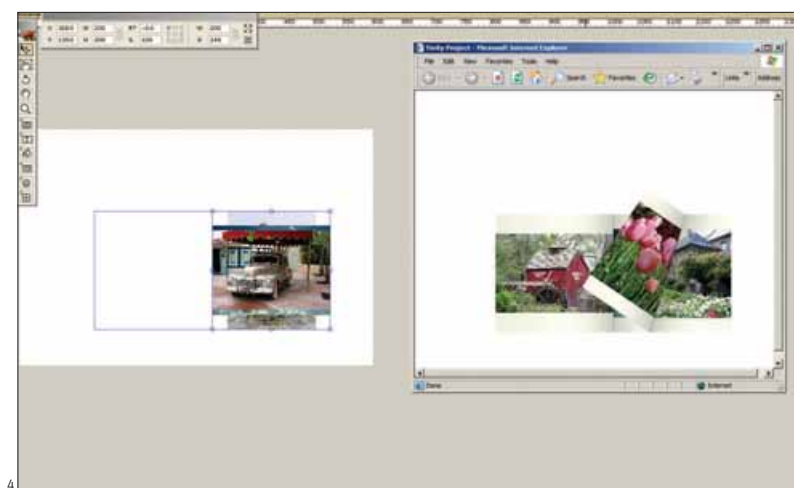
pros *Requires no coding. Full PSD file support and import, plus a library of pre-built, customizable elements and components. State Modifiers replace scripting.*

cons *PSD file import restricted to seven layers. Documentation is slightly confusing, and absent timeline will deter some users.*

Digit Rating ★★★★★

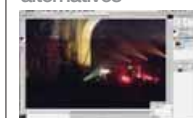


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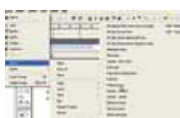
alternatives



Adobe ImageReady



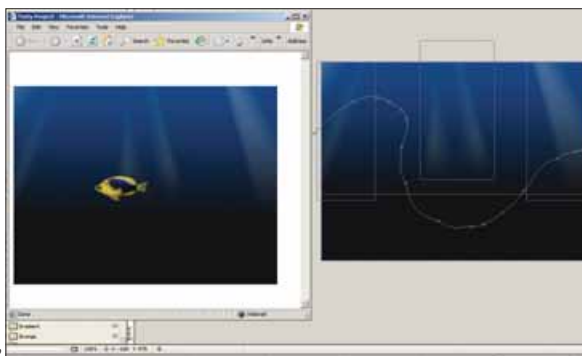
Macromedia Flash



SwiSHzone SWiSHmax



1



2

Plenty of multimedia-authoring applications these days offer the ability to export your projects to the SWF Flash file format. The difference here lies in the process.

Tivity Software makes the bold claim that Xtivity generates fully interactive SWF Web projects all without coding, timeline, symbols, or movie clips. Instead, it uses a layout program-style workflow for creating and updating projects in real-time.

In Xtivity, you work with boxes, building blocks of the project that contain one item of content each, such as graphics, photos, text, SWF elements, movies, or blocks of colour.

In terms of content support, Xtivity beats everyone except Macromedia's original pioneer. Selecting the various boxes (or selecting the relevant layers from the palette on the side) allows you to add actions to the content,

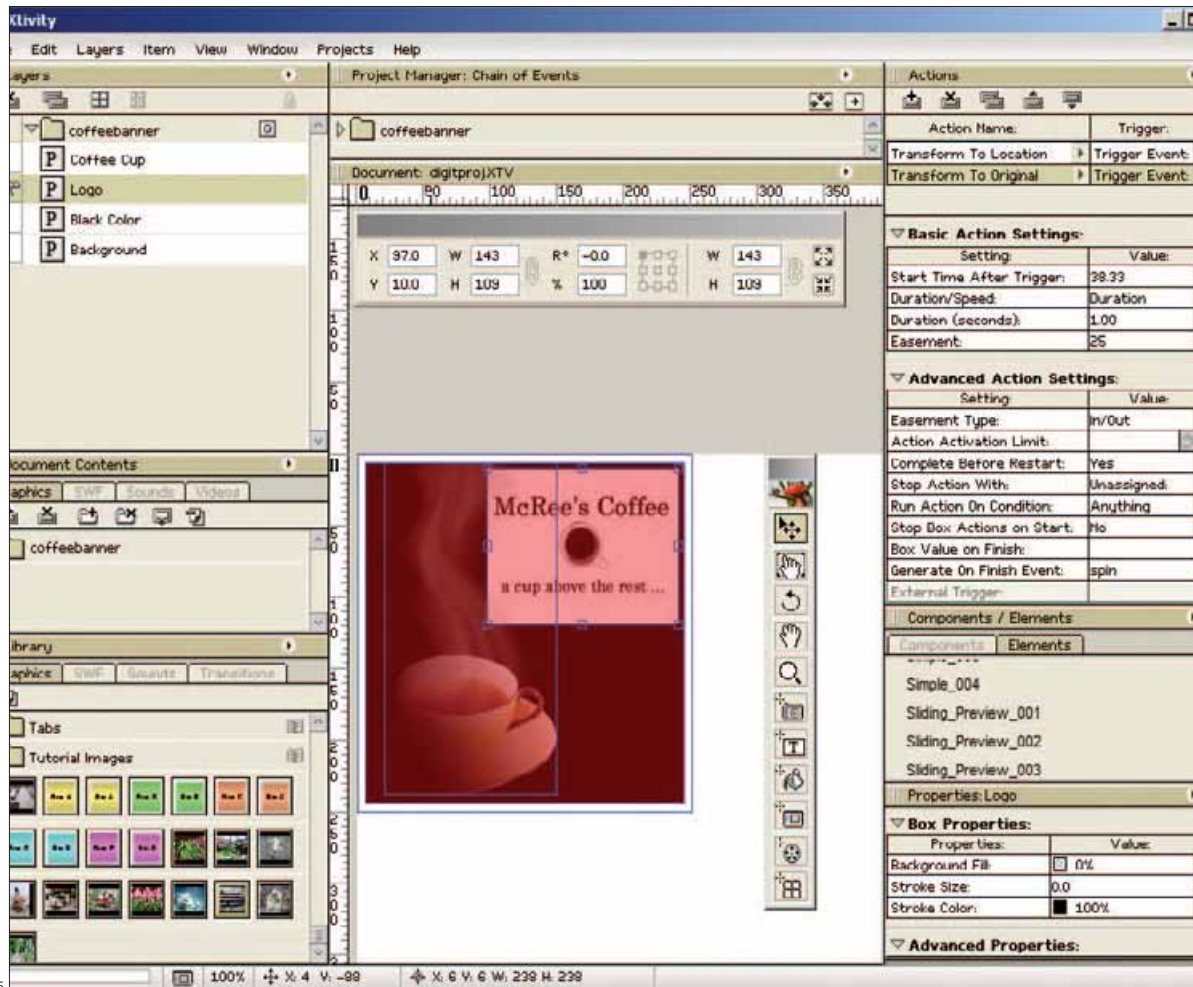
with categories such as motion, resize, group, and audio.

Group boxes are also available. These are used to apply one action to a series of child boxes grouped together. Triggers for the action can be set via an attributes panel, including all the usual mouse-down and roll-over functions, as well as more advanced options such as scene mouse move and external triggers.

If you've ever used QuarkXPress or InDesign or worked with text boxes in Illustrator, you'll find it quite easy.

The graphics in the Xtivity Library are saved as layered PSD files, and can be modified in Photoshop. They come ready supplied with alpha channels as well as layers that are used to define opacity and colour values for the graphic. If you are importing your own graphics, you must keep to Tivity's convention of a PSD file with seven layers. You can then go ahead and use the Modify in Image

IF YOU'VE EVER USED QUARKXPRESS OF INDESIGN, OR WORKED WITH TEXT BOXES IN ILLUSTRATOR, YOU'LL FIND XTIVITY REALLY EASY



1. *Object behaviour is controlled by Actions, which are set in motion by triggers. Using the Finish Event Triggers coupled with Start Time After Trigger settings, for example, allows you to specify exactly when an action takes place, all without the aid of a timeline.*

2. *Actions can be added to animated objects by selecting or creating an anchor point on the Freeform drawn path and assigning an action to that point.*

3. *Xtivity ships with over 50 Elements, including embedded audio and video, photo viewers, email links, headlines, hotspots, info boxes, menus, and scrolling elements to shorten the time spent creating your project.*

4. *Components – essentially pre-built functioning objects – are a good timesaver, especially as all you need to do is select one, then click-&-drag it into your project.*

5. *For a quick start, Xtivity users can add actions through the use of built-in file attributes, such as the layers in Photoshop files. These translate straight into boxes, the building blocks of Xtivity projects.*

Editor icon to import the file.

Once you have the hang of the Actions panel and the various available attributes, you can very rapidly build a quick Flash animation from a single Photoshop file. Xtivity also ships with a library of dynamic content.

Box fresh

Xtivity also makes use of Components. These are pre-created elements already set up with actions and an intelligent framework that can be customized with your own content, such as scrollbars and scrolling text, sliders, or text menus. Several Components are included with Xtivity, and more are available freely on the Tivity site. They're a good timesaver, especially as all you need to do is select one, then click-&-drag it into your project.

Another streamlining function makes use of Box Value, which is normally an

incrementing number assigned to a box at the end of an action, with the default being zero. By stringing functions together dependent on the box value, you can assign multiple actions to a common trigger.

Animation is simply applied using actions such as the Freeform motion action then drawing a path for the animated element with a pen tool. So far in the workflow, there's been no scripting. Nor do you need it when you want to make objects move in relation to the cursor or in relation to the behaviour of other project elements.

Instead, Xtivity uses specialized actions called State Modifiers. By assigning actions to one element or the cursor, you can apply State Modifiers to set an object to move, resize, rotate, and change transparency based on the dynamic properties of the object.

Elements complete the assets

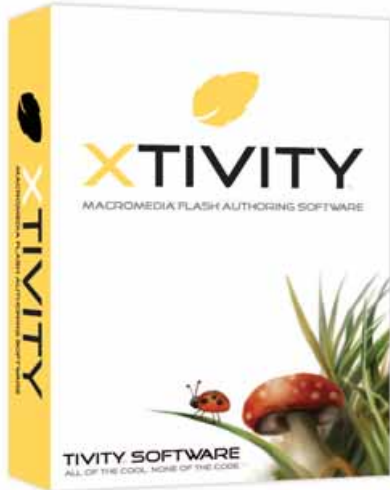
available for building projects. These are like components in that they come ready built with a task to perform and can be dragged in from a side palette, but could be a complex menu bar with multiple objects and actions or a simple resizing Photo Box with only a few actions applied. You can also save Elements from your own projects for use later, with all objects, actions, triggers, and properties applied.

It's not Flash, but that's a good thing for a lot of people. Once you get the hang of the terminology used in setting the attributes for the various actions, there'll be no stopping you. If you can use Photoshop, you can create Flash content with Xtivity. If you can use Flash and love ActionScript, there's no real reason to switch. Of course you could use both, since the two applications use a common file format.

Michael Burns

ALL OF THE COOL. NONE OF THE CODE.™

Xtivity™ is a new, professional Macromedia® Flash® (SWF) Authoring Software program that allows you to visually design interactive Flash web projects in a layout style workflow. There is no coding involved and you operate without using a timeline, symbols, movie clips or any of the traditional methods used to author interactive Flash projects.



Xtivity is designed to provide a robust professional workflow that enables you to develop cutting-edge Flash web designs with no experience needed working in Flash. If you have ever tried to learn Flash and couldn't master it, Xtivity gives you an alternative solution to create state-of-the-art interactive projects faster and easier than Macromedia Flash.

Xtivity sells for \$399 and has a **very low learning curve**. You draw boxes, add content to the boxes, assign actions to the boxes and then tell the actions when to start. It's that easy!

Xtivity exports the final project to the Macromedia Flash (SWF) file format which plays in the Flash Player on 98.3% of the world's internet browsers, just like Macromedia Flash.

Find out what everyone is raving about. Download a fully functional 30 Day Trial Version of Xtivity and see for yourself: **www.tivity.com**

There are hundreds of cutting-edge features in Xtivity to improve your workflow and design.

Directly import Adobe® Photoshop® PSD files and add interactivity to each individual layer. If you edit your Photoshop file you can automatically flow these changes into Xtivity and each layer in your project is updated for you.

No timeline or content tweening. This makes updating content and interactive actions fast and easy, saving you time and money. Simply change the content in the box or change the action applied to the box. This gives Xtivity a true dynamic authoring workflow.

Add streaming audio and video to your web project in seconds. Xtivity directly imports and converts MP3, WAV, MOV and AVI files ready for the web.

Drag-and-drop masks, transitions, sounds, music loops, elements, components and other pre-created graphics. Create clipping groups, apply actions to nested groups, automatically externalize graphics and stream them in ... there are just too many features to explain in this ad. Visit our site to learn more: www.tivity.com.



Xtivity has a professional workspace that is easy to customize and master. Content and interactivity are easily changed, allowing the project design and development to flow smoothly and rapidly.

When you're done creating your project, use the integrated FTP system to upload your SWF directly to the web.



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205-980-7656 / www.tivity.com

Visit our site to see examples of Xtivity projects.

GY-HD100E

HDV camcorder

format Mac, Windows

price HD100E, £3,790 plus VAT, HD101E, £4,130 plus VAT

company JVC Professional, www.jvcproeurope.com

contact JVC Professional, 020 8896 6000

pros Comfortable ergonomics, excellent output quality of footage. Attention to detail includes ear-level speaker and full auto mode.

cons VTR/cam switch hidden by screen. Application capture issues.

Digit Rating ★★★★★ 

The HD100 is the first HDV camera to offer interchangeable lenses. It's smaller than it looks, but otherwise it's just what you'd expect from JVC Pro. It's available in two versions: the HDV/DV out-only HD100 and the HDV/DV in/out-capable HD101.

This camcorder is based around the 720p flavour of HDV. This has a smaller resolution (1,280-x-720) than the 1080i used by Sony's HVR-Z1 (1,920-x-1080), but is progressive to the Z1's interlaced. The practical differences between the two is an article in itself, but suffice to say we'd rather use 720p for indie filmmaking and 1080i for sports. In most circumstances though, there's little between them.

The HD100 looks like its DV5000 cousin, but is a lot smaller. In use, it seems smaller than Canon's XL2, though this is due to the size of the viewfinder and lens rather than the body.

Ergonomically, the HD100 is extremely comfortable. It's too heavy to be used one-handed and it's front-heavy too – but it's light enough that you'll never notice this when it's on your shoulder.

The viewfinder can be adjusted left-to-right to fit both leading eyes for most head-sizes. JVC has also included a padded speaker by your right ear for monitoring, which is great when you're on the move. The shoulder-mount can be moved backwards and forwards for maximum comfort.

As you'd expect from JVC Pro, the HD100 is covered in buttons, switches, and knobs. The Z1's chassis seemed empty compared to this – preferring to place controls in menu screens as with consumer DV cams. JVC's approach is more high-end, and it takes longer to



learn where all of the control are, but we prefer it as it's faster in the field. Only the strange placement of the VTR/cam switch under the LCD screen was at fault.

Capture me if you can

As usual, we tested our sample HD101 in both news/documentary and dramatic set-ups. Unfortunately we couldn't capture our footage, as Final Cut Pro, Premiere Pro or Xpress Pro can't capture 25fps 720p – though minor updates to enable this are expected soon. Instead, we checked out our footage on a Dell HDTV.

In the news set-up, the camcorder's Full Auto mode proved as good as it was on the DV5000, providing 'we'll fix it in post'-able footage at a moment's notice. It was eminently more usable/fixable than the Z1's full-auto footage – though the bundled lens lacks optical stabilization. The multiplicity of buttons made acclimatizing the HD101 to difficult

lighting conditions an efficient process.

Footage captured with more time for manual camcorder adjustment and production set-up was equally impressive. It wasn't as detailed as the Z1's 1080i, but with the cinema mode turned on it's more than a match for Panasonic's DVX100.

There has been some worry about the HD-resolution abilities of the provided Fujinon 16x lens. It's as good as you'd expect for the price, but no better. If you want top notch footage for HD output, you'll have to invest in a better lens – and with 1/2-inch and 35mm film adaptors available, the options are wide.

If your aims are lower, the HD100 is a great camcorder for ENG or micro-budget filmmaking – and the best use of the HDV format we've seen so far.

Neil Bennett

alternatives



Panasonic AG-HVX200



Sony HVR-Z1

specifications

Recording system: HDV/DV **Camera type:** Shoulder-mounted **CCDs:** 3x 1/3-inch **CCD capacity:** 1,100,000-pixels **Progressive capture:** Yes **Film-style gamma:** yes **Interchangeable lens mount:** 1/3-inch **Lens zoom:** 16x **Image stabilization:** Optical **Dimensions (w-x-h-x-d):** 235-x-232-x-315mm **Weight:** 591g with provided lens, viewfinder and mic accessories

EIAS 6.0

3D animation suite

format Mac OS 9/X, Windows 2000/XP

price \$895 (around £500)

company Electric Image, www.eitechnologygroup.com

contact Electric Image, 001 830 438 4955

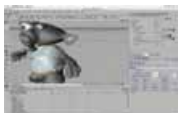
minimum specs G3/G4 processor/500MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 32MB graphics card with OpenGL support, 120MB free hard disk space

pros *Excellent control of all aspects of a material definition, very high-quality rendering at up to 32,000-pixels square, and a robust and efficient renderer.*

cons *Old fashioned, cluttered interface with lots of floating palettes and a lack of full material previews or UV editing tools.*

Digit Rating ★★☆☆☆

alternatives



Maxon Cinema 4D 9.5



Alias Maya Complete 7



NewTek LightWave 3D 8.5

Electric Image Animation System (EIAS) has gone through many changes over the years. A suite of 3D applications, EIAS began as an animation companion to various 3D modellers, eventually incorporating its own modelling program, Modeller. This is no longer supported or supplied, and the EI Universe moniker too has been dropped in favour of the old EIAS name.

Instead of offering its own modelling tool, Electric Image now supplies Silo, the excellent Subdivision Surface modelling application. This makes a good companion to the animation and rendering system.

There are plenty of freeware, shareware and bargain 3D modelling applications around, and a host of renderers of all price ranges and abilities. However, EIAS is the only 3D application that focuses solely on animation, layout and rendering, certainly at the high-end. EIAS' depth and flexibility justifies its existence in this competitive market.

The program is decidedly old-fashioned. It has separate floating view

windows, clumsy import and export, and you only get previews of the base material of your textures in the Material Editor. If you get past the surface of the application, though, you realize there's a huge amount of power on offer. One of its strengths is how well it handles huge data sets. For film and broadcast work, EIAS offers a seriously robust environment that can take masses of data in a single sitting and spit out quality renders without a hitch.

Render times

Although EIAS has been famous for its rendering speed, a quick test showed competitors have overtaken it in many cases. We set a scene consisting of a cityscape model duplicated five times (as full polygon meshes, not instances) and a ring of 12 spot lights each casting 1,280-x-1,280 pixel shadow maps, for a total of a quarter of a million polygons. While EIAS rendered the scene in a respectable 53 seconds, Cinema 4D completed it in a mere 37 seconds.

Version 6 boasts improved OpenGL performance, and this at least was



EIAS is capable of high-quality rendering, although it takes a little longer than some of the major 3D suites.

comparable to Cinema 4D when manipulating the 250k poly scene. Maya did a much better job of it, as it has one of the best OpenGL implementations you can get.

The Camera application is the jewel in EIAS' crown. It's a standalone renderer that comes as part of the suite, and offers unlimited network rendering. For version 6, displacements and bump mapping has been rewritten so that you can displace geometry using a texture or shader and have the Normals computed as well. Previously you had to also use a bump map with displacement.

Raytracing has been improved with a new raytraced volume transparency feature that calculates the transparency based on the object's volume and a user defined thickness for the surface. A new Fresnel option produces physically accurate Fresnel transparency based on the refraction value set. Camera also supports subsurface scattering, offers excellent transmissive effects, and makes use of Radiosity generated by the

separate Radiosity application. Though slow and clumsy, it's a useful feature, but no match for modern GI renderers. A new version of EIAS will be released this year that features integrated GI in Camera itself (as well as FBX format support). This will be free to 6.0 users.

Xpressionist 3.0 is a scripting plug-in that comes with EIAS 6.0. This offers advanced expressions for animation and rigging. This version works in real-time within the interface as a script is executed, and has a number of improvements including extra functions. Other improvements include pop-up contextual menus in palettes and in the view panels, a handy shortcut for auto centering the views, and numerous minor tweaks and alterations.

