

Video-editing software

Adobe Premiere Pro beta

Adobe might have the photo editing market sewn up with Photoshop, but when it comes to video editing, the company has faced some stiff competition. Premiere has long been Adobe's video blockbuster, but it's way too complex and expensive for most home users, while Avid still remains the name most associated with 'industry standard' at the professional end.

In light of the recent release of Apple's Emmy Award-winning Final Cut Pro 4.0, it makes sense to assume that Adobe would take advantage of the opportunity to claw back some ground by putting out a souped-up version of its own video application. So we weren't too surprised when Premiere Pro was announced in July.

Premiere Pro is, effectively, Premiere 7.0. The 'Pro' bit has been added in an obvious attempt to place Premiere in the same professional league as its competitors, Media Studio Pro and Final Cut Pro. It also leaves room for a possible future cut-down, 'non-Pro' version of Premiere at some point, to echo the success Adobe has had with Photoshop Elements.

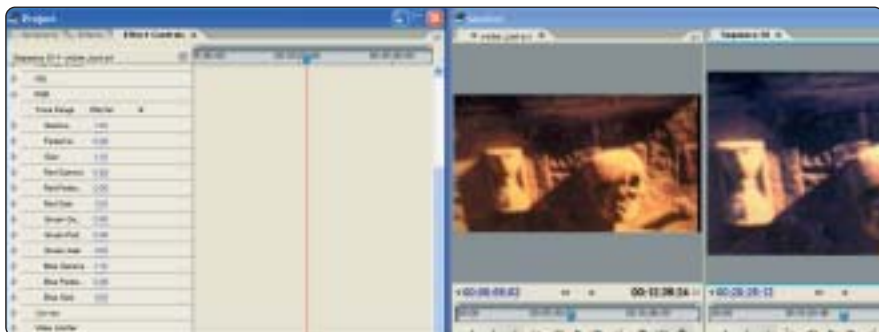
XP exclusive

The first thing to mention about Premiere Pro is that it's currently only available for Windows XP users. Those running any other versions of Windows will have to update their OS before running Premiere, while Mac users appear to be left out of the equation altogether. Perhaps Adobe has given up its battle with Final Cut Pro or maybe the company is holding a trump card up its sleeve. Watch this space.

The reason given for Premiere Pro's XP-only requirement is that the program has been optimised to work at blazing speeds on Pentium systems running Microsoft's latest OS. This extra oomph facilitates Premiere's various impressive real-time functions.

Rendering has long been the bane of video editors everywhere. The process of creating a new video file based on all the cuts and effects you have implemented can be tortuously slow, affecting both creative freedom and any enjoyment factor involved. Premiere Pro, however, claims to be a totally render-free experience. Basically speaking, this means that whatever cuts, fades, effects, cropping or titles you add to your project, you will be able to see what they look like instantly, without waiting for your PC to laboriously build a preview file.

→ The money shot: Premiere Pro has a clean and adaptable new interface and advanced audio editing tools



Get real

Until recently, real-time previewing has been possible only for those with specialised video-editing hardware. But Premiere takes advantage of the speed and power of modern processors, fast memory and hyper-threading – harnessing them to make real-time editing possible without the need for any extra expensive kit. As you might imagine, the more powerful your PC, the better Premiere performs.

While the minimum requirements listed below will allow you to run Premiere, you'll need a much faster system to get the most out of the program. Indeed, Adobe recommends a Pentium 4 3GHz processor or faster and 1GB of RAM for best performance. With this amount of power behind it, Premiere can playback edits instantly in full-resolution, both on-screen and on any monitor or TV that you have connected via a compatible camcorder/FireWire socket.

The trade-off for those with lower-spec PCs is progressively decreasing preview quality. To give you an idea, the system we tested Premiere Pro on (a Pentium 4 2.2GHz with 512MB RAM) began to give us stuttering previews when we added a transition to a project made up of two layers of video and two layers of audio.

A clean slate

Premiere's interface has been given a fresh lick of paint, too. The whole workspace has been

↑ Timesaver: Preview your edits in real-time without the need for rendering or dedicated hardware

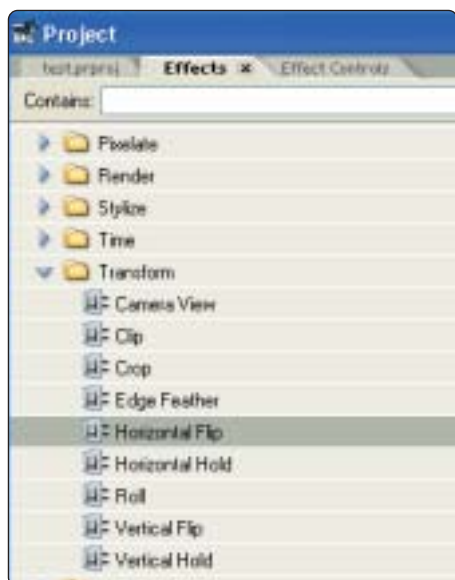
redesigned and it is now clean and uncluttered – assuming you're using a large monitor set to a reasonably high resolution, that is.