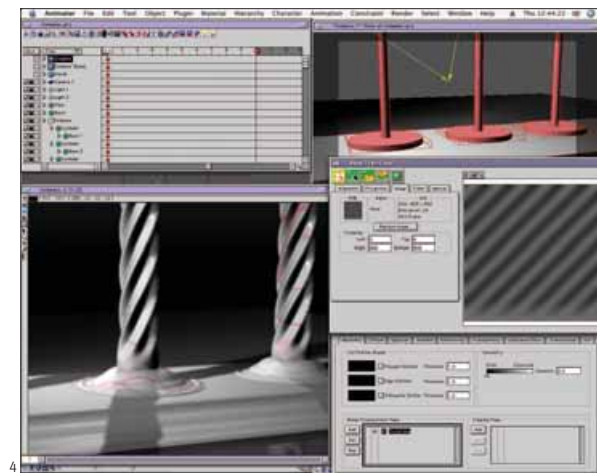
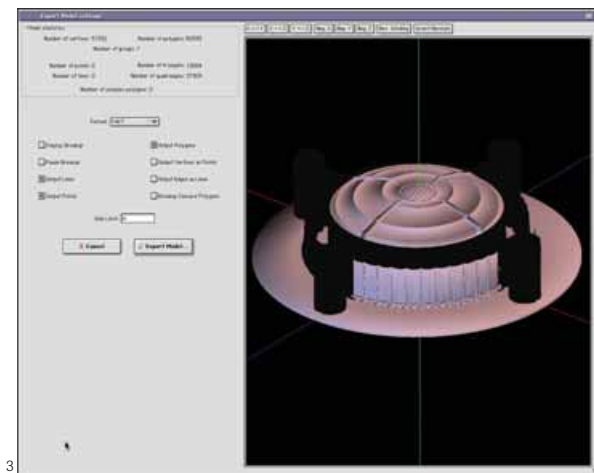
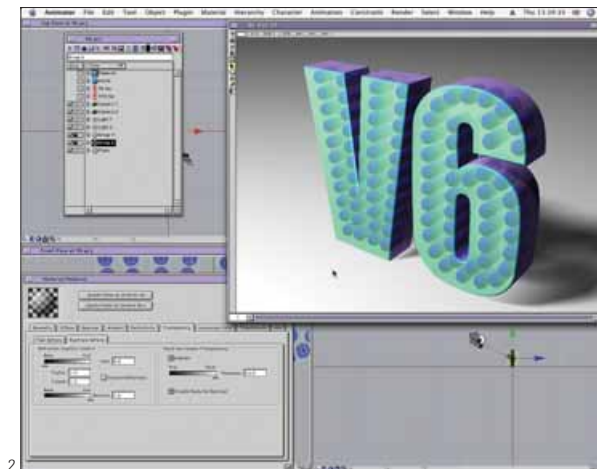
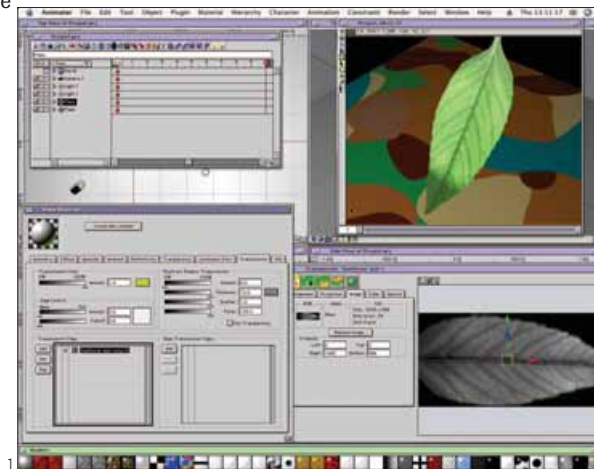
EIAS has a sophisticated, if traditional material system making it great at photoreal work, especially with transmission and transparency. HDRI reflections are supported too, but the

lack of full previewing in the editor lets the system down. When building materials you have to continually render to get an idea of how materials are shaping up. Good UV editing tools are also missing.

At \$895 for the full version, EIAS is good value. It is, however, a bit of a niche product rather than a confident, full-range, tackle-anything application. In the wide context of the 3D market, there are more comprehensive tools on offer. However, what EIAS does, it does very well indeed.

Simon Danaher

1. *The Material editor is extremely well appointed, with a serious degree of control, especially for edge effects.*
2. *The raytracing in EIAS is good but not earth-shattering speed-wise (it's no match for Mental Ray).*
3. *EIAS can import a handful of 3D formats, and there is a separate program called Transporter that can convert and view about 29 3D formats.*
4. *Displacement now calculates the correct surface Normals so that you no longer need to also use a Bump map for your displaced effect to look right.*



Ikivo Animator

Mobile-phone media-preparation software

format Mac OS X 10.2/3/4, Windows 2000/XP

price €295 (around £205)

company Ikivo, www.ikivo.com

contact Ikivo, 0046 853 481 180

minimum specs 128MB RAM, 15MB free disk space

pros Full Illustrator SVG file support and import. Timeline and object browser interface is simple, and offers precise control of objects. Previews of popular smart phones.

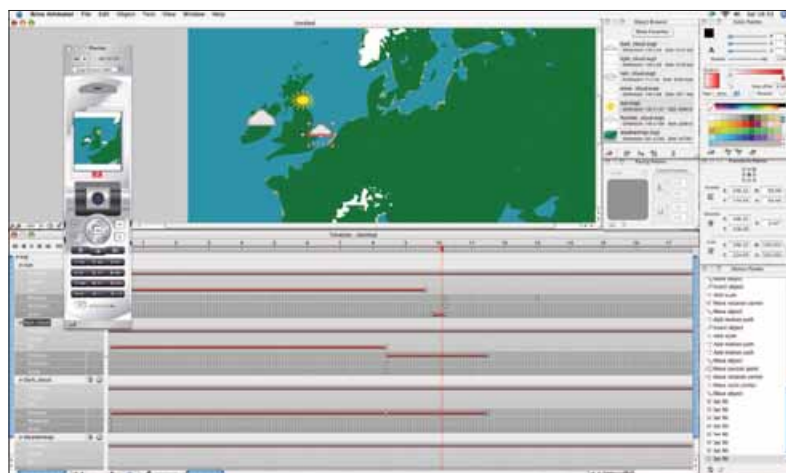
cons Relatively expensive, and requires SVG creation tool and XHTML publisher or SMIL editor to complete workflow and provide content deployment.

Digit Rating ★★★★★



1. The preview player replicates the look of mobile phones, so you can see how your animation will work in the real world.

2. Flash users should take to Animator's interface easily. It has a stage for working on, and a timeline to keep track of what you're creating.



Thanks to the new Live Trace feature in Adobe Illustrator CS 2, it's now a lot easier to translate bitmapped and vector images into SVG content.

Ikivo Animator takes this one stage further, enabling SVG files to be further converted to the SVG Tiny 1.1 mobile content format. An object library is provided for content management, allowing Animator and Adobe Illustrator to interact and access static SVG for animation via an Object Browser panel. You then create animated content by adjusting attributes in the usual multimedia-authoring manner and export the resulting content to GoLive CS 2 or a similarly SVG Tiny enabled Web design package.

Animator uses a Flash-style workspace, with a Stage for animation viewing and editing. The Treeview is a hierarchical view of the stacking order of the objects on the Stage, conforming to the naming conventions of XML and to layers in Illustrator. In the Treeview, it's also simple to reorder the elements or to group them, as well as apply hyperlinks to each one.

There's a timeline for viewing and adjusting the various layers of attributes for the

SVG content over time. These comprise visibility, stroke colour, fill colour, position, rotation, and scale. There's a dedicated palette to control, animate and adjust the colour and opacity attributes, while the transform palette allows precise control over adjustments of position, rotation and scale.

Mobile life

As with other applications of this type, you animate each attribute by changing it at a point in time, while the application adds corresponding key points to the timeline. You can just drag and scale objects from the browser to do this, or precisely adjust the attributes in the various palettes. Animator will automatically tween between keypoints, but you can turn this off to make the change instantaneous. A pacing palette is on hand to let you adjust animation timing as well as to save customized motion curves for export to other projects.

Once you have your animation sorted, it's just a case of saving and previewing the animation. This can take place in the built-in player, or on any one of the supplied SVG Tiny players that replicate those found on models of smart phones.

Since Ikivo provides mobile companies with the same software to view content, you can ensure that anything created with Animator will play, but you'll need to use something like GoLive CS 2 to deploy it.

It's obvious that you'll require most of Creative Suite 2 to do anything with it, but if you're already set up, Animator is an ideal way to join the mobile content revolution.

Michael Burns





Changing the face of 3D

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Sketchbook Pro 2

Sketching application

format Mac OS X 10.3 or later, Windows 2000/XP

price £114 plus VAT

company Alias, www.alias.com

contact Alias, 01494 441 273

minimum specs 266MHz Pentium II/Power Mac G4 processor, 128MB RAM, 16-bit colour display, hardware-accelerated video card with at least 32MB of video memory

pros Boasts a brilliant interface that is as close as you can get to real-world drawing on a computer. You can export to Photoshop to continue.

cons The tools are limited to basic pens and brushes, and there are no effects. It's just for sketching.

Digit Rating ★★★★★ 

alternatives



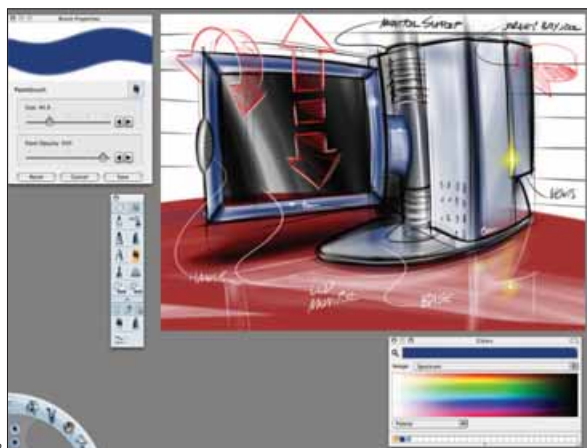
Bauhaus Mirage 1.2



Corel Painter IX



Microsoft Acrylic



1. The new resize widget allows you to scale the current brush without using the keyboard shortcut, offering a more comfortable drawing position when using a tablet.

2. Sketchbook Pro allows you to display tool palettes and to move and resize the image display to create a more traditional look for drawing and painting.

3. The new DIY brush feature lets you build custom brushes that respond to pressure sensitivity. You can save them as new presets and even create your own custom icons for them.



The trouble with feature-rich applications is that they are invariably impossibly complicated. Most people barely even scratch the surface of Word's functionality, so how developers keep really creative applications usable is a mystery.

However, the company that brought us Maya (a behemoth when it comes to complexity) also produces an application that doesn't strive to be cleverer than the person sat in front of it. Sketchbook Pro gives artists a drawing environment not a million miles away from good old pen and paper.

Sketchbook Pro attempts to come close to the ideal interface – one that you don't even notice is there. When you fire it up, the program presents a full screen view of a blank canvas with a top menu and a small widget at the bottom left corner of the screen. From here you can select most of the features of the application including colours, brush types, and file commands though pop-up, icon-based menus. These are arranged in compass-like arrays that disappear when not needed.

If you prefer palettes, you can have the OS Colour picker float nearby along with Sketchbook's tool palette for selecting brush types, and there's also a Layers palette too with its own pop-up compass menu. You need to have the Layers palette open to use the layers features, but other than that you can

work in Sketchbook Pro with a very clean and clear interface. You can even reduce the widget to a few icons if you wish, and set the display to full screen without OS menus and window titles.

Sketchbook Pro is not a painting program in the vein of Corel Painter or even Photoshop. There are no oils or watercolours – not even a paintbucket tool. It's simply for sketching and drawing. There are paintbrushes for filling in large areas with colour, but there's no natural media simulation apart from that offered via the standard drawing tools – Pencil, Ballpoint Pen, Paintbrush, Airbrush, Eraser, Marker and Felt and Chisel-tip pen. A single Smear tool is about all you get in the way of effects.

Custom brush editing is new in version two. You can create your own brush behaviours and save them for later use. SketchBook Pro offers support for pressure sensitive Wacom tablets, and the whole experience is as close to working with a handful of pens and brushes as you can expect from a computer. Version two supports Photoshop PSD format export, so you can further edit your layered work if you wish.

The speed of the application really makes it feel like organic drawing. The brushes work interactively even on huge canvases. Brush sizing is intuitive (via hotkey or the new floating widget) and it's generally a joy to use.

Simon Danaher

Fluid Mask

Photoshop plug-in

format Mac OS X 10.2/3/4

price £299 plus VAT

company Vertus, www.vertustech.com

contact Vertus, 0870 333 6901

minimum specs PowerPC G4 833MHz or 700MHz AMD/Intel processor,
Adobe Photoshop 7.0



pros Effective on difficult subjects, with automatic analysis aided by a range of manual adjustments, plus a forced edge tool for small areas where automation fails.

cons Pricey compared with rivals. Not particularly easy to use, though rivals aren't necessarily easy either.

Digit Rating ★★★★★

The market for still-image cutout masking applications has slowed down since Adobe built the Extract tool into version 7 of Photoshop. You can often do a better job with manual mask brushing for simple hard-edged objects, but Extract isn't very good with complex edges such as hair, or challenging subjects involving transparency or unfocused edges. In these cases, Photoshop can fall short (or take you ages to perfect), and a dedicated application is often the only way to get natural-looking cutouts.

Vertus' Fluid Mask plug-in for Photoshop uses a new 'heligon' technology to automatically analyze image content. The company claims its system is three-to-six times faster than rival methods when handling difficult edges and backgrounds. The Mac version is available now, while a Windows version of the software is due in the autumn.

Fluid Mask processes images in a similar way to the human eye and brain, with automatic detection and analysis of colours, gradients and textures.

When you fire up an image into the application, the heligon technology analyzes the content, and builds a model that divides it into regions representing objects, backgrounds, and 'transitional' sections of the image. This analysis is used to create a data set called the Image Information Layer, which can be modified by the user to fine-tune the result.

At the basic user level, you apply brush and selection tools to define 'keep' and 'delete' areas, after which Fluid Mask

recalculates its own model for the transitional edge areas. However, you can edit the results, as there are plenty of manual refinements and adjustments available through the program's menus. You can zoom in and preview the mask effect on small selected areas to check progress as you go along. You can choose a temporary backdrop colour to contrast with the foreground.

Backdrop's back

The eventual goal is for the final result to only contain a final colour, detail, and texture from the foreground object, with clean, semi-transparent edges that allow seamless compositing onto plain



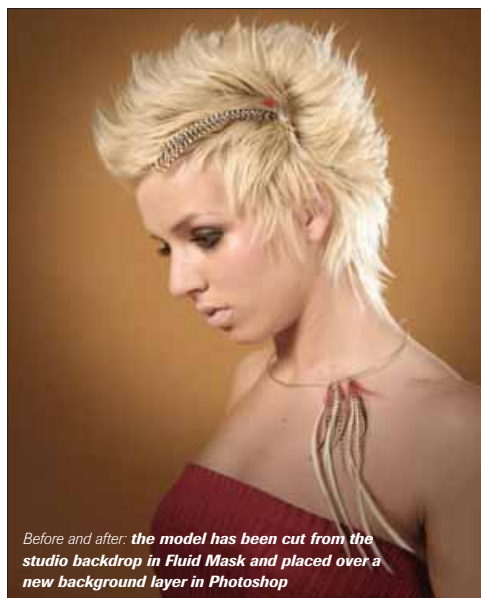
Above. Difficult subjects such as hair are handled well after some manual adjustment – here the result is previewed against a black background.

backgrounds, or any other background image.

Compared to rivals from Corel and onOne, Fluid Mask looks expensive, though the £299 price does include six months' free upgrades.

Fluid Mask takes a lot of practice to use effectively. There are five QuickTime tutorials to accompany sample files, and the manual is good. However, you can't just use it out of the box. When you do get the hang of it, though, the results are worth the effort. The ability to adjust for transparent or even unfocused objects is really impressive, and Fluid Mask handles difficult subjects with ease.

Simon Eccles



Before and after: the model has been cut from the studio backdrop in Fluid Mask and placed over a new background layer in Photoshop



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Office 500	512Kbps	20 : 1	£22.95 ex VAT	£31.99 ex VAT
Office 1000	1Mbps	20 : 1	£26.95 ex VAT	£49.99 ex VAT
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THIS ARTICLE WAS EXTRACTED FROM *Digital Photography Expert: Black & White* by Michael Freeman – a Digit highly recommended read – available now at a retail price of £17.95 from ILEX, the digital creative's publisher of choice.

Black and white occupies a special place in the development of photography and the sharp revival of interest in it testifies to its

enduring appeal. *Black & White* is an essential guide that will teach enthusiasts and professionals alike how the digital workflow can create stunning monochrome images.

Digit has teamed up with the digital designer's publisher of choice The Ilex Press to offer readers a fantastic discount on their latest titles, including *Digital Photography*

Expert: Black & White for £17.95. To order your copy with a 20 per cent discount and free P&P (usually £3.50) giving you a total saving of £7, visit www.ilex-press.com/digit to benefit from this great offer, as well as for more information about other new and exciting Ilex titles. Alternatively, please write to Digit Offer, ILEX Press Ltd, 3 St Andrews Place, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1UP or telephone 01273 487 440.

ALL ABOUT THE MOOD

FINE-TUNING BRIGHTNESS AND CONTRAST CAN ALTER THE CHARACTER AND LIGHTING OF A SCENE FOR A PERSONAL INTERPRETATION.

White Sands, New Mexico is a favourite location for B&W landscape photography because of the constantly changing graphics of shadows on the brilliant gypsum sand. In this high-key treatment, the mood is open and bright, with no shadow tones.



In black and white, more than in colour, there is no such thing as a perfectly 'correct' print. Instead there is the individual photographer's idea of how the image should look, what Ansel Adams called 'visualization'. Here is how he described his ideas for one of his most famous images (Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite National Park, 1940): 'Although the scene was of low general contrast, my visualization of the final print was quite vigorous. The subject had a very dramatic potential.'

Or, consider the work of English photographer Bill Brandt, who favoured glossy grade 4 paper for intense blacks and brilliant whites, and once said, "I try to convey the atmosphere of my subject by intensifying the elements that compose it." Other photographers have aimed for lower contrast in order to reveal everything from shadow to highlight with the subtlest of distinctions.

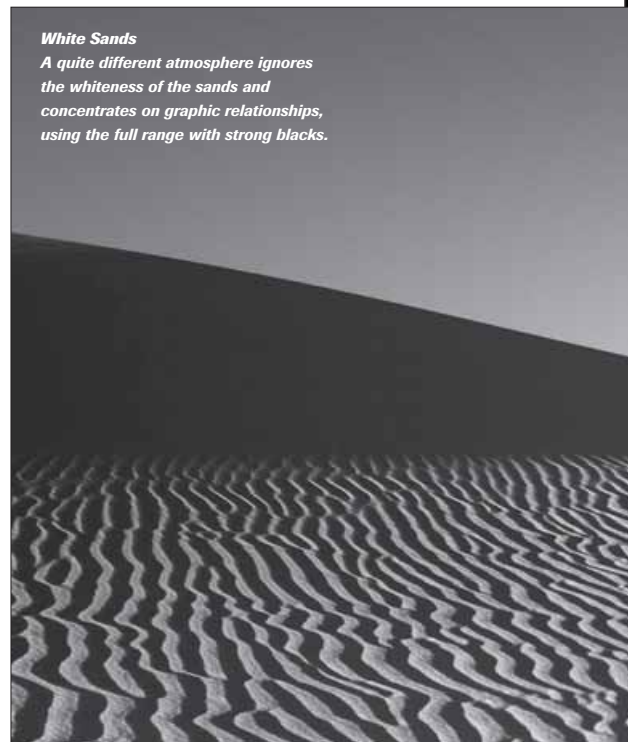
Just because the mood of an image is a less tangible quality than, say, its composition, makes it no less important to think about. The technical issues of digital imaging understandably occupy a lot of attention because they are new, complex, and detailed, but there is a tendency for them to push to one side those creative qualities that are less easy to pin down. Setting black- and white-points, and other ways of optimizing, are technical procedures that ought to follow on from your ideas of how an image should look, and not determine it.

Consider the following descriptions as applied to B&W photographs: bright and open, mysterious, threatening, subdued, airy, cheerful, soft, brittle. All are valid, even though open to personal interpretation, and the language is far from technical.

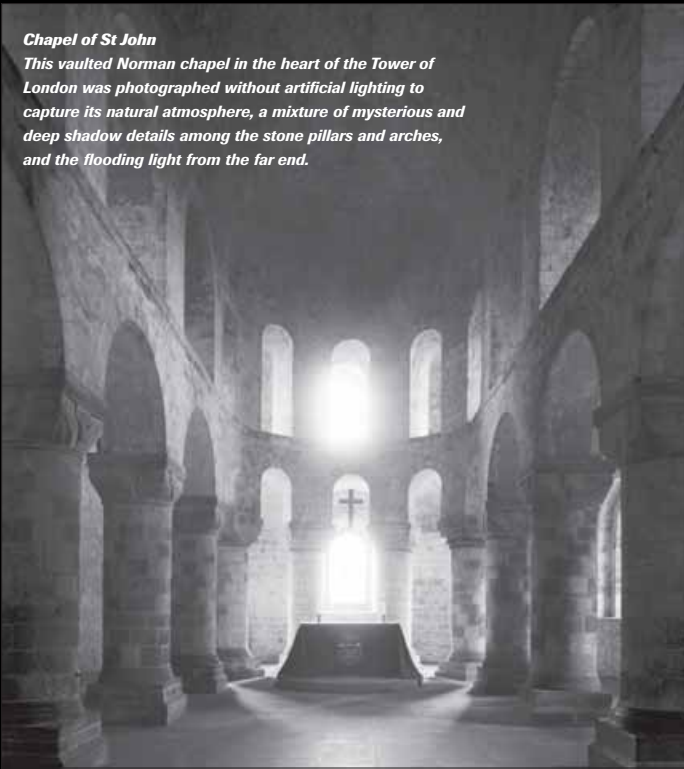
It describes the overall effect and not the process. Nevertheless, the means for creating these types of atmosphere suggest themselves readily enough in monochrome, as the table illustrates.

Here is yet another instance in which discarding the dimension of colour from images tends to focus attention on the nuances of the tonal range. Arguably, mood and atmosphere are better served in B&W than in colour.

*White Sands
A quite different atmosphere ignores the whiteness of the sands and concentrates on graphic relationships, using the full range with strong blacks.*



Qualities and effects	
Technical qualities Most of image falls into mid-to-light tones, large areas of highlight, no blacks, limited shadows.	Mood effects High key, bright, cheerful but slightly mysterious through the sense of not being able to see everything. Luminous.
Most of image dark, with few highlights. The concentration of graphic activity is in the shadow areas.	Low key, rich and dense, can be threatening, possibly mysterious.
Image largely in the second quarter of the tonal range (dark-to-mid), with no true blacks and very few light tones.	Murky, crepuscular, with possibly industrial and even pollution overtones.
Shadows and highlights clipped or almost clipped, and much of the image close to these ends of the scale, with limited areas of mid-tone grey.	High contrast, stark, lunar, chiaroscuro, sharp and brittle.
Most of image concentrated in the mid-tones, with few if any dark shadows and bright highlights.	Low contrast, dull, subdued.
Image largely in the third quarter of the tonal range (mid-to-light), with few dark areas but no really bright highlights.	Soft, delicate, misty.



#13 IMAGE EDITING AND EFFECTS

Case study: **defining the mood**

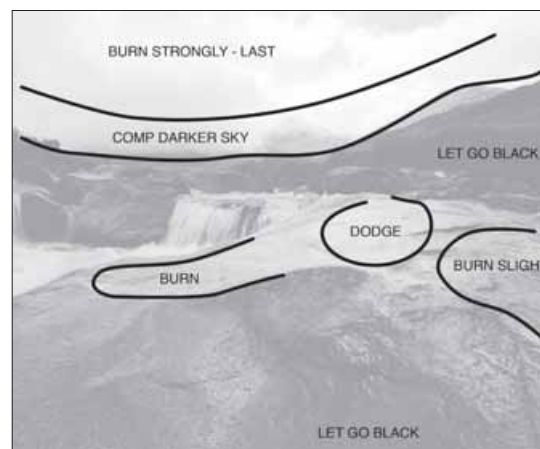
The scene here was a mountain stream coursing through the Isle of Skye in Western Scotland. How to interpret a landscape like this?



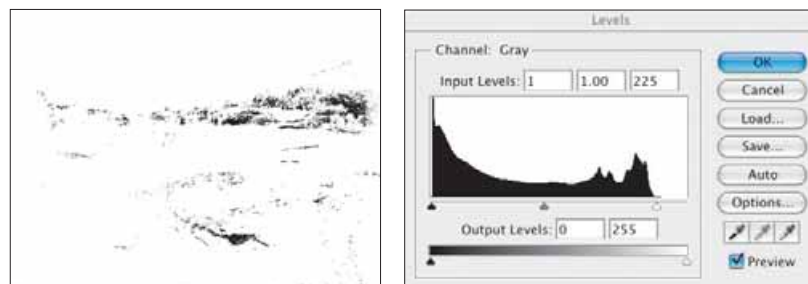
1 The original image in 16-bit, looking at first glance rather dark and flat – an excellent starting point! Next to this is a second darker exposure for the sky.



2 Sketch showing the intended plan. The sky will receive two treatments to make it thundery.



3 The first action is to make the tonal range fit neatly within the full scale, by setting the white- and black-points. Holding down the Alt key (or Option key) at the same time as moving either slider reveals the point at which the highlights/shadows will be clipped. The actual setting is a little back from these.



If you enjoyed this Masterclass, next month Digit will feature an extract from *Digital Photography Expert: Colour* by Michael Freeman – a Digit highly recommended read – available now at a retail price of £17.95 from ILEX, the digital creative's publisher of choice.

The unique value of this book is that it

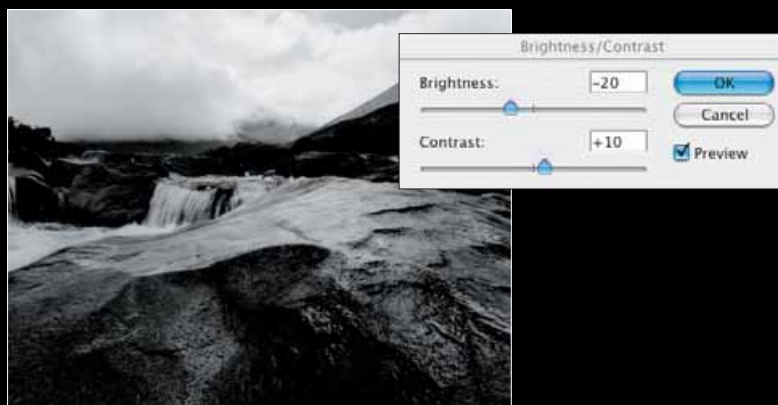
analyzes and combines three important ways of dealing with colour. The first is the subjective and cultural response to individual colours and colour combinations. The second is how they are found and appear in photography. The third is the means by which they can be viewed and altered digitally. Above all, the book is about enjoying colour in photography.

through understanding the role it can play in the image, appreciating its nuances and dynamic effects, then capturing and reproducing it as precisely as possible.

Readers can get a fantastic discount on Ilex's latest titles, including *Digital Photography Expert: Colour* by Michael Freeman. Visit www.ilex-press.com/digit



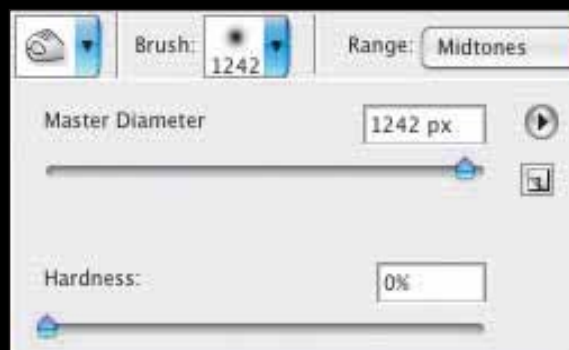
4 Brightness and contrast are then adjusted to taste – here, that means darker and more contrasty.



5 Although no highlights have been clipped in the original, the range of tones in the sky is still weakly defined. There is more information in the second, darker exposure, here given more contrast. As the camera was on a tripod, there is perfect register between the two images, and the darker is copied and pasted on top of the working image.



6 A snapshot is taken of this upper layer for later use by the History brush. Then the layer is deleted, and the darker sky carefully brushed in with the History Brush.



7 The final step is dodging and burning, using these tools in Photoshop in much the same way as in traditional darkroom printing, but with the considerable advantage of being able to see the effect as it is applied – and to undo the strokes if necessary. The Burn tool is set to a very large brush size and only 15 per cent opacity (for fine control). The upper part of the sky is given seven passes of the brush. A slight amount of dodging and burning is then given to the foreground rocks, as shown in the sketch, to give a better visual match to the retouched sky.





Sin City is on release in the UK by Buena Vista. Images used with kind permission of Buena Vista and CaféFX.



Bring it together

Video-based creatives now have to do it all – editing, compositing, art, and sound. Digit checked out the major software suites to see how the different tasks fit together.

BY NEIL BENNETT

Back in the day, everyone involved in postproduction had their roles and stuck to them. In 2005, only those working for high-end studios have the clearly defined role of editor, compositor, sound engineer and graphic artist. The rest of us have to be all of those and more – adding DVD and Web video authoring to the mix.

Our tools have changed to reflect this. Integration between the components of your video suite is, therefore, of paramount importance – hence Adobe, Apple and Avid's focus on their Video Collection, Final Cut Studio and Xpress Studio HD respectively.

The basic requirement of an integrated video suite is a cohesive interface across products and the ability to share media between the different applications without hassle or time-consuming transcoding (excepting MPEG-2 encoding for DVD authoring, which is necessary). The first point may seem a no-brainer, but with companies licensing or buying products (or entire companies) to fill gaps in their repertoires, it's not always the case.

There has also been a difference of toolsets and language between the differing roles. Product developers don't just have to bundle applications together, they've got to make them easily accessible to you. The traditional interfaces and workflows of audio, 3D and other applications from other fields can often seem confusing to the born-&-bred editor. To counteract this, tools should work in the same way across applications. □

Adobe Video Collection 2.5

format Windows XP

suite price Standard £915 (Premiere Pro 1.5, After Effects 6.5 Standard, Encore DVD 1.5, Edition 1.5)

Professional £1,335 (Premiere Pro 1.5, After Effects 6.5 Professional, Encore DVD 1.5, Audition 1.5, Photoshop CS 2)

components prices

Premiere Pro 1.5 £525

After Effects 6.5 Standard £565

After Effects 6.5 Professional £915

Encore DVD £245

Audition £209

company Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk

contact Adobe, 020 8606 4001

digit rating ★★★★★

With some of the oldest video applications in its repertoire, you'd think Adobe's video collection would have the tightest integration of all. However, while there are some excellent timesaving tools available, the overall integration of the main video products isn't as seamless as Final Cut Studio.

The main problem is that the suite often relies on the Edit Original command to move media to other applications from Premiere's timeline and project bins. This is fine if you have Windows' file associations set up to link video files to After Effects and audio files to Audition. However, many applications try to kidnap these, and most of the time you want video and audio to be matched to fast-opening playback applications such as QuickTime or Windows Media Player for previewing purposes.

Application-specific 'Edit in After Effects' or 'Edit in Audition' commands would be better.

Where this is seen is in Encore DVD's 'Edit in Photoshop' and 'Create After Effects Composition' commands for building static DVD menus and motion menus, respectively.

These give you the smooth movement of media you want – and Adobe's ownership of Photoshop makes graphic design an equal partner next to editing and compositing. Photoshop includes a top-notch set of video-related tools, such as its ability to mimic the output look of formats with non-square pixels – and its use of the standard Adobe interface makes it easy to use for the occasional editor.

Premiere Pro and After Effect's integration may not be on the same level as that of Final Cut Pro/Motion and Xpress Pro HD/Avid FX, but there are some notable functions. You can cut-&-paste clips between Premiere and AE (and also Encore), and Premiere automatically has access to all of AE's effects, which makes in-NLE compositing much better. AE can load Premiere projects, allowing it to act as a kind-of finishing system, setting and tidying effects after the edit is complete with access to most of the project's parameters.

Outside of 'Edit Original', Audition's integration into the Suite is almost non-existent.



You can import video – unless that video happens to be in QuickTime format – but the video monitor doesn't sit well in the Audition interface layout and definitely feels like an afterthought, especially when compared to Soundtrack Pro's layout.



Editing tools use different terms and phrases for certain concepts and commands to audio, 3D, and graphic design applications. Where possible, with a suite of products, terminology should be consistent from application to application.

No one wants to have to wait while moving a piece of media from your editing application to your compositing application, for example. MPEG-2 encoding for DVD authoring aside, you shouldn't have to convert a piece of video or audio to take it from one application to another because the second tool doesn't support the format. With a group of newer formats such as HDV and Panasonic's P2 being recently integrated into most NLEs, it's important that these formats are also supported in other parts of each suite.

Ideally, media should be transported backwards and forwards between applications

seamlessly. If you've trimmed a clip on the timeline in your editing software, only that piece is sent to the compositing tool – and when you've finished compositing it, it's automatically updated back in the editor. And if one of these applications crashes, it shouldn't require re-editing the original clip.

Playing well with others

We've focused on the integration between products in the major suites, but an application's ability to easily trade media with third-party tools should not be forgotten. These can never be as seamless as integrated suites, but if you need to move a film-based project to a high-end finishing system for conform and the director's already in a cab on the way over, you don't want to be waiting around.

This is where XML-based open exchange formats such as AAF (Advanced Authoring

Format) and MXF (Material Exchange Format), which are descendants of the basic EDL (edit decision lists) of the film-based world. AAF and MXF are project formats that are designed to allow timelines to be shared between a wide range of applications from Adobe, Apple, Autodesk, Avid, Quantel – from Final Cut Pro to Flame. They offer much more project information than EDLs, so more complex projects can be moved without rebuilding.

Final Cut Pro, Premiere Pro, and Xpress Pro all support AAF export. Final Cut Pro adds OMF, while Xpress Studio uses MXF as its own interchange format between applications, and has OMF support as a legacy.

The best suites allow you to get on with your job, without been held back by the many different things you're trying to do. Right now, all of the major suites have high levels of integration but still have some way to go before they are as

THE LEVEL OF INTEGRATION BETWEEN THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP FINAL CUT STUDIO IS UNSURPASSED

Apple Final Cut Studio

format Mac OS X 10.3/4

suite price £840 Final Cut Pro 5, Motion 2, DVD Studio Pro 4, Soundtrack Pro

components prices

Final Cut Pro 5 £595

Motion 2 £169

DVD Studio Pro 4 £297

Soundtrack Pro £169

company Apple, www.apple.com/uk

contact Apple, 0800 783 4846

digit rating ★★★★★



The level of integration between the elements that make up Final Cut Studio is unsurpassed. This is because the accompanying applications have been developed as almost add-ons to the central Final Cut Pro application, and while this means that Final Cut Studio has less overall features than the Video Collection or Xpress Studio HD, it maintains superb efficiency for everyday editing tasks.

Central to Final Cut Studio's success is seamless round-trip editing. Right-click on a video or audio clip on the Final Cut Pro timeline and the contextual menu allows you to send them to Motion or Soundtrack Pro. Save the clip when you've finished working on it, and the clip is automatically updated in FCP. Equally importantly, you can send multiple clips from the timeline or the whole sequence.

DVD Studio Pro 4 can also work backwards and forwards with Motion and Soundtrack Pro projects, which can save a lot of time on motion menu and sound effect creation. However, this can't compete with Adobe's Encore/Photoshop integration for the design of static menus.

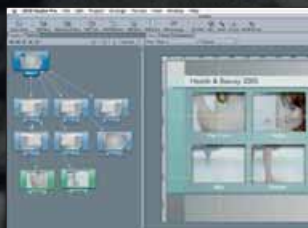
As you'd expect, the path from Final Cut Pro and DVD Studio Pro is narrow and one way – guided by the Compressor encoding tool – but the recently-added ability to work with non-MPEG media in DVD Studio Pro means you can save all of the encoding until the end of a project. It's bad practice but sometimes necessary under tight deadlines.

Apple's interface is consistent throughout the whole suite. Soundtrack Pro is of special note here, being the easiest-to-learn audio product of interest to professional editors. Its NLE-style interface would baffle many audio engineers. The Motion 2 motion graphics application may not have enough features to be correctly described as a compositing application, but as a real-time beefed-up titling tool, it's ideal for the majority of editors. The LiveType titling tool, which is as heavily integrated as such tools usually are, also offers a level of animation and other features for which you'd usually have to go to a compositing application.

The downside to Final Cut Studio is that if you are a real



power user, you will often have to go outside the Studio to work on graphics creation and compositing. The Studio is well integrated with Apple's Shake compositing software, but its high-end toolset lacks the breadth of filters that users of After Effects are used to.



Other suites: NewTek [VT4] version 4.5

format Windows 2000/XP

suite price Live \$5,995 (around £3,360)

company NewTek,

www.newtek-europe.com/uk

contact Computers Unlimited,

020 8358 6668

[VT4] differs from all of the other video suites in that it doesn't mix compositing or DVD authoring applications into an editing system – though the company's LightWave 3D application is bundled for 3D work.

Instead, the Video Toaster software package provides an integrated live broadcast system, backed up by a series of hardware options – including the 24-input SX-84 production switcher and the RX-8 program controller.

The software includes an NLE toolset, but this isn't as fully featured as any of the major suites. However, it's the live mixing, titling, and keying, that makes [VT4] such a unique product.

It's possible to run anything from a high-level corporate presentation to a small, local digital TV station from the [VT4].

NewTek has recently released version 4.5 of the [VT4] software, which adds a new codec to enhance the handling of DV footage, title templates, 1,024-x-768 resolution output for projections (for example, in corporate environments), and the ability to output the contents of other computer displays.



WHEN YOU'RE WORKING WITH FIVE OR MORE DIFFERENT TOOLS, HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER IS A MAJOR FACTOR

Avid Xpress Studio HD

format Windows XP

suite price Xpress Pro HD Powerpack £1,695 (Xpress Pro HD, Avid 3D, Avid FX, Avid DVD by Sonic)

Xpress Studio HD Essentials £2,395 (Xpress Pro HD, Avid 3D, Avid FX, Avid DVD by Sonic, Pro Tools LE, Mbox)

Xpress Studio HD Complete £3,895 (Xpress Pro HD, Mojo, Avid 3D, Avid FX, Avid DVD by Sonic, Pro Tools LE, Digi 002)

components prices

Xpress Pro HD £1,195

Mojo £1,195, Avid 3D £950

Avid FX £1,100

Avid DVD by Sonic £1,399

Pro Tools LE with Mbox £999

Pro Tools LE with Digi 002 £2,299

company Avid, www.avid.co.uk

contact Avid, 020 7534 2800

digit rating ★★★★★



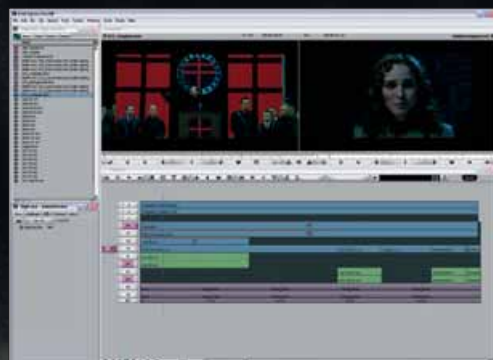
Xpress Studio HD automatically gets extra points for shipping with an extensive Workflow Guide. It's necessary, too, as the Studio has the widest set of tools of the major suites – adding 3D, high-end audio and a selection of hardware to the usual mix. Avid has set the bar high with its range of programs and has improved integration greatly since the first Studio release, but it's still finicky.

Round-trip editing between Xpress Pro HD and Avid FX is as you'd expect from an editing application and Boris Red, which is essentially what Avid FX is. FX is applied as an effect to clips on Xpress Pro's timeline with one, two, four, or six inputs. Opening the effect opens the FX interface, which exists independently of Xpress Pro (as with Apple's Motion). Overall, FX's toolset isn't as wide as that of After Effects, but it does have some unmatched motion graphics tools such as the automated (if flawed) 3D chart builder. The main integration issue here though is that FX's Boris FX-style interface is very different from Avid's, which can put off those who haven't used such products before.

The integration between Xpress Pro and Avid 3D is astounding. Round-trip sharing between an editing and a 3D application is great in itself, but returned clips come back – albeit after rendering – with full alpha channel support, and Avid 3D has been near-perfectly tailored to the editor in terms of interface and language. It's still more exacting in how you arrange your files and folders than other systems, as is the suite as a whole.

Moving media to Avid DVD by Sonic requires a lot more fiddling around in dialog windows than preparing media for DVD Studio Pro or Encore. As with the rest of the suite, Avid DVD doesn't like 'unprofessional' shortcuts, so you have to encode before you start authoring. The largest problem, though, is simply that Avid DVD is a very weak application that can't even match Encore, let alone DVD Studio Pro.

The Mojo hardware accelerator causes no issues, but the Digi 002 control surface prevents Pro Tools LE running at the same time as Xpress Pro HD – it can only communicate



with one of them at a time. This limits the integration between the two products to a series of import and export options – though the complexity of Pro Tools means that you aren't likely to want to switch backward and forwards too often.

Sony Vegas+DVD

format Windows 2000/XP

suite price £374 (Vegas 6, DVD Architect 3.0)

company Sony, www.sonymediasoftware.com

contact Sony, 0870 6060 456

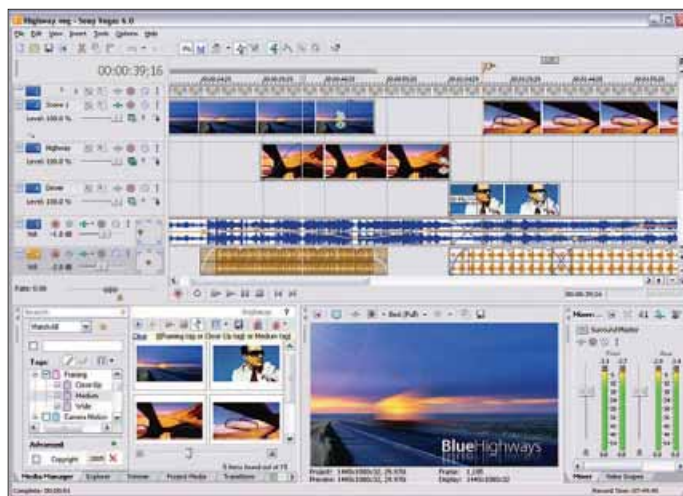
It may be called Vegas+DVD, but the integration of Sony's Vegas editing software and its DVD Architect DVD authoring software is limited by the nature of the two products. 'Edit then author' is the standard workflow for video projects destined for DVD.