You'll also notice that a lot of the classic Adobe interface elements look radically different. The dockable palettes (such as the useful History window) are still there, but buttons, toolbars and menus all have a shiny, metallic look. The overall effect is – dare we say it – not unlike Final Cut Pro. These design changes may also possibly serve as a glimpse of what Adobe has in store for us with Photoshop 8.0.

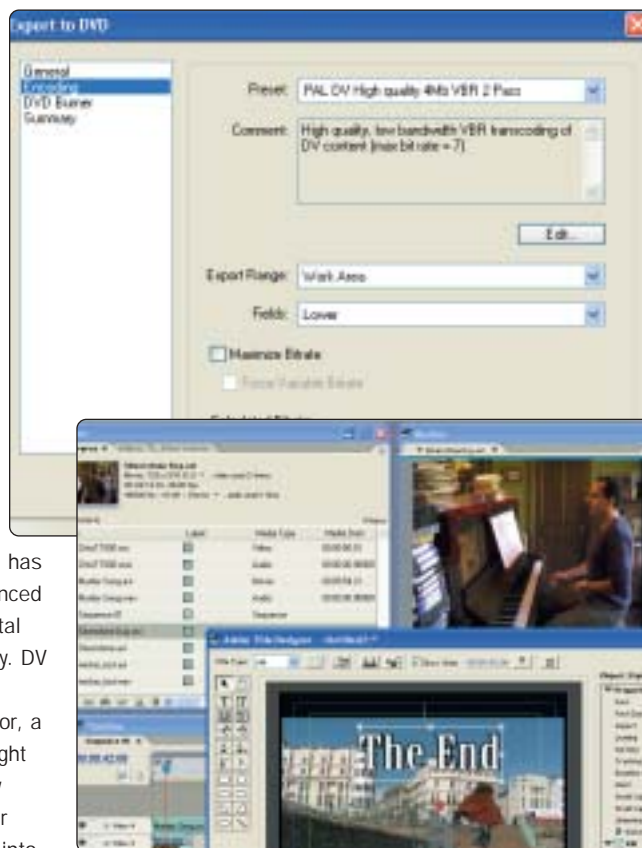
Most alterations have been made with more than just cosmetics in mind. The timeline, for instance, has been somewhat streamlined. Its best new feature is a zoom slider that makes it really quick and easy to switch from a wide overview of your project to split-second accuracy.

A handful of subtle differences in the way that the program works will confound existing Premiere users to begin with, but most will be thankful for the changes in the long run. For example, transitions (such as fades and wipes) are no longer placed between clips on the timeline but are instead applied directly to a specific clip. Not only does this make more visual sense, but it also frees up a whole video track to play with. Also, rather than having their own window, effects and transitions have been re-housed under a tabbed section of the main project window, freeing up more working space.

Users can even choose from several preset workspaces, so that you can easily switch between Editing mode and, say, colour correction. Particularly interesting here is the Audio mode, which showcases Premiere Pro's new, improved tools for mixing and tweaking multiple soundtracks.



→ Premiere Pro lets you output directly to DVD from within the program



The program has massively enhanced support for digital video technology. DV users are much better catered for, a particular highlight being the ability to break up your captured tapes into manageable-sized clips with the program's new scene detection feature.

There is also further support for widescreen and digital broadcast formats, such as DVCAM and HD. And, while we're on a technical note, Premiere Pro also offers some very powerful, high-end features intended for professionals. Native YUV processing, three-point colour correction, and multiple timelines might not sound exciting, but they certainly go a long way towards levelling some ground between Premiere and its rivals, cementing its status as a pro-end program.