The solution does score workflow points with what it calls 'saved project paths'. This takes the idea of nested projects and adds in an allowance for our organizational inadequacies.

Rendered files include information on the original projects, and if they're placed in other projects, you can open the original project file in a single click without having to remember where it is.

This works with video projects, and with the output from Sony's Acid Pro 5.0 audio software. This has a very similar interface to Vegas, and is a good addition to your toolbox.

However, though Sony has added some more professional features to Vegas with version 6, such as support for Blackmagic Design's DeckLink capture boards, it remains a low-level tool that hasn't been integrated at all with Sony Broadcast's Xpri editing systems.



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Large format inkjet printers

A3+ and larger inkjet printers are relatively inexpensive and able to produce gallery-quality prints. We review the models available for today's pro photographers and illustrators?

BY JOANNE CARTER

main. **Epson Stylus Pro 4800**

1. **Canon Bubble Jet i9950**

2. **Canon Bubble Jet W2200**

3. **Canon imageprograf W6400**

4. **Epson Stylus Photo R2400**

5. **HP Designjet 130nr**

6. **HP Designjet 30**

7. **HP Designjet 90r**

Inkjet printers are ubiquitous when it comes to photo-printing in the consumer market. Advances in quality, print times and fade resistance have spawned a raft of affordable pro-quality large-format inkjet printers. Few serious photographers are likely to consider A4-size printers, even though there are some very capable pro-oriented models available.

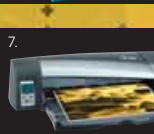
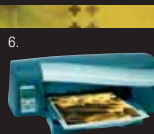
While A4 and the traditional photographic sizes such as 10-x-8, 5-x-8 and 6-x-4-inch prints are popular formats, there isn't one among them that can't be printed by the equivalent A3+ or even A2+ format printer – and prices for the larger printers are not always disproportionately expensive.

Print speeds for the same size media are not usually compromised, and ink sets are often identical or better value, so print costs aren't over-inflated. However, manufacturers have recognized potential purchasers of A3+ (and larger) format printers are more likely to have different requirements. As a result, pro and semi-pro printers are unlikely to feature PictBridge support, built-in card-readers, monitors, or CD face printing capabilities. While offering convenience, these features are clearly indicative of products aimed at consumers.

Traditional inkjet specifications such as ink droplet size and the number of inks used are of less importance to the buyer than they were a few years ago, primarily because user expectations are much higher.

Nevertheless, it isn't always the case that the printer with the smallest ink droplet size, the highest resolution and the largest number of coloured inks produces the best quality print. These factors contribute, but there are other things that influence the quality of output. Advanced layering techniques can be used to inflate the resolution, but the sophistication of the print drivers and the ink formulation







Canon imagePROGRAF W6400

format A1

price £2,499 plus VAT

company Canon, www.canon.co.uk

contact Canon, 01737 220 000

digit rating ★★★★★ 

Surprisingly, Canon doesn't have an A2+ printer in its large-format range, but the new imagePROGRAF W6400 provides a comprehensive printing solution from A4-cut sheets up to 24-inch wide prints from 30m rolls.

The single print head is user interchangeable, like that of the BJ W2200, but at around £400 a throw, you'll want to look after it. Fortunately, the W6400 has plenty of built-in safeguards, including a dust-reduction cut option for certain types of susceptible papers.

A small LCD panel on the printer's right fascia displays print and ink status, though again like the A3+ W2200, the W6400 is supplied with its own drivers. There's also a software RIP for precise control and consistent output of colour. Standard connectivity is just USB 2.0, but there are FireWire and network card options available.

A six-ink pigment-based ink set provides suitable light fastness said to be in excess of 100 years, and good features include high-capacity single-ink cartridges that can be replaced during printing without loss of quality.

Although the imagePROGRAF and similar printers are commonly viewed primarily as studio proofers, Canon is trying hard to promote the W6400 in particular as being suitable for professional photographers. The company's reasoning is quite justified. Print quality is very high indeed and print speeds are remarkable.

An A1 photo print at best quality can be run-off in half the time of the HP Designjet 130nr. B&W printing isn't quite up to the standards set by Epson's UltraChrome K3 ink set, but if your budget can stretch to it, the W6400 isn't going to leave you wanting for much more.



Canon Bubble Jet W2200

format A3+

price £1,495 plus VAT

company Canon, www.canon.co.uk

contact Canon, 01737 220 000

digit rating ★★★★★

Like the Bubble Jet i9950, Canon's W2200 is a wide-format device capable of printing on various media up to 13-x-19-inches (A3+). It's intended as a heavy-duty printer/proof for design studios and print-shops, but it's a very capable photo-printer too.

However, at a shade under £1,500, it's expensive when compared with Canon's top-of-the-range consumer models. It's devoid of built-in card readers and CD printers and the like, but it's supplied with the EFI Designer Edition software RIP for press emulations, as well as Digital Photo Pro editing and enhancement software.

The unorthodox front-loading design conceals a regular dye-based six-ink system, but it comprises of high capacity (130ml) single-ink cartridges for extended and uninterrupted print runs. There are no roll-feeder options, although a large paper tray sits underneath the output tray with a capacity of up to 250 sheets of A3+. An optional paper cassette can double that figure.

As well as a USB port and a parallel connection, Canon has provided a FireWire option for Macs running OS X, plus there's a built-in ethernet interface.

The Bubble Jet W2200 is an exceptionally quiet printer. It's fast and flexible too – it can print on a variety of paper types including over-size 13-x-22-inch media.

Output is excellent, with prints achieving a surprising level of detail and smooth accurate skin tones from our test files. Even B&W photos were free of tell-tale tints and restricted tonal range. Unfortunately, the one grumble is a significant one – the price is too high.



Canon Bubble Jet i9950

format A3+

price £407 plus VAT

company Canon, www.canon.co.uk

contact Canon, 01737 220 000

digit rating ★★★★★

Canon's wide-format i9950 is a consumer-orientated device boasting CD-printing, PictBridge support for direct printing with suitably equipped cameras, and an impressive eight-ink system comprising of additional red and green inks to the usual six-ink arrangement. The i9950 is well made and durable. A system of collapsible trays at the rear and front provide some dust resistance when not in use.

Canon's single-ink technology, comprising of eight cartridges sitting directly over the print head, makes an impressive sight, much like the Epson SP R2400. However, unlike the Epson, Canon's dye-based ChromaPLUS ink system consists of two extra coloured inks, effectively broadening the colour gamut over the more common six-ink types. And, Canon's choice of extra red and green inks would typically suit landscape or nature photographers looking for bolder, more saturated images.

Although quite compact, the i9950 is capable of printing photos from postcard size prints up to 13-x-19-inches (A3+), albeit with a small border at that size. Nevertheless, Canon's supplied printer driver allows borderless printing up to A3 size. To the rear is a pair of high-speed interfaces – both FireWire and USB 2.0 are supported – but there's no built-in wireless or ethernet.

Canon printers are usually blisteringly fast, and the i9950 is no exception. Happily, the speed does not compromise print quality. Even under close inspection the 2pl droplet sizes provide very fine detail and impressive gradation.

itself can't be determined from the specification alone. As a guide, in addition to the usual four-colour ink set, light-coloured inks – light magenta and light cyan – are employed for a wider colour gamut, and when greater colour accuracy is required for reproducing delicate pastel shades and skin tones.

Colourful language

Printing successful B&W images requires at least two black inks of different density. Often there's a third black supplied for matte papers that can be swapped for the glossy photo-black. Not only does the matte-black produce deeper, truer blacks, but it's often formulated for increased light-fastness in combination with specific archival papers.

The matte black inks are less prone to 'bronzing', too – noticeable colour separation from the more absorbent papers. Epson's latest A3+ printer, the Stylus Photo R2400, adopts the same UltraChrome K3 ink technology as the A2+ Stylus Photo 4600. Soon-to-be-replaced A1 format SP 7600 goes one further by adding a third black ink, in addition to the swappable matte-black.

For enthusiasts and professionals alike, colour accuracy and consistency is paramount, but budget is also a consideration. A small studio is far more likely than a freelancer to be able to justify and physically accommodate an A1 printer/proof, such as the Canon Bubble Jet W6400 or HP's affordable Designjet 130, especially when high-resolution images or scans are required.



Epson Stylus Pro 4800

format A2+

price £1,485 plus VAT

company Epson, www.epson.co.uk

contact Epson, 0800 220 546

digit rating ★★★★★

A relatively new model, the Stylus Pro 4800 features Epson's UltraChrome K3 ink set for colour and B&W prints up to 17-inches wide (A2+). The design is based on Epson's older Pro 4000 model with a telescopic paper draw to the front for cut-sheets up to A2+, as well as a neat covered built-in roll-feeder located high to the rear. With the exception of the cover for paper draw, the printer is well designed for easy access, and especially so for changing the 110ml/220ml ink cartridges.

Like the Stylus Photo 2400, it uses an eight-ink print head with three black inks in place at one time, plus there's a swappable matte-black, for deeper tones and fade-resistance with matte media. When combined with Epson's great Archival Matte paper, for example, the results are said to be lightfast in excess of 100 years under certain conditions. Epson claims colour has a life expectancy of up to 75 years if stored and displayed carefully. Swapping between inks is not as easy as it could be, and there's a good deal of ink wastage too.

Out of the box, the Stylus Pro 4800 features cross-platform USB 2.0 and a Mac-only FireWire interface. There's no ethernet as standard, which is surprising for a printer of this price. It was one of the slowest on test and one of the noisiest too. It's also extremely fussy over paper loading and selecting the appropriate size.

Perhaps not surprisingly, output is stunning from the drivers, and there would be little gained from using custom profiles providing you stick with Epson's latest media. Colour accuracy from the driver was far superior to that of the Stylus Photo R2400.



Epson Stylus Photo R2400

format A3+

price £510 plus VAT

company Epson, www.epson.co.uk

contact Epson, 0800 220 546

digit rating ★★★★★

Standing at the head of the consumer photo-inkjet range, the new Stylus Photo R2400 has an eight-ink print head with swappable photo-black and matte-black cartridges.

The matte-black ink option provides the necessary heavy shadows required for matte-papers. In addition to the now usual light-black, the UltraChrome K3 ink set has a third black ink – this light-light-black provides improved tonal range for B&W printing.

The print head adopts the conventional CMYK set-up. There is a light cyan and light magenta, but the special blue and red ink seen in the UltraChrome Hi-Gloss ink set of the A4 R800 and A3+ R1800 is absent. Epson claims users can expect excellent colour rendition in addition to realistic B&W prints.

The printer chassis is loosely based on the R1800. Epson has wisely kept the collapsible feeder-tray covering the rear slot. Another cover on the printer's front houses the manual feed slot accommodating thicker media as well as CDs for face printing, but media is ejected to the rear, so you'll have to make sure there's plenty of room. As in previous models, the R2400 comes with an extremely useful roll-paper adaptor, but there's no built-in paper cutter.

Output is fantastic, but there are some issues with obtaining accurate colour reproduction, even when using Epson media. Calibrating the printer and adopting the custom ICC profiles can solve this. Although the print quality was good, especially the detail rendered from 3pl droplets, the glossy finish wasn't quite up to the prints from the A2+ Stylus Pro 4800.



HP Designjet 130nr

format A1

price £1,295 plus VAT

company HP, www.hp.com/uk

contact HP, 0845 270 4000

digit rating ★★★★★

The A1 printer in HP's Designjet range comes in several different guises. If you need to print up to 24-inches wide using cut sheets, the Designjet 130 is available without the roll-feeder. Our review model was the Designjet 130nr, which has an automatic 24-inch wide roll-feed attachment and an installed HP Jetdirect 620n LAN card. Both items are available as optional accessories. Without them, the basic Designjet 130 costs around £900 plus VAT.

The printer looks a little odd. It's a stretched version of the A2+ Designjet 90 and A3+ Designjet 30 models, but it has a relatively small footprint, especially without the roll-feeder. Like the Designjet 90r, the attachment has to be assembled first, but it takes no more than ten minutes, and it's a useful feature to have.

The Designjet 130nr comes with a built-in colour sensor and automatic print head alignment, just as with the Designjet 90r and Designjet 30 models. There's no FireWire for older Macs nor USB 2.0 for recent machines, but the Designjet 130nr is no slouch when it comes to printing high-resolution A3+ or A2+ photographs. Even an A1 test print at best quality is delivered in just under 20 minutes.

The quality of output is excellent, though not up to the standard of the Canon iP W6400, especially printing B&W photos on matte papers. HP's dye-based colour inks have good fade-resistance, though. Our only concern was that several of the internal rollers left a long-lasting impression on the resultant posters, which took several days to settle down.

With the various types of finish, weight, and size of media available, as well as the desire for uninterrupted print runs, photographers will be attracted to optional software RIPs, generous ink capacity, and automatic roll-feeders for time saving and cost effectiveness over cut sheets.

Print quality

That said, even without the extra expense of RIPs or custom profiles for certain media, both the Canon and HP A1 printers would still benefit less frenetic use. Thanks to their driver accuracy, even the most discerning of users and clients would be satisfied with the results achieved from using the printer-branded media and inks. That applies to the A2+ and A3+ printers available too.

Aside from the physical size of output, there are plenty of other features to consider before making your choice. For example, although dye-based inks generally look brighter and are especially pleasing when used with glossy paper, they are more prone to fading than pigment types. You should also look out for features such as wireless options or built-in ethernet for networked environments, and user interchangeable print heads are convenient – the down time and extra expense associated with calling out an engineer is often overlooked.

We've selected eight models from A1 down to A3+, and we've chosen them to suit different budgets. Although the price range reflects the various formats, all of the inkjet printers offer the kind of features, not to mention quality, that would be suitable for the professional or serious photographer. □



HP Designjet 90r

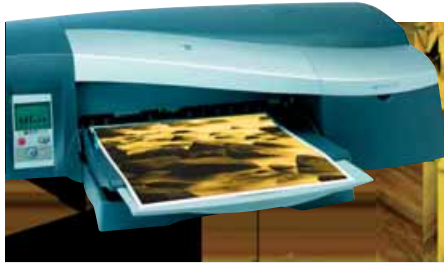
format A2+
price £865 plus VAT
company HP, www.hp.com/uk
contact HP, 0845 270 4000
digit rating ★★★★★

In many respects the Designjet 90r is a straightforward A2+ alternative to the Designjet 30. There's still no borderless capability though, which is a shame, but it shouldn't necessarily detract enthusiasts or pro-photographers. HP's marketing, not to mention the name, aims the Designjet series at graphic design work, prepress, and proofing, but the fact remains the Designjets would easily satisfy most photographers. Each of the printers are fast, come with sophisticated drivers and paper profiles, and produce accurate colour, print after print.

The Designjet 90r shares the same sweeping body design and Vivera ink set as the other two Designjet models, but it has a number of interesting features over the A3+ model and the standard (and slightly cheaper) Designjet 90. The most attractive of which is roll-feed for media up to 150ft long and 18-inches wide. It's supplied as an attachment and isn't challenging to set-up.

A built-in media cutter is a welcome addition. A large paper tray for cut sheets ranging in size from postcard size papers up to 70 sheets of 18-x-24-inch media provides additional flexibility, but loading postcard size media can be fiddly. As well as the rear manual slot for heavier media, delicate single sheets up to 18-inches wide can feed through the front bypassing the input tray.

Printing is fast despite the pair of older interfaces, and output is practically indistinguishable from the A3+ model. Colour prints look good, and B&W images don't suffer from the Designjets single black-ink, though they can't quite match Epson's UltraChrome K3 black ink set.



HP Designjet 30

format A3+
price £440 plus VAT
company HP, www.hp.com/uk
contact HP, 0845 270 4000
digit rating ★★★★★ 

The Designjet 30 is HP's entry-level wide-format printer for imaging professionals – and the price makes it attractive to a wider range of users. Although the Designjet 30 has less inks than the likes of Epson's Stylus Photo R2400, there's still six including the light magenta, and light cyan.

What's probably more appealing to the photographer looking to use third-party media is HP's unique Automatic Closed Loop Colour Calibration option. With recent HP media, this feature provides acceptable colour accuracy without having to resort to custom profiling, though it's always an option if you want to squeeze that little bit more from it.

Although the Designjet can output up to A3+, there's no provision to print borderless. A large detachable and durable paper tray simplifies paper handling and helps prevent accidental damage. Fortunately, for thicker and heavier weight media, a second manual feed slot is located to the rear. Six large ink cartridges of varying capacity sit to the right of the printer body.

Black, yellow, light-magenta, and light-cyan have a useful 69ml capacity, while the least used of the set – magenta and cyan – contain a healthy 28ml each. There's a smallish LCD panel on the front providing indicators of ink and print head status. Despite the lack of USB 2.0 or FireWire connectivity, the Designjet 30 was still one of the fastest on test when it came to printing our high-resolution test prints.

Printing quality was surprisingly good, and it was one of the most accurate for colour rendition on test.

Testing procedures

Each printer was tested using photos from the Kodak Professional Color Management Check-up Kit (supplied by Colour Confidence) printed from Adobe Photoshop CS using the supplied printer driver and appropriate paper profiles (or software RIPs, where appropriate).

Only printers that were noticeably adrift from our reference print were subsequently calibrated and custom profiles made with Colour Confidence Print Profiler 2.0, using an X-Rite DP-45 Color Autoscan spectrophotometer to read the resultant colour patches from the appropriate media.

A 2D graph representing the potential gamut of each printers ICC profile was produced using Chromix ColorThink 2.1.2.

Colour Confidence, 0800 0735 845, www.colourconfidence.com, Chromix, www.chromix.com

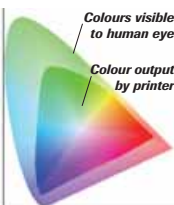
products at a glance



MANUFACTURER	CANON
MODEL	IMAGEPROGRAF W6400
PRICE PLUS VAT	£2,499

DIGIT RATING	★★★★★ 
FORMAT	A1
MAX RESOLUTION (DPI)	1,200-x-2,400
NO OF INKS	6 + 1
NO OF CARTRIDGES	6 + 1
DROPLET SIZE (MIN)	4pl
INK TYPE	Pigment
BORDERLESS PRINTING	yes to 10-x-12-inches
ROLL FEEDER	yes
MEDIA (MAX)	0.8mm
MEDIA CUTTER	yes
INTERFACES	USB 2.0 (FireWire & ethernet optional)
SIZE (W-X-D-X-H)	1,420-x-550-x-721mm

GRAPHS

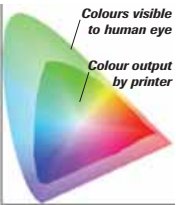
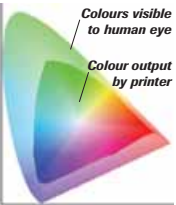
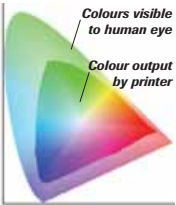
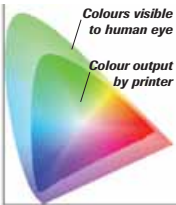
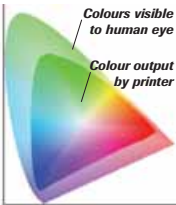
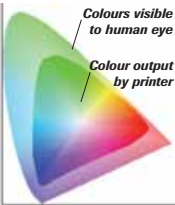
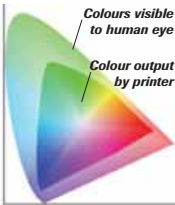


* optimized resolution



CANON	CANON	EPSON	EPSON	HP	HP	HP
BUBBLE JET W2200	BUBBLE JET I9950	STYLUS PRO 4800	STYLUS PHOTO R2400	DESIGNJET 130NR	DESIGNJET 90R	DESIGNJET 30
£1,495	£407	£1,485	£510	£1,295	£865	£440

★★★★★☆☆	★★★★★☆☆	★★★★★☆☆	★★★★★☆☆	★★★★★☆☆	★★★★★☆☆	★★★★★☆☆ 
A3+	A3+	A2+	A3+	A1	A2+	A3+
1,200-x-2,400	2,400-x-4,800	1,440-x-2,880	1,440-x-5,760*	1,200-x-2,400	1,200-x-2,400	1,200-x-2,400
6	8	8 + 1	8 + 1	6	6	6
6	8	8 + 1	8 + 1	6	6	6
1.3pl	2pl	3.5pl	3pl	4pl	4pl	4pl
Dye	Dye	Pigment	Pigment	Dye	Dye	Dye
yes to A3	yes	yes to 19-inch	yes	no	no	no
no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
244gsm	270gsm	1.5mm	1.2mm	0.4mm / 300gsm	0.4mm / 300gsm	0.4mm / 300gsm
no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no
USB, Parallel, FireWire, ethernet	USB 2.0, FireWire, Wireless optional	USB 2.0, FireWire, (ethernet optional)	USB 2.0, FireWire	USB, Parallel, ethernet	USB, Parallel, (ethernet optional)	USB, Parallel, (ethernet optional)
588-x-626-x-208mm	577-x-334-x-182mm	848-x-765-x-354mm	615-x-737-x-457mm	1,050-x-535-x-220mm	890-x-520-x-220mm	724-x-442-x-224mm



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FORMAT

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scanners 3d graphics cards

software

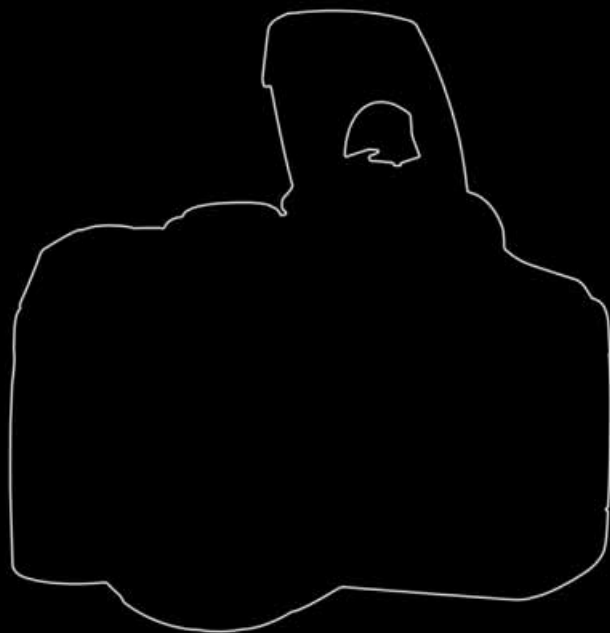
3d dtp digital video graphic design multi
media web design utilities

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DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: WORKSTATIONS



Apple Power Mac G5 dual 2.7GHz
This is the ultimate desktop Mac. Perfect for the 2D creative, the Power Mac G5 dual 2.7GHz also offers good value for money



Armari Gravistar XR
A hugely powerful 3D workstation, Armari's Gravistar XR offers incredible performance and is easily expanded and upgraded



Dell Precision M70
This genuinely mobile workstation has a 15-inch screen with high-definition resolution – plus it has the graphical power to drive it



Evesham Acumen DC64
Dual-processor 3D workstation offering blinding performance, plenty of scope to upgrade, and great peripherals



Sony Vaio A397XP
This unit is a winner, combining creative power with genuine mobility. Stylish, with Sony's great X-black screen technology

Buying advice: digital cameras

If you want a digital camera for serious design and publication work, you'll probably reach for a digital SLR first. These cameras are built for professional photography. With a digital SLR model, you're sure of high-quality output, the lenses are interchangeable, and the cameras can communicate with proper flash lighting systems. Digital SLRs are now starting to fall in price, too, so they're becoming an affordable solution to your imaging problems.

However, a few of the top 'prosumer' compact cameras offer similar capabilities, so it's worth checking out your options.

The race to pack in higher megapixel output seems never-ending – the current crop of compact models have eight million pixels. However, higher resolutions can decrease output quality, because cramming more sensor cells onto small CCD sensors increases image noise. However, there are signs that suggest manufacturers realize high megapixel output only gives their products a temporary competitive advantage, and we're seeing some genuinely useful innovations too.

For instance, some manufacturers are addressing one of the biggest limitations of digital sensors – the dynamic range. This is the ability to capture detail in both bright highlights and deep shadows in the same exposure.

HP and Fujifilm have both come up with technologies that attempt to improve dynamic range. HP's Adaptive Lighting features on its Photosmart 945 model. When a photograph is taken, the camera calculates a contrast mask, and electronically balances the range of tones.

Fujifilm's method involves two photodiode sensors in each cell area of its Super CCD HR sensor. The two photodiode sensors have different light sensitivities, and the camera chooses which one to use for different areas of the image.

Workstations

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Acumen DC64	£2,999	Evesham, www.evesham.com, 0870 160 9700	Windows	Digit 88	4.5
<i>Two dual-core processors for under £3,000 isn't the only impressive thing about this workstation. Could do with more RAM, but the power is blinding</i>					
D900T	£1,300	AJP, www.ajp.co.uk, 020 8208 9744	Windows	Apr 05	3.5
<i>This huge laptop boasts a 17-inch widescreen LCD. The power comes from a 3.2GHz Pentium 4 chip, but overall it's not fully featured enough</i>					
EvoFlex 360-PCX59	£1,575	Graphicsworkstations.com, 020 8544 0022	Windows	Oct 04	4.0
<i>There are a few weaknesses – the unit is incredibly noisy, for one – but overall this is an excellent budget option for the graphics professional</i>					
Gravistar XR	£2,899	Armari, www.armari.co.uk, 01923 225 550	Windows	Digit 88	4.5
<i>Driven by the fastest single-core Opteron chips, this workstation has a few niggles, but offers awesome power – making it perfect for 3D work</i>					
IntelliStation Z Pro	£4,385	IBM, www.ibm.com/uk, 0800 015 7229	Windows	Apr 05	4.0
<i>Offers obscenely powerful 3D performance, and fast image rendering and processing. The price is huge, though, and the hard drive is too small</i>					
Katana 3D-9	£2,005	SavRow, www.savrow.com, 020 7428 0035	Windows	Jun 05	3.5
<i>Blistering performance, excellent set of components, and a great screen. However, it gets too hot, is massively heavy, and has a small hard drive</i>					
Latitude D610	£799	Dell, www.dell.com/uk, 0870 152 4699	Windows	Apr 05	2.5
<i>An excellent lesson on why creatives have high demands when it comes to PC specs. The screen is poor and the processor is basic. Best avoided</i>					
MJ-12m 7700	£1,928	Alienware, www.alienware.co.uk, 0800 279 9751	Windows	Apr 05	4.0
<i>The 3.4GHz Pentium 4 processor is at the heart of this enormous desktop replacement. The innovative drive system allows for speed and easy backup</i>					
NW8000	£2,507	HP, www.hp.com, 0870 241 1485	Windows	Apr 05	3.0
<i>This mobile workstation is a little on the large side, but boasts a great screen, and fast, powerful performance. It's a bit pricey for what you get</i>					
PowerBook G4 (15-inch)	£1,870	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac	Apr 05	4.0
<i>The new PowerBook isn't a G5, but it's still notable. It's not the fastest, but it offers great value for money and is still very stylish</i>					
PowerBook G4 (17-inch)	£2,040	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac	Jun 04	3.5
<i>1GHz G4 chip; 17-inch/1,440-x900-pixel screen; 64MB graphics memory; 60GB hard drive; 3.1kg; 4.5-hour battery life</i>					
Power Mac G5 dual 2GHz	£1,863	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac	Oct 04	4.5
<i>Ideal for the traditional Power Mac creative, the dual 2GHz G5 is limited on high-end flexibility, but perfect for 2D and video work</i>					
Power Mac G5 2.7GHz	£1,701	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac	Digit 88	4.5
<i>Superb 2D graphics performance coupled with excellent value for money makes this the ultimate desktop Mac. The supplied RAM needs a boost</i>					
Precision 370	£1,939	Dell, www.dell.co.uk, 0870 152 4699	Windows	Oct 04	3.0
<i>Dell has delivered a machine that is fine for the corporate market, but best avoided by the creative user. Offers poor value for money, too</i>					
Precision 670	£5,691	Dell, www.dell.co.uk, 0870 152 4699	Windows	Digit 88	3.5
<i>The most powerful workstation we've seen but you need to spend £3,000 to upgrade the £1,200 model. Two 3.4GHz Xeon processors make it very fast</i>					
Precision M20	£1,397	Dell, www.dell.co.uk, 0870 152 4699	Windows	May 05	3.5
<i>The high-resolution screen for such a small laptop is great, and the M20 has a powerful processor. However, the graphics chip is under powered</i>					
Precision M70	£2,290	Dell, www.dell.co.uk, 0870 152 4699	Windows	May 05	4.5
<i>This mobile workstation has a great high-definition screen and a terrific graphics chip. It's pretty light given the power delivered. No FireWire ports</i>					
Roswell 5550	£2,257	Alienware, www.alienware.co.uk, 0800 279 9751	Windows	Digit 88	3.0
<i>Alienware usually makes PCs for gamers, and this foray into the 3D artist's world is unsuccessful. It's noisy, and has very limited upgrade options</i>					
RX3D Platinum	£2,750	Real Machines, www.realmachines.co.uk, 0845 022 1000	Windows	Digit 88	4.0
<i>This 3D workstation offers 11 5.25-inch bays, allowing for mixing and matching of drives. Two Opteron 250 chips provide the power</i>					
Vaio A397XP	£1,899	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 08705 111 999	Windows	Apr 05	4.5
<i>The best balance for power and mobility for the creative designer – and it looks great too. Sony's X-black technology makes for an amazing screen</i>					
Vaio FS195XP	£1,899	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 08705 111 999	Windows	Apr 05	4.0
<i>Sony's answer to Apple's new 15-inch PowerBook. It's stylish, but its all-round performance is let down by some graphical corner-cutting</i>					
Voyager XT	£977	Evesham, www.evesham.com, 0870 160 9700	Windows	Apr 05	3.5
<i>A very average creative laptop. Specs look good on paper and it's priced reasonably. However, some of the components aren't good quality</i>					
X6i-64	£2,499	Xworks, www.xworksinteractive.com, 01785 229 191	Windows	Digit 88	3.0
<i>This 3D workstation uses a 3.73GHz P4 EE chip – fast, but not as fast as a dual system. Includes 4GB of RAM and the ATI FireGL v7100 graphics card</i>					

Digital cameras

Camedia 7070 Wide Zoom	£315	Olympus, www.olympus.co.uk, 0800 072 0070	M W	Aug 05	4.5
<i>Top-quality compact digital camera with tough metal body, wide-angle lens, full manual and auto controls, and an excellent flip-up rotating monitor</i>					
Coolpix 8400	£553	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0800 230 220	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>This 8mp digital camera has the widest angle of any compact camera – equivalent to 24-85mm. Sensor starts to get noisy at ISO 200 or 400</i>					
Coolpix 8800	£595	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0800 230 220	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>The 8mp 8800 boasts a massive 10x zoom lens, and a clever Vibration Reduction (VR) technology to iron out shakiness. Good image quality and value</i>					
Coolpix S1	£212	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0800 8541 4440	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>This is an incredibly slim pocket-sized camera. It's stylish and well built, but its tiny size can make it awkward to hold and shoot with</i>					

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Cyber-shot H1	£340	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 08705 111 999	M W	Aug 05	4.5
<i>This 5mp digital compact camera boasts solid build quality, 12x zoom, Steady Shot image stabilization, and an impressive feature set</i>					
Cyber-shot T7	£297	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 08705 111 999	M W	Aug 05	4.0
<i>This camera is remarkably slim – just 16mm. Its build quality is also top notch, as is the image quality, but its tiny size makes it harder to use</i>					
D2H	£2,130	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0845 4500 155	M W	Jan 05	5.0
<i>Nikon's second-generation professional digital SLR is a fantastic camera, despite its relatively low resolution of 4mp. Great quality images</i>					
D50	£470	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0845 4500 155	M W	Aug 05	4.0
<i>Lowering the entry price of digital SLR photography still further, Nikon's D50 offers great manual and auto control, but suffers a few handling quirks</i>					
D70	£680	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0845 4500 155	M W	Jan 05	4.5
<i>This is one of the first digital SLRs to move away from the professional market. It has consumer features like scene modes, plus pro fine-tuning options</i>					
D70s	£595	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk, 0845 4500 155	M W	Aug 05	4.0
<i>A makeover of the popular D70 digital SLR, the D70s is durable, and offers ultra-fast handling. However, it's pricey for a 6mp camera</i>					
Digital Ixus 700	£235	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 0800 616 417	M W	Aug 05	4.0
<i>Canon's pocket range of digital cameras is good-looking and high-quality, and the Ixus 700 is no exception. Pricey, though, and lacks manual controls</i>					
Dynax 7D	£978	KonicaMinolta, www.konicaminolta.co.uk, 020 8751 6121	M W	May 05	3.5
<i>A 6mp digital SLR with good anti-shake technology, although it doesn't come with lenses that take advantage of this. Not as responsive as some rivals</i>					
E-1	£850	Olympus, www.olympus-pro.co.uk, 0800 072 0070	M W	Jan 05	3.0
<i>The first camera built to the new Four Thirds lens mount standard, this SLR can't quite match the performance of more expensive models</i>					
E-300	£595	Olympus, www.olympus.co.uk, 0800 072 0070	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>Digital SLR with 8mp and Four Thirds lens and flashgun compatibility. Great output for a good price, but the menu system is slightly fiddly</i>					
EOS 20D	£925	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 0800 616 417	M W	Jan 05	4.0
<i>This 8.2mp digital SLR offers fantastic image quality, great detail, a quick autofocus system, and a DIGIC II processor, all in a small and light body</i>					
EOS-1D Mark II	£2,562	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 0800 616 417	M W	Jan 05	4.5
<i>A digital SLR built for performance. Canon's DIGIC II processor, top notch exposure and autofocus technology, and 8.2 megapixels</i>					
EOS-1Ds Mark II	£4,510	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 0800 616 417	M W	Apr 05	4.5
<i>This 16.7mp digital SLR is aimed at professional studio and location use. Massive resolution means minimal interpolation, even at large print sizes</i>					
EOS-350D	£553	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 0800 616 417	M W	Jul 05	4.5
<i>Small, light, and fast handling, the EOS 350D is a bargain-priced digital SLR that boasts 8mp, great build quality, and brilliant usability</i>					
Caplio GX8	£255	Ricoh, www.ricohpmc.com, 020 8261 4000	M W	Jul 05	3.0
<i>Capable of capturing very fine detail, Ricoh's GX8 is an 8.2mp compact that offers great value and a decent level of manual control. Poor scene modes</i>					
Caplio R2	£195	Ricoh, www.ricohpmc.com, 020 8261 4000	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>This recent pocket-sized camera is neatly styled and boasts a versatile zoom lens. It's let down by a lack of any real manual controls</i>					
FinePix F810	£298	Fujifilm, www.fujifilm.co.uk, 020 7586 5900	M W	Mar 05	4.0
<i>An update to the FinePix F710, the main difference is the F810's 7.3mp resolution – twice that of the old model. A decent, well-built compact</i>					
FinePix F10	£220	Fujifilm, www.fujifilm.co.uk, 020 7586 5900	M W	Aug 05	4.5
<i>This pocket-sized camera has a 6.3mp CCD, a great 2.5-inch monitor, and the ability to shoot high dynamic range images. This camera oozes quality</i>					
FinePix E550	£281	Fujifilm, www.fujifilm.co.uk, 020 7586 5900	M W	Mar 05	3.5
<i>Compact camera with 6.3mp resolution, 4x zoom, and a 2-inch screen. Unless you use RAW capture, it's prone to purple fringing at ISO 100</i>					
FinePix S3 Pro	£1,360	Fujifilm, www.fujifilm.co.uk, 020 7586 5900	M W	May 05	4.0
<i>Mid-range Nikon-compatible digital SLR camera with innovative and effective sensor that captures a wide tonal range. Pricey, and a bit slow, though</i>					
FinePix S5500	£299	Fujifilm, www.fujifilm.co.uk, 020 7586 5900	M W	Mar 05	3.5
<i>It looks & feels like a digital SLR, but isn't. Boasts 4mp resolution, a massive 10x zoom, and good output, but suffers from a small screen</i>					
*ist DS	£535	Pentax, www.pentax.co.uk, 01753 792 792	M W	Jan 05	4.0
<i>Small, lightweight, and affordable digital SLR with a decent feature set. Not enough dedicated control buttons, and pattern metering is easily fooled</i>					
Lumix DMC-FZ5	£297	Panasonic, www.panasonic.co.uk, 08705 357 357	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>This 5mp digital camera has a lot going for it – such as a fast and powerful zoom lens, and a good feature set – but its body feels a bit flimsy</i>					
Mju-mini Digital S	£230	Olympus, www.olympus.co.uk, 0800 072 0070	M W	Aug 05	3.0
<i>This curvy camera comes in a variety of colours, but the performance is average. The 2:1 zoom and maximum aperture of f/3.5 are a bit limited</i>					
Optio 750Z	£425	Pentax, www.pentax.co.uk, 01753 792 792	M W	Aug 05	5.0
<i>Fantastic retro styling, manual exposure controls, and reliably built, the Optio 750Z shoots RAW as well as JPG, and is a fine, pocketable camera</i>					
Photosmart R717	£144	HP, www.hp.com/uk, 01344 360 000	M W	Aug 05	4.0
<i>This pocket camera from HP boasts a 6.2mp output, and a built-in red-eye remover so you can correct your images and print them without a PC</i>					
PowerShot G6	£510	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 0800 616 417	M W	Nov 04	4.5
<i>This 7.1mp upgrade to the well regarded G-series offers faster processing and excellent images. Sadly purple fringing on contrasting edges is still there</i>					
R-D1	£1,072	Epson, www.epsonrd1.co.uk, 08702 416 900	M W	Apr 05	3.5
<i>This 6mp digital camera offers classic analog handling, with life-size finder. Large digital SLR-style sensor provides low noise. Menu system is poor</i>					
SD10	£936	Sigma, www.sigma-imaging-uk.com, 01707 329 999	M W	Jan 05	3.0
<i>Improved version of low-cost digital SLR produces extremely sharp images despite low resolution. Unusual Sigma-only lens mount is only drawback</i>					

DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: CAMERAS AND DV

RECOMMENDED: Coolpix 8800

This 8mp digital compact camera is a class act, with a massive zoom lens and a clever anti-shake technology called Vibration Reduction (VR) that prevents your long-zoom images blurring



SLR CAMERAS



Canon EOS-1D Mark II

Based on Canon's top professional film camera, the EOS-1, this digital SLR is built for the ultimate performance



Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II

This 16.7mp digital SLR is perfect for the studio-based professional photographer, and allows use of Canon's wide-angle EF lenses



Canon EOS-350D

A superbly priced, well-built digital SLR camera. Delivers cracking results with bags of detail, and is an absolute joy to use



Nikon D70

The D70 is a great value digital SLR that packs in some excellent professional-level features. Thankfully, the images look great too



Nikon D2H

An updated D1H, this offers improvements to the imaging technology and is incredibly quick. Excels out in the field

POCKET-SIZED DIGITAL CAMERAS



Fujifilm FinePix F10

Fantastic image quality and a superb build make this camera a great buy. Shoots high dynamic range images, and boasts a 6.3mp sensor



Pentax Optio 750Z

Everything you could want from a pocket-sized camera. Stand-out features include true manual exposure controls and a flip-out monitor

RECOMMENDED: Canon XL2

Canon's XL2 DV camcorder is the ideal model for indie film-makers. For three grand you get a component-based system that is without doubt the best in the market. Footage is crisp and detailed



DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: PROSUMER CAMCORDERS



Canon MVX25i

There's virtually nothing to fault the MVX25i, with its 1/1.4-inch CCD, great colour fidelity, and stacks of manual controls



Canon MVX3i

If 3CCD models are out of your reach, this is the next best thing, with excellent picture quality and ease of use, plus manual and pro features



Panasonic NVGS200B

With a three-CCD imaging system, the NVGS200B offers superior colour fidelity, a proper focus ring, and good audio and accessory options



Samsung VP-D590i

Vertical DV camera; 800,000 pixel CCD; 10x optical zoom lens; digital image stabilization; Night eye; 355g; 2.5-inch viewfinder



Sony DCR-PC109E

This upright palmcorder's touch-screen is unique, and makes the unit really easy to use. The output is great, with vibrant colours and good detail

Buying advice: DVD drives

Unlike CD-RW, recordable and rewritable DVD drives and media are split between three incompatible formats – though recent efforts have brought them closer together.

DVD-R and DVD-RW, writable and rewritable versions of the same format, were created by the DVD Forum, the original inventors of the DVD format. DVD+R and DVD+RW were developed by the DVD+RW Alliance. DVD-RAM was also invented by the DVD Forum. It differs from DVD-RW and DVD+RW in that it has a disc layout that doesn't require linear writing, as with conventional CD-RW, DVD-RW or DVD+RW discs. This allows it to be used like a hard drive, with drag-&-drop adding and deleting of files.