Verdict

A big makeover and a new name, but it's still Premiere underneath. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, and the beta suggests that Pro will most probably be the top-dog video-editing application for Windows XP users when the final version is released. However, complexity and cost are liable to put beginners off, while serious editors may have already been tempted to switch platforms in order to take advantage of Final Cut Pro 4.0 on a powerful G5 Mac. ■

James Bennett

← Premiere's workspace has been improved with tabbed project and effects windows

↑ Although highly compatible with Photoshop and Illustrator, Premiere Pro comes with its own powerful title editor

Adobe Premiere Pro beta

- ☐ Adobe: 020 8606 4000
- ☐ www.adobe.co.uk
- ☐ £689 inc VAT (upgrade £220)

System requirements

800MHz Pentium III processor;
Windows XP (Home or Professional);
256MB RAM; OHCI-compatible
FireWire (IEEE-1394) card; 600MB
free hard disk space

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Remote access software

GoToMyPC 4.0

One of the appeals of the internet is that it can allow you to control your desktop from multiple locations, and remote PC software has proliferated over the past decade. Indeed, Microsoft even included this function in Windows XP with its Remote Desktop utility.

GoToMyPC takes a slightly different approach to the norm in this now crowded field. Applications such as pcAnywhere and LapLink typically install servers and clients that concentrate on remote control across a LAN (local area network), offering internet access as an extra to this core support – though an extra that has become increasingly important in recent years. Expertcity's software, on the other hand, works entirely across the internet, which gives it certain advantages and disadvantages.

The pros...

Regarding advantages, GoToMyPC must be the easiest remote utility to install and configure. After registering on the company's website, the next step is to download a 1.4MB application to the PC you wish to connect to as host.

Once the host software is installed you can view files on and control that PC from almost any Java-compliant browser in the world. Simply remember your password and you will be able to launch programs, copy, move or delete files and access all your information as though you were seated in front of the machine itself.

What's the alternative?

The two programs users are most likely to encounter are pcAnywhere, from Symantec (www.symantec.com), and LapLink (www.laplink.com), both of which offer considerably more features than GoToMyPC.

Admittedly, some of these (such as chat) have become less relevant with the growth of instant messaging, but if you regularly need to perform tasks such as synchronising or transferring files across a LAN (local area network) both are much more effective than GoToMyPC. They also cost much more in the first instance.

There are less expensive options though, one of which, 3am's RemotelyAnywhere (www.remotelyanywhere.com), easily competes with both pcAnywhere and LapLink, including a huge range of features and excellent security at a much lower cost.

→ Access to remote computers is via Expertcity's website, making it easy to connect across the internet

And cons...

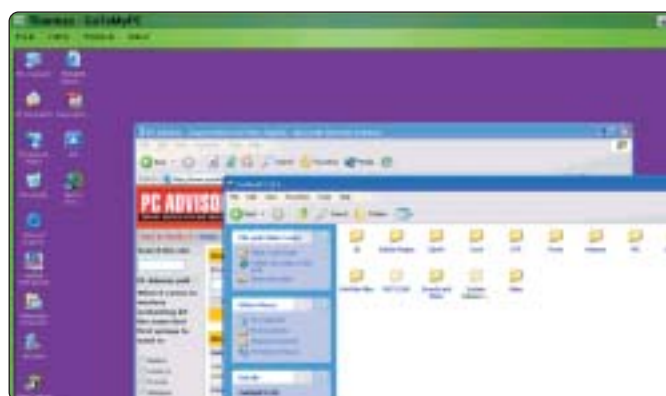
The downside of GoToMyPC's derives from its main strength: because all access operates through the Expertcity site, communications with other PCs on a LAN are much slower than with other comparable software. Even with broadband access, this program cannot compare in terms of performance with rival software. This is not really a problem if you merely wish to view information remotely, but transferring large files would be frustrating.

The second snag is in terms of cost: the software appears reasonable compared to the competition, but GoToMyPC is subscription only. The price stated below is to connect to one PC, with cheaper deals for multiple users.

These drawbacks should be placed in perspective, however. GoToMyPC has fewer options and extras than other remote access programs and could very well be more expensive in the long run, but it concentrates on doing a single task extremely well, making it by far the easiest-to-use application in its class. It employs advanced encryption for heightened security and makes it very easy to engage in collaborative working, sending out invitations to remote users via the Expertcity website.

Verdict

Although there are better all-purpose programs in this field, this utility will probably be more useful to users who have to access data elsewhere, because they are travelling or working away from the office. You will have to do this frequently to make your subscription worthwhile, but none of the alternatives are as easy to set up and use as GoToMyPC. ■



↑ Once connected, GoToMyPC displays the remote desktop via its viewer, allowing you to run applications and access files

GoToMyPC 4.0

- ☐ Expertcity: 00800 5744 2340
- ☐ www.gotomypc.com
- ☐ approx £15 per month or £132 per year inc VAT

System requirements

300MHz Pentium; 64MB RAM (host computer only); Windows 9x/Me/NT 4.0/2000/XP; Internet Explorer/ Netscape 4.0 or later

Ease of use



Features



Value for money

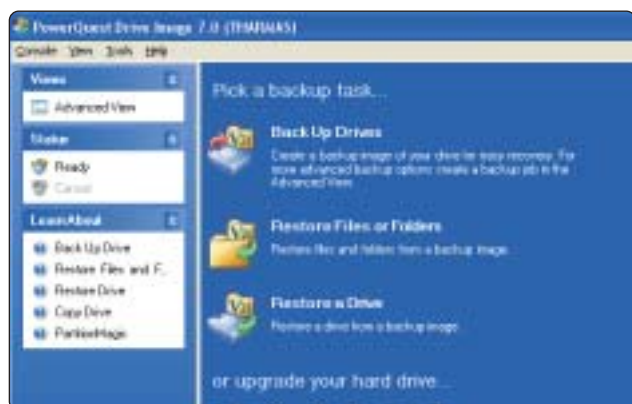


Overall rating



Jason Whittaker

Backup and disk imaging software Drive Image 7.0



Over the past few years, Drive Image has become one of the most popular utilities for

creating disk images – replicas of a complete hard drive or partitions thereof. The main competitor is Norton Ghost from Symantec, but with version 7.0, PowerQuest has introduced some extremely valuable innovations.

The new interface has basic and advanced views and shares the Windows XP look and feel. While this makes the program easier to use, the important changes are behind the scenes.

Most significant is the ability to create an image of a partition without leaving Windows or booting up. Admittedly, the most advantageous form of backup – an exact hard drive duplicate – still has to be done outside of Windows, but the alternatives available from within Windows are extremely flexible and much easier to handle than in previous versions.

New to Drive Image 7.0 is the ability to save an image straight to DVD, USB or FireWire hard drives, or to network drives – all of which actions can be performed from within Windows (although, somewhat oddly, this does not apply to saving to CD). While the program offers excellent performance, be warned that version 7.0 works only with Windows XP and 2000, although Drive Image 2002 is included for earlier versions of Windows.

Verdict

By offering more options within Windows, Drive Image 7.0 dominates the field for disk imaging. Symantec will almost certainly respond with the next release of Ghost, but the simple ability to perform most operations without leaving Windows makes the program easier to use than ever. If you need to make backups or copies of drives and partitions, this is currently the best. ■

Jason Whittaker

↑ The latest version of Drive Image simplifies the task of creating and restoring copies of your hard drive

Drive Image 7.0

- PowerQuest: 0118 952 2600
- www.powerquest.com
- £47 inc VAT

System requirements

Pentium processor; Windows XP/2000; 256MB RAM; 45-85MB hard disk space

Ease of use



Features



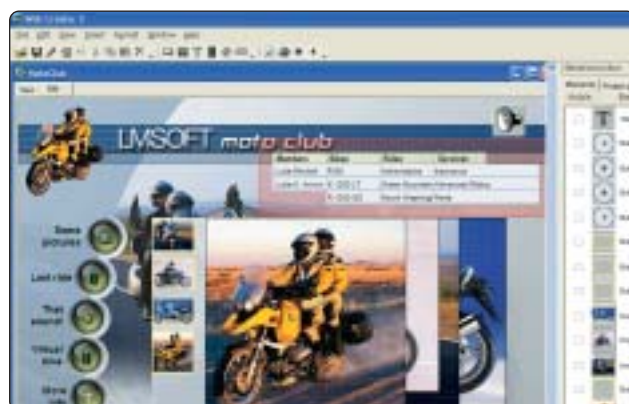
Value for money



Overall rating



Web design software WebCreator 2.0



Mindscape's WebCreator 2.0 aims to make creating a website easy for novices. And it's true to say that it allows for the creation of relatively advanced

sites with multimedia elements such as rollovers, animations, slideshows and so on, without the need for any coding. But an essential element of beginners' software is good documentation.

Unfortunately, both the manual and the online help have obviously been badly translated from a French original, making them rather hard to follow. Given that the interface and features in WebCreator 2.0 are far from intuitive, this is a serious flaw.

It has a large selection of templates but the previews are provided as tiny thumbnails – the only way to see a template at full size is to create a new project or page based on it, which is far too time consuming.

While the templates vary quite a lot, the formats and navigation styles were pretty limited. Alternatively, you can create pages from scratch, giving you a fairly high level of control over what elements can go on a page and how they're displayed.

Once you're ready, you select Prepare and Publish the Site, and your project gets converted to HTML and JavaScript. You can then choose to launch WebCreator's built-in FTP tool to upload the site to your web server.