The main difference between DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW, apart from the basic incompatibility, is the lack of support for DVD+RW on the Mac. DVD-R and DVD+R both have current top speeds of 4x, with DVD+RW's 2.4x top speed beating DVD-RW's 2x. Though these speeds seem slow when compared to CD burners, you actually get a lot more from each speed with DVD. A 4x DVD-R burner creates an entire 4.7GB disc in the same time as it took an old 4x CD-R drive to build a 700MB disc. DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW speeds are likely to grow at the same rate as CD-R/RW did, if not faster. Manufacturers say they're unlikely to get as fast as current CD-R/RW speeds – though they also said that about CD-R/RW in the past.

Digital video cameras

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
AG-DVC30	£1,650	Panasonic, panasonic-broadcast.com, 08700 100 464	M W	Dec 04	3.5
<i>A decent secondary pro camcorder but overpriced compared to Sony's PDX10. Features include IR-based B&W night-vision mode</i>					
AG-DVX100A	£2,450	Panasonic, panasonic-broadcast.com, 08705 357357	M W	Dec 04	4.0
<i>The DVX100A has ruled the roost for years, but has been usurped by Canon's XL2. However this is still a great camera and has a lot to offer filmmakers</i>					
DCR-HC1000	£850	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 020 7365 2947	M W	Dec 04	2.5
<i>Good looking but ultimately disappointing DV camera lacking controls and let down by poor footage. Small, but not perfectly formed</i>					
DCR-PC109E	£489	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 08705 111 999	M W	Aug 04	4.5
<i>Sony's upright palmcorder has a touch-sensitive LCD screen – focus can be set by pressing a spot on the LCD. Boasts decent image quality, too</i>					
DSR-PD70P	£2,200	Sony, www.sonybiz.net, 0870 6060 456	M W	Dec 04	3.5
<i>Sony's workhorse pro-level DV camcorder has a loyal following who swear by it. With controls to match the competition this would be a top model</i>					
GY-DV5000E	£2,900	JVC, www.jvcpro.co.uk, 020 8896 6000	M W	Dec 04	4.0
<i>This stalwart of the scene is intuitive for those used to conventional broadcast cameras, offering good manual control and excellent auto</i>					
HDR-FX1E	£2,150	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 08705 111 999	M W	Mar 05	3.5
<i>This HDV camcorder offers exceptional output quality at 1080i resolution, but it suffers because it doesn't have XLR audio inputs</i>					
JY-HD10E	£2,650	JVC, www.jvcpro.co.uk, 020 8896 6000	M W	Dec 04	2.5
<i>Very popular because for a year it was the only HDV camcorder available. But lacks manual control, is American format and has been superceded</i>					
MXV25i	£765	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 08705 143 723	M W	Aug 04	5.0
<i>The MXV25i is worth the money – there's virtually nothing to fault this prosumer model. The 1/3.4-inch CCD stands out</i>					
NVGS200B	£850	Panasonic, www.panasonic.co.uk, 0870 906 8357	M W	Aug 04	5.0
<i>The NVGS200B's three-CCD imaging system delivers vibrant, well-defined colour. Every manual feature you'd need is catered for and easy to use</i>					
NVG5400	£900	Panasonic, www.panasonic.co.uk, 0870 906 8357	M W	Dec 04	4.0
<i>The NGS400 isn't a true professional-level DV camera, but it does offer some pro applications. Three CCDs, and clean footage with accurate colours</i>					
NVG555B	£510	Panasonic, www.panasonic.co.uk, 0870 906 8357	M W	Aug 04	4.0
<i>The NVGS55B packs a lot into a small package, including an accessory shoe and microphone input. There is a healthy selection of manual controls, too</i>					
PDX10P	£1,400	Sony, www.sonybiz.net, 0870 6060 456	M W	Dec 04	4.0
<i>This is Sony's attempt to combine the best from the pro and consumer worlds and it works well. Top of its class in compact and mobile DV cams</i>					
XL2	£3,000	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 08705 143 723	M W	Dec 04	4.5
<i>Digit's Best Buy and the best indie-film DV camera in the market. It's £500 more than the DVX100A but is a better component-based system</i>					

Input devices

Cintiq 21UX	£1,899	Wacom, wacom-europe.com @ CU, 020 8358 5857	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>This LCD graphics tablet is an amazing tool, with a massive screen, programmable Express Keys and styling that would turn any creative's head</i>					
Intuos3	from £129	Wacom, wacom-europe.com @ CU, 020 8358 5857	M W	Dec 04	4.0
<i>A smart new design and an improved pen make the Intuos3 a great graphics tablet. The mouse is a bit unbalanced, but overall a decent buy</i>					
MX700	£51	Logitech, www.logitech.com, 020 7309 0127	M W	Jan 03	4.5
<i>The best cordless mouse on the market: flexible, rechargeable, and offering the level of precision a designer requires – at a price</i>					
SpaceBall	from £375	3Dconnexion, www.3dconnexion.com, 01952 243 629	Windows	Sep 04	3.5
<i>Two-handed input devices that potentially prevent RSI, but they're unlikely to change the way you work, as there's no real benefit in terms of speed</i>					

Storage devices

Bravo Pro DVD	£2,325	Primera, www.primera.com @ Bannerbridge 0870 870 1220	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>This DVD duplicator and printer offers fast and efficient disc-creation, but its print quality isn't high enough, and the Mac software is fiddly</i>					
GigaVu Pro	from £365	Jobo, www.jobo.com, 01628 674 411	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>Portable storage device that lets you view pictures on the move. Boasts decent battery life, and supports a range of CCD-RAW files. No car adaptor</i>					
MediaBank HS-R	£299	Miglia, www.miglia.com, 0870 747 2988	M W	Mar 04	4.0
<i>If speed and security are high on your priority list for external storage – and cost per MB isn't – the FireWire 800-enabled MediaBank HS-R is great</i>					
ND3540A	£29	NEC, www.nec.co.uk, 020 8752 3665	M W	Jul 05	4.5
<i>A real-bargain of an internal DVD writer. It pushes vastly more expensive drives for speed, and offers reliable and simple DVD burning</i>					

Monitors

321 LCD Monitor	£957	LaCie, www.lacie.com/uk, 020 7872 8000	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>Aimed at designers who would normally plump for a CRT, this LCD offers fantastic colour accuracy, and looks great on your desktop</i>					
Cinema Display	£595	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	M W	May 05	3.5
<i>The emergence of other LCDs for designers makes the Apple Cinema Display less impressive. Still looks great though, and still a good performer</i>					

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Cinema Display HD	£1,060	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	M W	May 05	4.0
<i>The 23-inch version of the 20-inch Cinema Display, the HD offers much better value for money. Colour accuracy and styling are great</i>					
ColorEdge CG21	£1,279	Eizo, www.eizo.co.uk, 01483 719 500	M W	Digit 76	4.5
<i>It's been overtaken by Barco's Coloris Calibrator for the best LCD crown, but this 21.3-inch model is far more realistically priced</i>					
ColorEdge CG220	£3,189	Eizo, www.eizo.co.uk, 01483 719 500	M W	May 05	4.0
<i>The best handling of colour available on an LCD monitor. Good ergonomics and great output quality, but there's an inevitably massive price-tag</i>					
Colour Reference System	£1,446	Sony, www.sony-cp.com, 08705 111 999	M W	Jun 03	5.0
<i>The best monitor we've ever used. The GDM-CS20K monitor and Sony/GretagMacbeth calibrator are a winning pair – for a comparatively low price</i>					
Electron22blue IV	£549	LaCie, www.lacie.com/uk, 020 7872 8000	M W	Apr 04	4.5
<i>The Electron22blue boasts excellent picture quality, and offers great value for money. You won't get a better monitor without really splashing out</i>					
Flatron L1940P	£314	LG, www.lge.com, 0870 607 5544	M W	Jun 05	3.5
<i>Despite the stylish looks, the 19-inch Flatron L1940P is a good monitor, but not really cut out for top-end creative work. Low resolution lets it down</i>					
Gallery Xtreme 2010	£515	Formac, www.formac.co.uk, 08705 357 357	M W	May 05	3.0
<i>It's the X-black technology pioneered by Sony for its laptops, but this large monitor suffers as a result. Too much glare, and too small a colour gamut</i>					
Photon20vision II	from £519	LaCie, www.lacie.com/uk, 020 7872 8000	M W	May 05	3.5
<i>This previously great LCD monitor has been overtaken by newer models. The aspect ratio will put off video-editors, and colour-handling could be better</i>					
SDM-S204	£671	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 0990 424 424	M W	May 05	3.0
<i>The SDM-S204 is quite old now, and is over-priced and under-featured as a result. Boasts a wide colour gamut, but not the accuracy to match</i>					
SDM-P234	£1,380	Sony, www.sony.co.uk, 0990 424 424	M W	May 05	3.0
<i>This 23-inch LCD can't compete with the likes of Apple's Cinema Display HD. Whites are washed out even after calibration, and it's very pricey</i>					
SpectraView 2180	£999	NEC Display Systems, www.nec-mitsubishi.com, 020 7202 6300	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>A fantastic LCD monitor that has good enough colour handling and gamuts to satisfy most designers. Calibrator is easily stored in a hatch on the hood</i>					
SyncMaster SM243	£1,701	Samsung, www.samsung.co.uk, 0870 242 0303	M W	Digit 76	4.5
<i>A massive 24-inch LCD, the SyncMaster SM243 is remarkably compact considering its size. Picture quality is fine after calibration</i>					
UltraSharp 2005FPW	£469	Dell, www.dell.com/uk, 0870 152 4699	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>The 2005FPW is a widescreen version of the 2001FP, and offers the same budget pricing and excellent image quality</i>					
VP231b	£1,190	Viewsonic, www.viewsonic.com/uk, 01293 643 900	M W	Jul 05	3.5
<i>Viewsonic's first 23-inch widescreen monitor. Offers good picture quality, but its design is dull and it's much more expensive than Apple's 23-incher</i>					

Printers

5550DN	£2,229	HP, www.hp.com/uk, 0845 270 4222	M W	Jun 05	5.0
<i>HP's clever design and all-round quality belies the low price. An A3+ model that would be perfect for any busy design studio or creative office</i>					
AcuLaser C1100N	£399	Epson, www.epson.co.uk, 0800 220 546	M W	Jun 05	3.5
<i>Epson's entry-level A4 colour laser printer, the C1100N is excellent value for money. Not really cut out for constant A4 colour printing, though</i>					
AcuLaser C8600PS	£3,495	Epson, www.epson.co.uk, 0800 220 546	M W	Jun 05	3.5
<i>This A3+ model from Epson is a four-pass printer, which explains the slow speeds in colour printing. Its standard 192MB RAM is a bit disappointing</i>					
Bubble Jet i9950	£465	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 08705 143 723	M W	Jul 04	4.5
<i>This A3+ photo printer has a PictBridge camera port at the front, and the ChromaPLUS eight-ink system. USB 2.0 and FireWire interface</i>					
C9500dn V2	£3,135	Oki, www.europe.oki.co.uk, 0800 917 6015	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>This A3+ printer uses LEDs rather than lasers but works pretty much the same as a standard laser printer. Awesome image quality and very versatile</i>					
Designjet 30n	£535	HP, www.hp.com/uk, 0845 270 4222	M W	Jul 04	4.5
<i>Despite some usability issues, the Designjet 30n outputs exceptional quality photographs and artwork – better than most A3 photo printers</i>					
HL-3450CN	£2,249	Brother, www.brother.com, 0845 6060 626	M W	Jun 05	3.5
<i>A small, light A3 printer, but it's also quite slow. Well made and easy-to-use, though there's no installer for Mac OS X, which seems a bit daft</i>					
Magicolor 5450DL	£1,169	Konica Minolta, www.konicaminoltaprinters.co.uk, 01784 442 255	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>This compact A4 colour laser printer has a powerful 667MHz processor at its core, and 256MB RAM as standard. A top-quality offering</i>					
Magicolor 7300	£2,495	Konica Minolta, www.konicaminoltaprinters.co.uk, 01784 442 255	M W	Jun 05	3.5
<i>It's getting old now, but this A3+ laser printer is fast, considering its reasonable price. Konica Minolta's image-enhancement technologies work well</i>					
P915	£80	Lexmark, www.lexmark.co.uk, 0870 44 0044	M W	Feb 05	3.5
<i>This A4 consumer-focused photo printer offers great print quality, and features such as support for four memory card formats make it a bargain</i>					
Phaser 7750V/GX	£6,999	Xerox, xerox.co.uk, 0870 873 3873	M W	Jun 05	4.0
<i>A fast single-pass A3+ printer that can hit 35ppm in colour or mono. However, this level of performance doesn't come cheap</i>					
PIXMA iP8500	£280	Canon, www.canon.co.uk, 08705 143 723	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>A strange shape, the PIXMA iP8500 is billed as a printer for pro photographers, but doesn't have any digital camera card slots. Fast, with good output</i>					
Photosmart 8450gp	£275	HP, www.hp.com/uk, 0870 241 1485	M W	Feb 05	4.5
<i>Stylish printer for digital photographers, packed with features for the serious user. Supports five different digital camera cards, as well as PictBridge</i>					
Stylus Pro 2100	£387	Epson, www.epson.co.uk, 0800 220 546	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>An A3+ alternative to Epson's R800. A seven-ink system allows you to swap between matte black and photo black cartridges as required</i>					

DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: MONITORS



Dell UltraSharp 2005FPW

This 20-inch widescreen LCD display continues Dell's tradition of making budget monitors that satisfy the creative pro's needs



Eizo ColorEdge CG21

The best LCD package available. Perfect colour accuracy makes the CG21 a great buy for any designer – despite the comparatively high price



LaCie 321 LCD Monitor

This LCD offers great colour even before calibration – and it's spot on afterwards. Aimed at designers who are looking to replace old CRT monitors



LaCie Electron22blue IV

This CRT is a fine monitor that offers great picture quality and high resolution. You'll be hard pushed to find a better monitor at such a good price



NEC SpectraView 2180

A large colour gamut, fantastic colour output even before calibration, and a stylish look make the SpectraView 2180 ideal for any designer



Samsung SyncMaster SM243

A whopping 24-inch viewing area makes this the giant of the LCD market. The SyncMaster's output is great, and the price is reasonable



Sony Colour Reference System

The best monitor we've ever used. The GDM-CS20K monitor and Sony/GretagMacbeth calibrator are a winning pair – for a comparatively low price

Buying advice: monitors

The first decision you'll need to make is whether to get a flat-panel display, based on liquid crystal display (LCD) technology, or a cathode-ray tube (CRT) monitor.

An LCD display's advantage is unparalleled sharpness and an ultra-thin profile. In recent years, the quality of LCDs has improved to the point where they are suitable for all but very high-end graphics work.

A screen hooked up to a digital DVI or ADC connector offers sharper, clearer images than those connected via an analog VGA connector.

The resolution of a monitor is expressed in horizontal and vertical pixel dimensions. The higher the resolution, the more you will be able to see on screen. The more inches, the larger the pixels. A CRT's dot pitch measures how close adjacent phosphor dots (or stripes on aperture-grille CRTs) are to each other. In general, the smaller the dot pitch, the sharper the display will be.

On CRT monitors, a low refresh rate – how many times your computer sends a fresh copy of the screen image to your display – implies flicker, a major cause of eyestrain. LCDs don't suffer from flicker at all.



RECOMMENDED:
HP PhotoSmart 8450gp
A stylish printer for the digital photographer. Can download pictures direct from your camera, or a variety of memory card formats, and offers first-rate picture quality

Tech notes: film scanners

Despite the surge in digital photography, film isn't dead, and most professional photographers will have masses of film archived whether they've gone digital or not. So, scanning film is a regular task. The main problem when choosing a film scanner is the fact that the market is in decline – and the emergence of digital photography has made a dent in the demand for film scanners. Decent flatbed scanners have invaded the film scanner's market too, and there's little incentive for manufacturers to keep their film models up to date.

Desktop film scanners generally come in two forms: 35mm and medium format. 35mm film scanners can capture 35mm slides and filmstrips, with the ability to scan just a single slide at a time or a holder of four or five. Some medium format film scanners can work with film up to 6-x-9cm, some with up to 5-x-4-inch – and most come with holders for around four 35mm slides.

In the past, the most important specification for a scanner was the optical resolution. Now, though, even the lowest-resolution film scanner can produce images large enough to print A4 size or bigger at 300dpi.

Most scanners can capture 16-bit colour, but the most important figure is the dynamic range. This gives an indication of the level of shadow and highlight detail the scanner can reproduce. Many film scanners offer hardware-based automated correction tools. Kodak's Digital ICE is the best known, but some manufacturers have invented their own proprietary systems.

DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: GRAPHICS CARDS



3Dlabs Realizm 100

This is a great value card. It boasts two display outputs, two DVI output, 256MB memory, and 8x max AGP support



PNY Nvidia FX 1300

The PCI Express card is quick, solid, and good value. It boasts 128MB memory, two display outputs, and two DVI outputs

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Stylus Pro 4800	£1,498	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	Aug 05	4.5
<i>Heavy-duty A2 professional inkjet with excellent colour and new dedicated grey inks for monochrome. Borderless printing with choice of resolutions</i>					
Stylus Photo R1800	£339	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>This A3 inkjet printer excels at photo prints on a variety of media. Slower than standard inkjets on standard jobs, but great for photographers</i>					
Stylus Photo R2400	£510	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	Aug 05	4.0
<i>Affordable desktop A3+ printer with new K3 long-life pigment inks. RPM technology gives the printer a resolution on 5,760-x-1,440dpi</i>					
Stylus Photo R800	\$399	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>The highest-quality photo inkjet printer on the market, the R800 produces accurate photos, though it's slow and can't print borderless on the Mac</i>					

Scanners

ArtixScan 120tf	£1,360	Microtek, microtekeurope.com , 0870 906 3300	M W	Mar 05	3.0
<i>The best film scanner Microtek has to offer, which isn't saying very much, since this model is old. Correction system isn't as good as Digital ICE</i>					
CanoScan 9900F	£250	Canon, www.canon.co.uk , 08705 143 723	M W	Sep 04	3.5
<i>A top scanner at a low price, the 48-bit colour depth and 3,200-x-6,400dpi resolution are great, but it's let down by poor software</i>					
Dimage Scan Elite 5400 II	£509	Konica-Minolta, www.konicaminolta.co.uk , 01908 200 400	M W	Jul 05	4.0
<i>This 35mm film scanner captures well on its automatic settings, and has good dust and scratch removal. However, its software is poor and it's slow</i>					
Dimage Scan Multi Pro	£1,960	Konica-Minolta, www.minolta.co.uk , 01908 200 400	M W	Mar 05	3.5
<i>This shoebox-sized film scanner is the medium-format equivalent of the Dimage Scan Elite 5400. Suffers the same drawbacks, but does have digital ICE</i>					
Expression 10000 XL Pro	£1,634	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	Sep 04	4.0
<i>This A3 scanner boasts 2,400-x-4,800 optical resolution and 3.8 dynamic range. Film scanning is no more than adequate, but it's fine for larger formats</i>					
F-3200	£465	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	Mar 05	3.5
<i>This unusual film scanner also scans reflective media, and can scan eight 35mm slides at once. Lack of corrective hardware limits its usefulness</i>					
FilmScan 3600 Silver	£297	Microtek, microtekeurope.com , 0870 906 3300	M W	Mar 05	2.0
<i>A prime example of why you shouldn't buy a low-cost film scanner. Only 12-bit per colour capture gives dull and muted colours</i>					
FineScan 2750	£6,500	FujiFilm, www.fujifilm.co.uk/gs , 01234 245245	M W	Sep 04	4.0
<i>You could use this high-end A3 format and film scanner confidently to produce a top-quality magazine, but it's been usurped by the iQsmart1</i>					
iQsmart1	£6,382	Creo, www.creo.com , 01242 285 100	M W	Sep 04	4.5
<i>Professional A3 film scanner aimed at creatives. You don't need to be a pre-press expert to get great results, and the resolution is good at 3,200dpi</i>					
Perfection 4870 Photo	£270	Epson, www.epson.co.uk , 0800 220 546	M W	Sep 04	4.5
<i>Low-cost flatbed scanner with high resolution and dynamic range. Built-in Digital ICE dust/scratch removal makes this good value – if slow</i>					
Scanjet 5530 Photosmart	£156	HP, www.hp.com/uk , 0870 547 4747	M W	Sep 04	3.0
<i>This desktop scanner is tuned for high-speed print scanning. It's slightly larger than A4, but only takes single strips of 35mm film at a time</i>					
ScanMaker i700	from £254	Microtek, microtekeurope.com , 0870 906 3304	M W	Jan 05	4.0
<i>High-resolution flatbed film scanner with Digital ICE, and a decent feature and software set. An attractively priced all-rounder</i>					
ScanMaker i900	£595	Microtek, microtekeurope.com , 01327 844 880	M W	Sep 04	3.5
<i>This A4+ scanner has a conventional top bed for reflection copy, as well as a separate slide-in tray for film. It's a good scanner, but not good value</i>					
Super CoolScan 9000 ED	£2,000	Nikon, www.nikon.co.uk , 0800 230 220	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>Versatile hi-res film scanner with Digital ICE4. Can handle all formats from miniature to 6-x-7cm. Only 35mm and 120/220 film holders are supplied</i>					

Graphics cards

FireGL X3-256	£699	ATI, www.ati.com . 01844 263 747, ati@manandmachine.co.uk	Windows	Nov 04	4.0
<i>ATI's highest-spec AGP graphics accelerator has a massive 7cm fan that gives a lot of cooling power. It's pricey, though</i>					
FireGL V3200	£249	ATI, www.ati.com , 01844 263 747, ati@manandmachine.co.uk	Windows	Nov 04	3.5
<i>This 128MB PCI-based card is a decent card at a good price. It performs in the mid-range on Maya and Max, but is a winner for Cinema 4D</i>					
FireGL V5100	£499	ATI, www.ati.com , 01844 263 747, ati@manandmachine.co.uk	Windows	Nov 04	4.0
<i>ATI's decent value 256MB PCI Express card offers 22.4GBps memory bandwidth, has the same massive fan as the X3-256 but doesn't need extra power</i>					
Parhelia 256MB	£365	Matrox, www.matrox.com , 01753 665 544	Windows	Nov 04	3.0
<i>The Parhelia 256MB is small, and needs no external power. It supports three monitors at once so it's good for VJing or video production. Costly</i>					
PNY Nvidia FX 1100	£645	Nvidia, www.nvidia.com , 01784 224 220	Windows	Nov 04	4.0
<i>Good performance but with 128MB memory and a £650 price tag you would expect more from it. Outclassed by the Realizm 100</i>					
PNY Nvidia FX 1300	£535	Nvidia, www.nvidia.com , 01784 224 220	Windows	Nov 04	4.5
<i>A Digit Best Buy, this PCI-Express card is small, solid, and well-priced. With 128MB of DDR RAM, it's good enough for most situations in 3D applications</i>					
PNY Nvidia FX 3400	£929	Nvidia, www.nvidia.com , 01784 224 220	Windows	Nov 04	3.0
<i>At an earth-shattering price performance should have been better overall. The FX 1300 offers much better value for performance</i>					
Realizm 100	£683	3Dlabs, www.3dlabs.com , 01784 470 555	Windows	Nov 04	4.5
<i>Very good value. One of the most capacious cards on test and a Best Buy. 8xAGP support; 256MB memory; two DVI outputs; two display outputs</i>					
Realizm 200	£874	3Dlabs, www.3dlabs.com , 01784 470 555	Windows	Nov 04	4.0
<i>If you need to visualize scenes with a lot of textures, this is ideal. 8xAGP support; 512MB memory; two DVI outputs; two display outputs</i>					

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
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3D and animation software

3DS Max 7	£2,695	Discreet, www.discreet.com, 01252 456 669	Windows	Jan 05	4.5
<i>Version 7 incorporates Character Studio 4, and features Normal Bump Mapping, Subsurface Scattering, and enhanced modelling and viewing tools</i>					
Bryce 5.5	£99.95	Daz Productions, www.daz3d.com, 001 800 267 5179	M W	Digit 88	3.5
<i>The original landscape rendering program has come a long way, but still combines ease-of-use with considerable depth. OpenGL features are a bonus</i>					
Carrara 4 Pro	£419	Eovia, www.eovia.com @ Computers Unlimited, 020 8200 8282	M W	Feb 05	4.5
<i>Offers a wide range of features. Bones and IK animation are easy to use, and the suite boasts real-time terrain-creation and network rendering</i>					
FaceFX 1.0	call company	OC3 Entertainment, www.oc3ent.com, 001 919 460 4564	Windows	Aug 05	4.0
<i>A game-oriented facial animation application. It's a good system – workflow is slow, but that's the price you pay for the high level of control on offer</i>					
Cinema 4D 9	£424	Maxon, www.cinema4d.co.uk, 0500 224 660	M W	Jan 05	4.5
<i>Version 9 supports N-gons, Brush, Melt, and enhanced knife tools. One of the best 3D applications out there – perfect for learning the craft</i>					
Hexagon	£169	Eovia, www.eovia.com @ Computers Unlimited, 020 8200 8282	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>3D modelling software that offers a good set of polygon tools, but the modelling history is temperamental and unreliable. A bit too glitchy</i>					
LifeStudio:Head Pro 2.6	£483	Lifemode Interactive, www.lifemi.com, 01932 847 597	M W	Aug 05	4.5
<i>A very comprehensive facial animation and lip-syncing application. Offers lip-syncing with auto phoneme extraction, as well as face modelling</i>					
LightWave 3D 8	£945	NewTek, www.newtek.com, www.newtek-europe.com/uk	M W	Oct 04	4.0
<i>Version 8 of this 3D suite has new character animation tools including bone editing and rigging enhancements, plus an IK booster and loads more</i>					
LipSync 2.0	\$250	DSP Engineering, www.speechanimation.com, 0039 0289 073 447	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>Aimed at the higher-end of lip-syncing and animation. Its real-time analyzing of audio is impressive, but it doesn't have 3D models built in</i>					
Maggie Pro 2.1.2	\$250	Third Wish Software, www.thirdwishsoftware.com	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>One of the more complete, general purpose lip-sync tools available. Generates both 3D and 2D animations, and supports plenty of different formats</i>					
Maya 6.5	from £1,449	Alias, alias.com, 01494 441 273	M W L	Apr 05	4.5
<i>Maya is the industry-standard high-end 3D effects and character-animation tool. Its workflow is creative and experimental, but hugely powerful</i>					
Mimic Pro 3	\$195	Daz Productions, www.daz3d.com, 001 800 267 5170	M W	Aug 05	3.5
<i>Comes either as a LightWave plug-in or as an application that works with Poser. Mimic is a fast and easy-to-use facial animations system</i>					
MojoWorld 3.0	from \$199	Pandromeda, www.pandromeda.com, 001 304 788 7818	M W	Mar 05	4.0
<i>Powerful fractal scene generator that generates whole planets with local overrides. Pro version adds vegetation and animated textures</i>					
MotionBuilder 6	from £645	Alias, www.alias.com, 01494 441 273	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>Imports 3D character-models for animating. There's expanded keyframe features in version 6, along with enhanced character manipulation</i>					
Poser 6	£145	E frontier @ Computers Unlimited, 020 8200 8282	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>This version of the character modelling and animation software boasts powerful new rendering options and enhanced figure articulation</i>					
Realsoft 3D 5	€600	Realsoft, www.realsoft.com, 00358 3212 9913	Windows	Mar 05	3.5
<i>This 3D package will attract newcomers to 3D with its educational pricing plan, but it's Windows-only, and has a steep learning curve</i>					
Shade 7	£552	E frontier, www.e-frontier.com @ CU, 020 8200 8282	M W	Jan 05	3.0
<i>Full function 3D modeller and renderer for a reasonable price. Integrates with Poser, ArchiCAD, Illustrator, and Photoshop. Not as easy to use as it looks</i>					
Softimage XSI 4.0	from £299	Softimage, www.softimage.com, 01753 655 999	W L	Oct 04	4.5
<i>Powerful 3D modelling and animation suite that boasts one of the best renderers available. Great workflow and interface makes this a top package</i>					
StoryViz	€3,000	RealViz, www.realviz.com	Windows	Jan 05	4.0
<i>Previsualization software that offers real-time preview rendering, import options, and real-world camera correlation. It's pricey, and tricky, though</i>					
Strata CX	\$695	Strata, www.strata.com @ Grey Matter, 0870 366 5577	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>This 3D modelling, animation and rendering suite is easy to use, and the familiar interface and high-quality rendering make Strata a good buy</i>					
SpeedTree	£215	IDV, www.idvinc.com, 001 803 233 0073	Windows	Dec 04	3.5
<i>This 3DS Max plug-in generates animatable, realistic trees, though not as realistic as the more expensive Nat FX</i>					
Swift 3D 4	£149	Electric Rain, www.eraim.com, 001 303 543 8233	Windows	Sep 04	4.5
<i>Rendering times are a bit slow, but this is a versatile and easy-to-use 3D-to-Web application. Good quality animation tools and Flash importer</i>					
Swift 3D 3 plug-ins	\$297	Electric Rain, www.eraim.com, 001 303 543 8233	Windows	Jun 05	4.0
<i>Offers 11 rendering options, SmartLayer technology, improved speed and transparency, and realistic shadows to the 3D and Web application</i>					
Toon Boom Studio 2.5	£239	Toon Boom, www.toonboom.com @ Pixelution, 01462 433 558	M W	Apr 05	3.5
<i>2D animation software now adds auto lip-syncing and drawing in 3D scene planning view. Well-designed, but the display is a little clunky</i>					
Voice-o-matic	£150	Di-o-matic, www.di-o-matic.com, 001 514 369 2400	Windows	Aug 05	4.5
<i>This lip-syncing plug-in for 3DS Max offers tight integration with the host program. It supports up to 40 phonemes, allowing accurate facial animation</i>					
Vue 5 Infinite	£411	E-on Software, www.e-onsoftware.com, 0033 143 553 671	M W	Jun 05	4.0
<i>This landscape-generation software offers new tools for rendering foliage and high-polygon scenery. Multipass rendering now comes as standard</i>					
Xfrog	£220	Greenworks, www.greenworks.de, 0049 3046 7963 31	M W	Dec 04	4.0
<i>A novel system for creating trees and plants, Xfrog is logical and intuitive in use. Animation is on offer: you can simulate growth effects and wind</i>					
ZBrush 2	£270	Pixologic, www.pixologic.com @ Freehand, 01483 200 111	M W	Feb 05	4.5
<i>A novel and innovative hybrid 2D/2.5D/3D modelling, painting, and rendering program with lightning fast, high-resolution polygon tools</i>					

SPOTLIGHT: 3D MODELLING AND ANIMATION SOFTWARE

SOLUTIONS FOR £1,000-£5,000

Alias Maya 6.5

Maya 6.5 adds Satellite Rendering, better Final Gather performance and much improved IPR to the suite's impressive toolset



Discreet 3DS Max 7

Version 7 incorporates Normal Bump Mapping, Subsurface Scattering, and the complete Character Studio 4 character-animation package



NewTek LightWave 3D 8

Version 8 sees numerous hard- and soft-body dynamics improvements, says NewTek, along with cloth and workflow enhancements



Softimage|XSI 4.0

A professional 3D tool with features tuned to match its price tag – revamped hair tools, particle dynamics, and nonlinear animation



Digital rock

Passion Pictures made the video for the Gorillaz single Feel Good Inc. Jamie Hewlett and Passion's Pete Candeland directed, and the characters were coloured in Toonz



SPOTLIGHT: 3D MODELLING AND ANIMATION SOFTWARE

SOLUTIONS FOR UNDER £1,000

Curious Labs Poser 6

This latest incarnation of the character modelling and animation software is more complex, but more powerful too



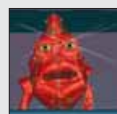
Electric Rain Swift 3D 4

This 3D-to-Web software is versatile and easy to use. Version 4 sees a vastly improved polygon modelling environment and better gallery options



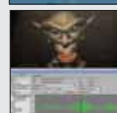
Eovia Carrara 4 Pro

A shallow learning curve and impressive feature set make Carrara 4 Pro a good addition to your creative toolbox



Kaydara MotionBuilder 6

A comprehensive tool that allows you import models from other applications and add real-time animation to them

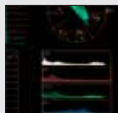


Maxon Cinema 4D 9

One of the best 3D applications available, and ideal for learning the craft. Version 9 includes many improvements, including N-gon support

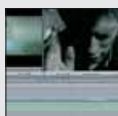


DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: DIGITAL VIDEO TOOLS



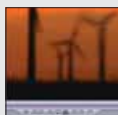
Adobe After Effects 6.5

A packed point-five upgrade to a great compositing application, After Effects 6.5 has more than 60 new effects, and an advanced clone tool



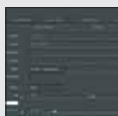
Apple Final Cut Pro 5

Apple has gradually improved this video-editing suite to the point where Final Cut Pro is one of the best in the business



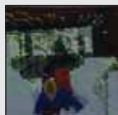
Apple Motion 2

Apple's motion graphics offering makes the most of top Apple hardware. Version 2 boasts tight integration with Apple and Adobe creative products



GenArts Sapphire

The ultimate plug-in collection for video editors, Sapphire is aimed at high-end compositors whose work demands the highest quality



The Pixel Farm PFHoe 1.0

A powerful tool that lets beginners get to grips with complex motion-tracking facilities. Handles free motion and nodal pan camera moves



Red Giant Software Magic Bullet Suite

A great set of plug-ins for compositors, that works with After Effects 5.5 and Combustion 3. Great for using film styles for creative effect



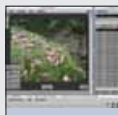
Reflecmedia Matenee 1.0

It works best with Reflecmedia's own Chromatte hardware, but the software is quick and easy to use, and offers great results



RE:Vision FX RE:Flex

An easy-to-use and very effective warping and morphing plug-in for video-editing systems – RE:Flex puts native attempts to shame



Science D-Visions 3DEqualizer V3

This matchmoving solution is one of the most hands-on out there – there's no wizard here. The results though, are fantastic



Silhouette FX Silhouette Roto 1.0

Powerful rotoscoping software that's far and away the best in the business, and makes a tedious task a whole lot easier



Trapcode Particular

This plug-in supercedes After Effects' dated particle system – bridging the gap between compositing and full-on 3D work

Desktop publishing software

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Acrobat 7.0 Professional	£395	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4001	M W	May 05	4.5
<i>Update boasts extended print tools, improved preflight, new Windows-only forms designer, and direct output from Internet Explorer</i>					
Canvas X	\$349	ACD, www.acdsystems.com, 001 250 544 6700	M W	Jul 05	4.0
<i>Professional quality technical illustration and general design and layout program. Extensive toolkit allows you to do everything in the one application</i>					
InDesign CS 2	£609	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4000	M W	Jul 05	4.5
<i>Adobe has boosted efficiency by improving workflow and style use. You can even switch layers on and off in Photoshop and PDF documents</i>					
Multi Style II XT 5.0.4	£69	Techno Design, techno-design.com @ XChange, 020 7490 4455	Windows	Digit 76	4.5
<i>This plug-in builds InDesign's must-have feature – nested type styles – into QuarkXPress. Makes complex styling much easier</i>					
PageMaker Plug-in Pack	£39	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4000	M W	Digit 76	4.5
<i>Designed to encourage PageMaker users to upgrade to InDesign, this plug-in pack is a must-buy thanks to its simple bullets and numbering features</i>					
QuarkXPress 6.5	£995	Quark, www.quark.co.uk, 00800 1787 8275	M W	Jul 05	4.0
<i>Quark 6.5 is a significant free upgrade to the DTP stalwart. QuarkVista is a useful image XTension, but Quark's PDF output still lags behind InDesign's</i>					
RagTime 5.6.5	£449	LanMarque, www.lanmarque.co.uk, 01932 222 821	M W	Jul 05	3.5
<i>RagTime has evolved from a straight DTP program into a low-cost but comprehensive business suite with the ability to import MS Office files</i>					
Ready,Set,Go! 7.6.1	£100	Diwan Software, www.diwan.com, 020 7252 5333	M W	Jul 05	4.0
<i>A solid frame-based DTP application with a logical toolbox and smart menu systems. If you miss PageMaker, you'll find this an excellent alternative</i>					

Digital video

3DEqualizer V3	from £1,990	Science D-Visions, www.3dequalizer.com @ Techimage, 01367 253 868	M L I	May 05	4.5
<i>3DEqualizer is a hands-on motion-tracking tool, but still offers effective automatic options. Usable, stable, and robust, with great results</i>					
After Effects 6.5	from £565	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4001	M W	Feb 05	4.5
<i>The upgrade to version 6.5 adds an advanced clone tool, which saves a lot of time on boring jobs. Disk caching also speeds things up. Essential</i>					
Blaze	£199	Easy Effects, www.easyeffects.com	M W	Jan 05	4.0
<i>Blaze successfully adds a different interface construct to Avid's product line. Offers a variety of colour, blur, and glow effects to text and video</i>					
Boris Red 3GL	from £599	Boris FX, www.borisfxeurope.com, 01264 326 384	M W	Feb 05	4.0
<i>Runs as a compositing plug-in with almost any editing package, or as a standalone suite. The interface is cramped, but the results are great</i>					
Boujou 3.0	\$10,000	2d3, www.2d3.com, 01865 811 060	M W L	May 05	3.5
<i>An immensely expensive matchmoving tool, Boujou 3.0 will nonetheless save you a massive amount of time. Automatic tracking with great results</i>					
Boujou Bullet 1.0	£1,365	2d3, www.2d3.com @ Techex, 0870 161 7171	M W L	Apr 05	4.0
<i>The interface of this matchmoving tool is a little glitchy, but Boujou Bullet offers a simple-to-use wizard, and offers fast and efficient matchmoving</i>					
Colour Finesse 1.5	£349	Synthetic Aperture @ Digital Garage Group, 01295 201 120	M W	Jan 05	4.0
<i>Real-time colour-correction systems haven't made Color Finesse redundant yet. It takes over the whole screen, but there's no better tool for colour</i>					
Combustion 4	£850	Autodesk, www.discreet.com, 020 7851 8000	M W	Jun 05	4.0
<i>The best visual-effects package for under £1,000, but After Effects still tops it for motion-graphics work. Few new features in the version 4 upgrade</i>					
Continuum Complete 3.0	£459	Boris FX, www.borisfxeurope.com, 01264 326 384	M W	Jun 05	4.0
<i>A massive set of video plug-ins that runs with Final Cut Pro, Premiere Pro or After Effects. Expensive but worth it for professional users</i>					
Digital Fusion 4.04e	£2,650	Eyeon, www.eyeonline.com, 020 7637 5319	Windows	Feb 05	4.0
<i>Widely used in the US, Digital Fusion is a solid, reliable compositing suite. It renders quickly, and the interface is efficient and effective</i>					
Edius Pro 3	£315	Canopus, www.canopus.uk.com, 01189 210 510	Windows	Mar 05	3.5
<i>Edius is gaining on its competition with every release but cutting-edge innovation doesn't excuse weak effects tools. It's more 'pro' than ever, though</i>					
Final Cut Pro 5	£595	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac	Jul 05	4.5
<i>Final Cut Pro has clawed its way to the top since its launch five years ago. New version adds support for new formats and multicam editing</i>					
Liquid Edition 6	£255	Pinnacle, www.pinnaclesys.com, 01895 424 228	Windows	Dec 04	4.0
<i>Great workflow and artist-centric modes of operations make this video-editing software a powerful tool. Screen can feel cramped</i>					
Magic Bullet Suite 2.0	£450	Red Giant Software @The CarPark, 02879 632 614	Mac	Jun 05	4.5
<i>A set of plug-ins with a very wide appeal. Its preset looks for digital video have image-based previews, which makes choosing the right look easy</i>					
MatchMover Pro 3.1	£2,139	Realviz, www.realviz.com @ Computers Unlimited, 020 8200 8282	M W L	May 05	4.0
<i>This professional 3D camera-tracking system is a capable and robust application, but can be buggy under Mac OS X and is pricey</i>					
Matenee 1.0	£195	Reflecmedia, www.reflecmedia.com, 01606 593 911	M W	Oct 04	4.5
<i>This keying plug-in is simple, fast, and effective – as close to one-click keying as you're likely to find at any price. Licensing is a little complex</i>					
Mirage 1.2	£895	Bauhaus Software, bauhaussoftware.com, 001 210 212 7530	M W	Feb 05	3.0
<i>Combines video effects, motion graphics, rotoscoping, cel animation, and Painter-style natural media. Great for animators, not so great for compositors</i>					
Motion 2	£169	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac	Jul 05	4.5
<i>Apple's motion-graphics product provides real-time manipulation and rendering. Needs a top spec Mac, but Motion 2 is a real step up for the product</i>					
particlellusion 3.0	\$399	Wondertouch, www.wondertouch.com	M W	Jan 05	3.5
<i>A standalone program based around a 2D particle system that uses layers to create faux 3D effects. Impressive feature set, but not as good as Motion</i>					

Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Particular	\$299	Trapcode, www.trapcode.com	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>A powerful particle solution that bridges the gap between compositing and full-on 3D in After Effects 6.0. Includes a real-time preview system</i>					
PFHoe 1.0	from £49	The Pixel Farm, www.the.pixelfarm.co.uk	M W	Mar 05	4.5
<i>This motion-tracking software brings high-end process within reach of beginners. Inexpensive and professional, with a user-friendly look-&-feel</i>					
PfMatch 1.0	£600	The Pixel Farm, www.the.pixelfarm.co.uk	M W	May 05	4.0
<i>Relatively affordable tracking solution for broadcast, auto-tracking with good post-tracking cleaning and refinement tools. The interface is a little glitchy</i>					
Premiere Pro 1.5	£525	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8358 5857	Windows	Sep 04	4.0
<i>The interface has been given a grown-up redesign, and there's some new features too. Great integration with Adobe's other video products</i>					
RE:Flex	\$795	RE:Vision FX, www.revisionfx.com	M W	Jun 05	4.5
<i>RE:Flex is an incredibly easy-to-use set of warping tools. Morphing is just as easy - and auto-align feature matches features of common morphs</i>					
Sapphire	\$549	GenArts, www.genarts.com, 001 617 492 2888	M W	Jan 05	4.5
<i>The pinnacle of plug-in collections. Aimed at compositors working on high-end projects, it works with After Effects, Avid, Combustion, Shake, and Sparks</i>					
Shake 3.5	from £1,786	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	M W	Feb 05	3.5
<i>An exceptional tool for post houses putting together top film and commercial work, but it's not the right software for everyday jobs</i>					
Silhouette Roto 1.0	\$495	Silhouette FX, www.silhouettestfx.com	M W L	Jun 05	4.5
<i>A streamlined, easy-to-use, and powerful dedicated roto-spline package that takes a lot of the drudgery out of rotoscoping work</i>					
Squeeze 4	\$449	Sorenson, www.sorenson.com	M W	Jan 05	4.0
<i>Compression Suite that's simple and intuitive, with good export format option. Results are good quality, but you can't output from Windows to Mac</i>					
Visual Communicator	£258	Serious Magic, www.seriousmagic.com, 01635 294 300	Windows	Jan 05	2.5
<i>It's the easiest live video tool so far, with good keying features. However, the stock media is awful, and you can't add your own templates</i>					
Xpress Studio	from £2,599	Avid, www.avid.com, 020 7534 2800	M W	Oct 04	4.0
<i>This end-to-end creative studio for video work beats the competition in terms of tools, but it's expensive and, not as well integrated as some packages</i>					

Graphic design software

ADC plug-ins	\$99.95	Kodak, www.asf.com, 01442 261122	M W	Nov 04	4.5
<i>Standalone versions of clever Digital ICE technology to reduce noise and film grain while preserving detail. Works well, but not with mono</i>					
Backdrop Designer	\$199	Digital Anarchy, www.digitalanarchy.com, 001 415 586 8434	M W	Nov 04	3.0
<i>Flexible easy-to-use Photoshop plug-in that lets you substitute simulated backdrops onto cutouts and blue-screen images. Good effects but very slow</i>					
Creative Pack	\$39	Flaming Pear, www.flamingpear.com	M W	Nov 04	3.0
<i>Formerly Furbo Filters, Photoshop plug-in Creative Pack offers four filters and special effects but no way of reverting back to the original image</i>					
Deep Paint	\$249	Right Hemisphere, www.righthemisphere.com, 001 510 818 2880	Windows	Nov 04	3.5
<i>Photoshop plug-in that's like adding a miniature Painter to Photoshop. Lets you paint normally or use a wide range of tools for natural-media effects</i>					
Digitalizer	\$22	Panopticum, www.panopticum.com	M W	Nov 04	3.0
<i>Photoshop plug-in that creates an image out of text characters. It's decent value, but bugs are evident on images over 5MB</i>					
Eye Candy 4000	\$169	Alien Skin, www.alienskin.com, 001 919 832 4124	M W	Nov 04	3.5
<i>Eye Candy 4000 is a collection of 23 plug-ins, so there is bound to be something that appeals to you. The Shadowlab option is particularly useful</i>					
Flood	\$20	Flaming Pear, www.flamingpear.com	M W	Nov 04	4.5
<i>Handy Photoshop plug-in for creating water effects is cheaper and easier to use than its rivals. Well worth the money</i>					
FreeHand MX	£289	Macromedia, www.macromedia.com/uk, 01344 458 600	M W	Jul 05	4.0
<i>With its excellent MX Studio interface cleanup, great new tools, and a raft of improved features, this is the most compelling upgrade since version 7</i>					
Illustrator CS 2	£435	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4000	M W	Digit 88	4.5
<i>Live Trace makes vectorizing bitmap images a breeze, and Live Paint makes creating complex artwork easier. The new Options bar tidies up the interface</i>					
ImageAlign	\$129	Grasshopper, www.grasshopper.com, 0064 7854 7279	M W	Nov 04	3.5
<i>Photoshop plug-in that allows photographers to compensate for lens problems like barrel and pincushion distortion. One of the best of its type</i>					
Light! 2.0	\$50	Digital Film Tools, www.digitalfilmtools.com	M W	Nov 04	4.5
<i>Clever Photoshop plug-in that controls light and adds realistic shadows, even from objects not in the main image. Poor manual but still a Best Buy</i>					
Mystical Lighting	\$179	Auto FX Software, www.autofx.com, 001 205 980 0056	M W	Nov 04	3.0
<i>Lighting control Photoshop plug-in that gives you more in-depth tools and control than in Photoshop CS. However, it's a bit slow</i>					
Painter IX	£249	Corel, www.corel.co.uk, 01628 589 800	M W	Nov 04	4.0
<i>Painter IX has faster brushes than 8.1 and is all the better for it. There really is no better natural-media painting program on the market</i>					
Paint Shop Pro 8	£85	Jasc, www.jasc.com @ Digital Workshop, 0870 120 2186	Windows	Jul 03	4.0
<i>Jasc pushes ahead with more design and correction tools to keep Paint Shop Pro strong enough to fend off rivals. The new look may confuse you</i>					
Photoshop CS 2	£445	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4000	M W	Digit 88	4.5
<i>The best reason to buy Adobe's Creative Suite 2, Photoshop has been given some fantastic new special effects, as well as good efficiency improvements</i>					
Piranesi 4	£450	Informatix, www.informatix.co.uk @ CU, 020 8358 5858	Windows	Nov 04	4.0
<i>High-quality and fast painting tool for painting textures, adding depth and finishing 3D scenes. Primarily used by architects</i>					
pxl SmartScale	£149.99	Extensis, www.extensis.co.uk @ CU, 020 8358 5858	M W	Nov 03	4.5
<i>It has limits, especially with text and logos, but SmartScale soothes the headache of low-res imagery like nothing else. Highly recommended</i>					

SPOTLIGHT: GRAPHIC DESIGN TOOLS

PHOTOSHOP PLUG-INS



Flaming Pear Flood

Make waves in your toolbox by creating water effects, ripples and reflections. Other plug-ins do this too, but this is excellent value



Digital Film Tools Light! 2.0

Streaming light through windows, shadows where there were none, even light falling through the leaves of a tree. Good and only \$50



Right Hemisphere Deep Paint

Like having a miniature Corel Painter bolted into your toolbox. Either apply texture effects or paint with brushes and by cloning photographs

Blood, sweat & jeans

Denim brand Blood & Glitter commissioned Elevator to devise a photo campaign. Central to the shoot was a burnt out XJ6 Jag, with Photoshop employed to add the fire and brimstone-style visual effects



Software in focus: Creative Suite CS 2



Adobe's Creative Suite 2 pulls together the company's top creative applications to offer a complete toolset for the digital artist. It includes Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, as well as Version Cue CS 2, Adobe Bridge (a new asset management tool), and Adobe Stock Photos, which allows you to browse a massive stock photo library and purchase pictures online.

The suite is priced so that if you're planning on buying Photoshop and one other Adobe application, you might as well buy the whole suite. This allows Adobe to muscle in on your entire workflow, but thankfully its corporate strategy benefits you - the integration within Creative Suite 2 allows you to bounce files between applications with ease.

The various applications have some great new features too. For example, Photoshop offers Vanishing Point (above). This new filter allows you to clone objects within an image to fit the perspective of the background.

DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: GRAPHICS SOFTWARE



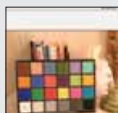
Adobe Illustrator CS 2

The Create Suite 2 upgrade doesn't have that many new features, but the addition of Live Trace and Live Paint is a revelation



FreeHand MX

With its excellent MX Studio interface cleanup, great new tools, and improved features, this is the most compelling upgrade since version 7



InCamera 3.1

You need a colour target as well, but this hassle-free Photoshop plug-in adjusts image colour according to lighting profiles – with great results



Painter 8.1

Painter 8.1 offers a more Photoshop-like experience, and is all the better for it. There is no better natural-media painting program on the market



Primatte Chromakey 2.0

This compositing plug-in for Photoshop removes plain backgrounds from photos, and handles the difficult cutouts like hair really well



pxi SmartScale

It has limits, especially with text and logos, but SmartScale soothes the headache of low-res imagery like nothing else. Highly recommended

DIGIT BEST BUY RECOMMENDATIONS: UTILITIES

Enfocus PitStop Pro 6.0

A versatile PDF preflight checking, manual/auto editing and tracking utility. Now updated for OS X and Acrobat 6 features and formats



Enfocus Instant PDF 3.0

This preflighting software is worth shelling out for. Supports new versions of both major DTP packages, and minimizes expensive errors



Extensis Portfolio 7

A traditional asset-management program. Puts every digital asset at your fingertips, whatever you're working on



Flexion Solutions CubeLite

An easy-to-use in-house photography studio. The white tent and studio lighting system allows you to shoot objects with even light sources



iView Multimedia iView Media Pro 2

Slick, speedy, and good-looking, iView Media Pro 2 is easy to use, and offers the added benefit of image editing within the application



Product name	Price	Company and contact details	Platform	Reviewed	Digit rating
Stitcher 4.0	£345	www.realviz.com @ Computers Unlimited, 020 8358 5858	M W	Apr 04	4.5
<i>The leading multi-image stitcher for panoramas and interactive spherical images gains improved controls and interface, and better rendering options</i>					
Verdant	\$179	Digital Elements, www.digi-element.com, 001 510 601 7351	M W	Nov 04	3.0
<i>Photoshop plug-in that lets you create realistic trees and plants that you can add to your images. Not quite photo-realistic, and a bit pricey</i>					
Xara X1	£94	Xara Group, www.xara.com	Windows	Sep 04	3.5
<i>This vector-illustration program has an extremely fast rendering engine, and intuitive tools. However, its toolset is relatively limited</i>					

Multimedia software

DVD Producer Authoring 5.0	£1,125	Sonic, www.sonic.com, 020 7437 1100	Windows	Apr 05	3.5
<i>Sitting between high-end systems and desktop DVD authoring packages, DVD Producer Authoring is pricey for what you get</i>					
DVD Studio Pro 4	£297	Apple, www.apple.com/uk, 0800 783 4846	Mac OS X	Jul 05	4.5
<i>Apple has gone straight for the Hollywood market with DVD Studio Pro 4. Supports HD DVD, and is well integrated with Motion and Final Cut Pro</i>					
DVD Workshop 2	£153	Ulead Systems, www.ulead.co.uk, 0049 2131 512 6850	Windows	Apr 05	3.0
<i>DVD authoring with a simple interface, and plenty of wizards to help you through the process. It's a bit basic, but worth considering</i>					
Encore DVD 1.5	£121	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4001	Windows	Apr 05	4.0
<i>The upgrade to version 1.5 adds QuickTime support, background transcoding, a styles palette, After Effects integration, and some essential revisions</i>					
Mediator Pro 8	£249	Matchware, www.matchware.com, 020 8940 9700	Windows	Jun 05	3.5
<i>Mediator Pro is a simple but effective multimedia application. Boasts an integrated drawing application and FTP upload facility</i>					
PanoWeaver 4.0	\$599.95	EasyPano, www.easypano.com, 001 323 908 8588	Windows	Digit 88	4.5
<i>Easy-to-use panorama creation software that doesn't charge you for each image you create – unlike some of its competitors. Now works with SLRs</i>					
ReelDVD 3.1.3	£140	Sonic, www.sonic.com, 020 7437 1100	Windows	Apr 05	3.0
<i>Ideal for entry-level users, ReelDVD is easy to use. Despite this, it does offer a fair amount of pro-level tools, such as support for layered PSD files</i>					

Web design software

Dreamweaver MX 2004	£339	Macromedia, www.macromedia.co.uk @ 0131 458 6766	M W	Nov 03	4.5
<i>This upgrade manages to provide more power while still maintaining ease of use, and its strong support for CSS points to its future path</i>					
Flash MX 2004	£419	Macromedia, www.macromedia.co.uk @ 0131 458 6766	M W	Nov 03	4.5
<i>New Timeline tools make the base version a must-have upgrade. Many functions of the Professional version may not appeal to Web designers</i>					
GoLive CS 2	£335	Adobe, www.adobe.co.uk, 020 8606 4000	M W	Jul 05	4.0
<i>Adobe's Web design software has an improved CCS editor, and tight integration with the Creative Suite. It's just not as wide-ranging as Dreamweaver</i>					
Fireworks MX 2004	£249	Macromedia, www.macromedia.co.uk, 0131 458 6766	M W	Nov 03	4.0
<i>Not that radical an upgrade, but there are welcome performance improvements, collaborative features, and enjoyable new creative tools</i>					
NetObjects Fusion 8	£132.50	WebSite Pros, www.netobjects.co.uk, 001 877 729 8625	Windows	Digit 76	3.0
<i>A tidy interface and plentiful wizards make Fusion an easy-to-use Web design product, but you have to pay extra for some of the functionality</i>					
WireFusion 4.0	from £59	Demicron, www.demicron.com, 0046 856 486 950	M W L	Oct 04	4.0
<i>WireFusion 4.0 features an updated interface, and is quick and easy to use. Pricing starts at £59, but the full version stretches to £1,195</i>					

Utilities

Colorproof XF	from £735	Efi, www.efi.com, 020 8476 7676	M W	Mar 05	4.0
<i>Professional-quality proofing software to drive a wide range of colour printers, with accurate simulation of international print standards</i>					
CubeLite	from £255	Flexion Solutions, www.cubelite.com, 01530 837 143	M W	Oct 04	4.5
<i>This in-house photography studio comprises of a collapsible light tent and studio lamp that make it easy to shoot photos with even illumination</i>					
Cumulus 6.5	£48	Canto, www.canto.com, 0049 30 390 4850	M W	Digit 88	4.0
<i>A decent – if complex – asset management and cataloguing system. Handles a wide range of formats. Not as slick as some of the competition</i>					
Deep Exploration 3.5	\$149	Right Hemisphere, righthemisphere.com 001 510 818 2880	Windows	Digit 88	3.5
<i>Deep Exploration is one of the few asset management programs dedicated to 3D. It's reasonably priced, but doesn't improve on the Windows interface</i>					
FileMaker Pro 7	£219	FileMaker, www.filemaker.co.uk, 01628 534158	M W	Digit 88	3.5
<i>Version 7 of this database/asset-management system boasts increased capacity, improved architecture, tighter security, and multiple window views</i>					
Instant PDF 3.0	£199	Enfocus, www.enfocus.com, 0032 9269 1690	M W	Mar 05	4.5
<i>Utility for detecting and correcting expensive mistakes before submitting PDFs. Now supports InDesign, QuarkXPress, Acrobat and OS X PDFs</i>					
iView Media Pro 2	£101	iView Multimedia, iview-multimedia.com, 020 7223 8691	M W	Digit 88	4.5
<i>This dedicated media management tool looks great and handles graphics, movies, and audio files speedily and efficiently</i>					
PitStop Pro 6.0	£429	Enfocus, enfocus.com @ XChange International, 020 7490 4455	Mac	Feb 04	4.5
<i>A versatile PDF preflight checking, manual/auto editing and tracking utility. Now updated for OS X and Acrobat 6 features and formats</i>					
PolyTrans	\$395	Okino, www.okino.com, 001 905 672 9328	Windows	Digit 88	4.0
<i>PolyTrans is a dedicated 3D file translation and management tool. It's the standard in a quiet market. Unfortunately doesn't support Maya files directly</i>					
Portfolio 7	£130	Extensis, www.extensis.co.uk @ CU, 020 8200 8282	M W	Digit 88	5.0
<i>An improved interface and ease-of-use make this the ultimate media management tool. New NetPublisher allows you to create a Web portfolio</i>					



issue 81



issue 82



issue 83



issue 84



issue 85



issue 86



issue 87



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issue 89



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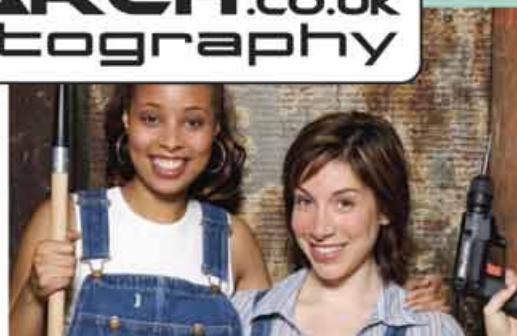
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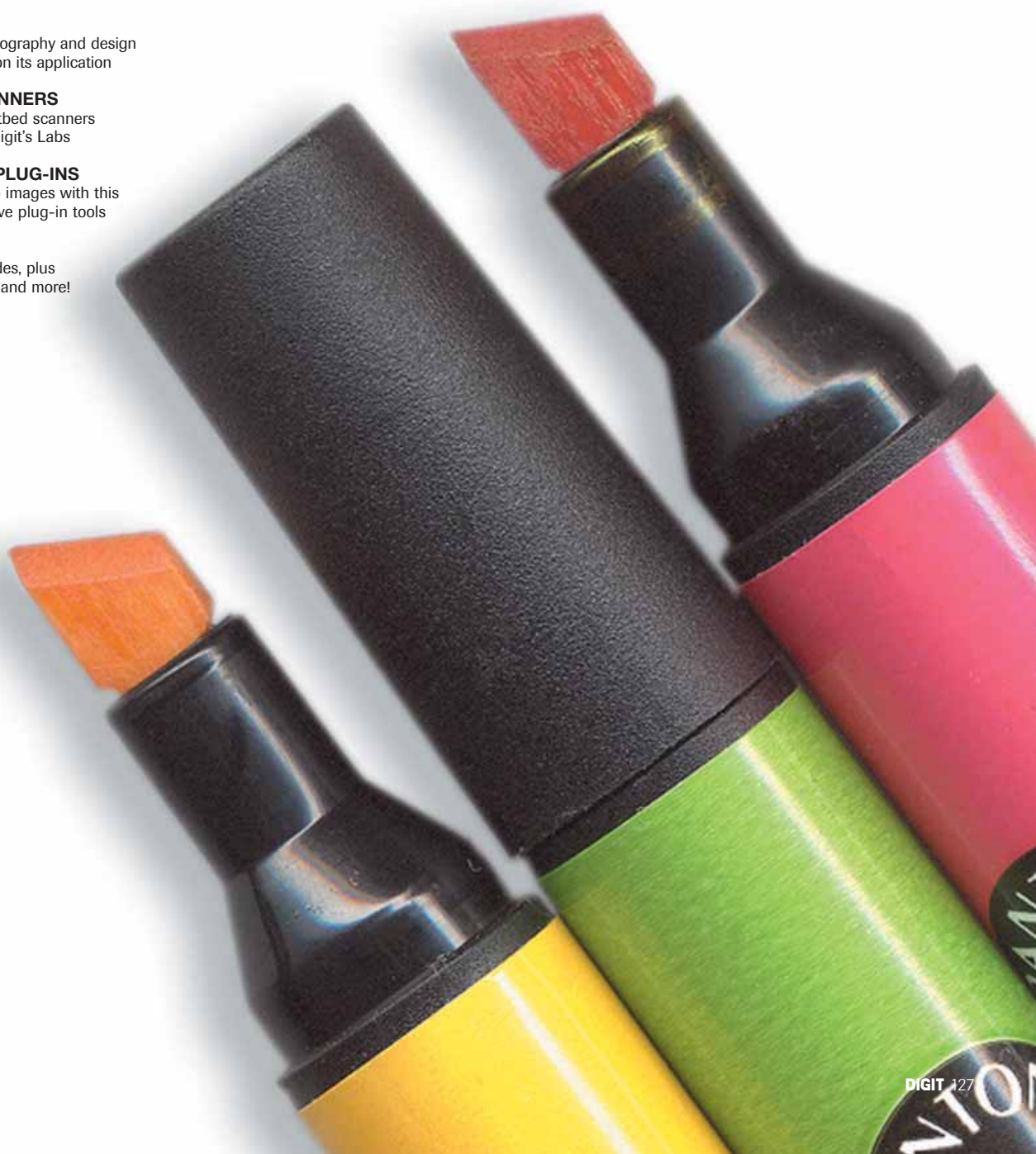
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Showcase & software

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mean and lets you
know what steps
you should take.



Showcase

This month's CD
showcase section
includes four Frubes
commercials created
by Aardman, as
featured in this issue's
projects section. Next,
we present the short
film, *BV-01* by
Alessandro Pacciani,
which combines a 3D
robot with real-world
documentary footage
to great effect.



The Softimage|XSI 5.0
showreel was built for
that product's launch
at Siggraph 2005.
Coffee, Cake & Kink is
a commercial created
by Absolute Post for
London-based coffee
shop S&M. We finish
with the trailer for
online sci-fi *Shirow*.



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CONTENTS

- + Aardman's animated Frubes commercials
- BV-01: robot-themed live-action short film
- Softimage|XSI 5.0 showreel from Siggraph 2005
- S&M coffee house commercial from Absolute Post
- Shirow Project trailer
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- Photon 20 - dot pitch 0.25
- Photon 20 - 176 degrees viewing angle (IPS)
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- 321 - response time 20ms
- 321 - dot pitch 0.27
- 321 - 176 degree viewing angle (S-IPS)
- 3 years advance replacement warranty

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319 - 19"



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- Compatible with Windows® backup utility
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