A disadvantage of 'Prepare and Publish' is that if you want to make any changes to your site, you have to publish the entire site every time, rather than just updating individual pages or elements.

Verdict

On the face of it, a £20 web-creation package designed for novices sounds great. But WebCreator 2.0 is unintuitive and too restrictive for us to be able to give it a whole-hearted recommendation. ■

Alex Katz

↑ Every item on the page is listed in the Elements tab, so you can easily edit its attributes

WebCreator 2.0

- Mindscape: 01293 651 300
- www.mindscape.co.uk
- £20 inc VAT

System requirements

233MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/Me/XP; 64MB RAM (128MB recommended for XP); 100MB free hard disk space; 800x600 colour display

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



Audio-editing software

Adobe Audition 1.0

Adobe has never really been that well known in audio circles, so it's surprising to see it suddenly produce a brand new audio-editing package apparently from thin air.

Look a bit closer, however, and you will see that Audition is really Adobe's version of Syntrillium Software's popular Cool Edit Pro package. Adobe bought the rights to Syntrillium's software technology in May this year and Audition is the first fruit of that union. Rather than a Cool Edit Pro upgrade, Audition 1.0 is more of a rebranding exercise with a few very minor tweaks thrown in to make it more compatible with Adobe's other products.

All-in-one

To say that Audition is simply an audio editor is a bit like saying that The Beatles were just a pop band. Audition is in fact an entire recording studio packed into a piece of software. You can use it to record simple stereo WAV

files, but it also works as a complex multi-track recorder capable of mixing together

128 tracks of audio, while simultaneously adding real-time effects. In fact, the only thing it can't handle is Midi sequencing.

The lack of Midi support also means that Audition doesn't have the traditional arrange page that you'll find on many other multi-track recorders. Instead you get a mixer page where you can assign waveforms to individual tracks. Each song has mute, solo and record buttons associated with it as well as information for volume and pan position. If you want to edit a piece of audio in more detail you can switch to the single waveform view and perform more complicated edits.



↑ Audition can mix together 128 tracks of audio in real-time if your PC is beefy enough

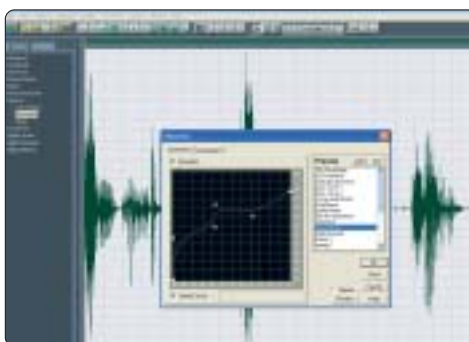


Back tracking

Like most software recording systems Audition is a non-destructive editor, meaning that you can always retain your source material in its original form no matter how many edits you perform. However, Audition also goes further by offering multiple levels of undo. This is a major bonus when you're working on complex edits or putting together soundtracks for big video projects.

Adobe has also included a plethora of real-time audio effects as standard. They're generally of a high standard, although the reverb effect isn't particularly natural sounding. But that's a complaint that could be levelled at any audio editor on the market. Another bonus is that all the effects work in real time so you can immediately hear the results of any tweaks you make.

Like many audio editing programs Audition allows you to customise its interface by docking and undocking elements such as the transport controls and level meters. However, the interface can seem very cluttered at times, even with many of the superfluous tool bars closed, and the default colour scheme is very drab indeed.



We also don't like the way the sample editing and multi-track windows are mutually exclusive. You can't have both open at the same time and it's frustrating not being able to view a sample in detail, while also being unable to see its overall position on the multi-track view.

Verdict

Audition certainly has professional features, but the user interface still betrays its shareware roots. It's a shame that Adobe didn't take this as an opportunity to give the whole look and feel of the application an overhaul. Nevertheless, Audition is a feature-packed audio editor containing all the tools you'll need to produce professional results. ■

Niall Magennis

← There is a huge range of effects included as standard and they all work in real-time

Adobe Audition 1.0

- Adobe: 0870 606 0325
- www.adobe.com
- £275 inc VAT (£89 for upgrade from Cool Edit)

System requirements

400MHz processor or higher;
Windows 98 SE/Me/2000/XP; 64MB
RAM; 800x600 colour display; stereo
sound card; 55MB free hard disk
space necessary

Ease of use



Features



Value for money



Overall rating



BT Broadband is up to ten times faster than standard dial-up Internet, so now you can access movie trailers and short films from Filmfour.com in a flash. Connection and one month's rental are free if you sign up by 30th September. You can also save £10 on your modem by ordering online. Broadband your movie horizons.



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