

Movie Maker 2.0

If you're yet to invest in a video-editing package and use Windows XP then we have good news: Movie Maker 2.0 is the OS' easy-to-use and versatile film creation tool. And the best part? It's completely free. Dennis Jarrett takes advantage of Microsoft's, ahem, generous nature

In Windows XP Microsoft has bundled plenty of features that are intended to clobber Mac OS X. Windows Media Player, for instance, was better than the Mac's iTunes even before the brand-new version 9.0 appeared. And digital photo acquisition technology integrated into XP was well ahead of Apple's dozy Image Capture application, with the subsequent release of iPhoto on the Mac being no more than a catch-up.

But for a long time now Apple has been top dog for digital video. Microsoft included Movie Maker as a freebie with Windows Me and tweaked it slightly

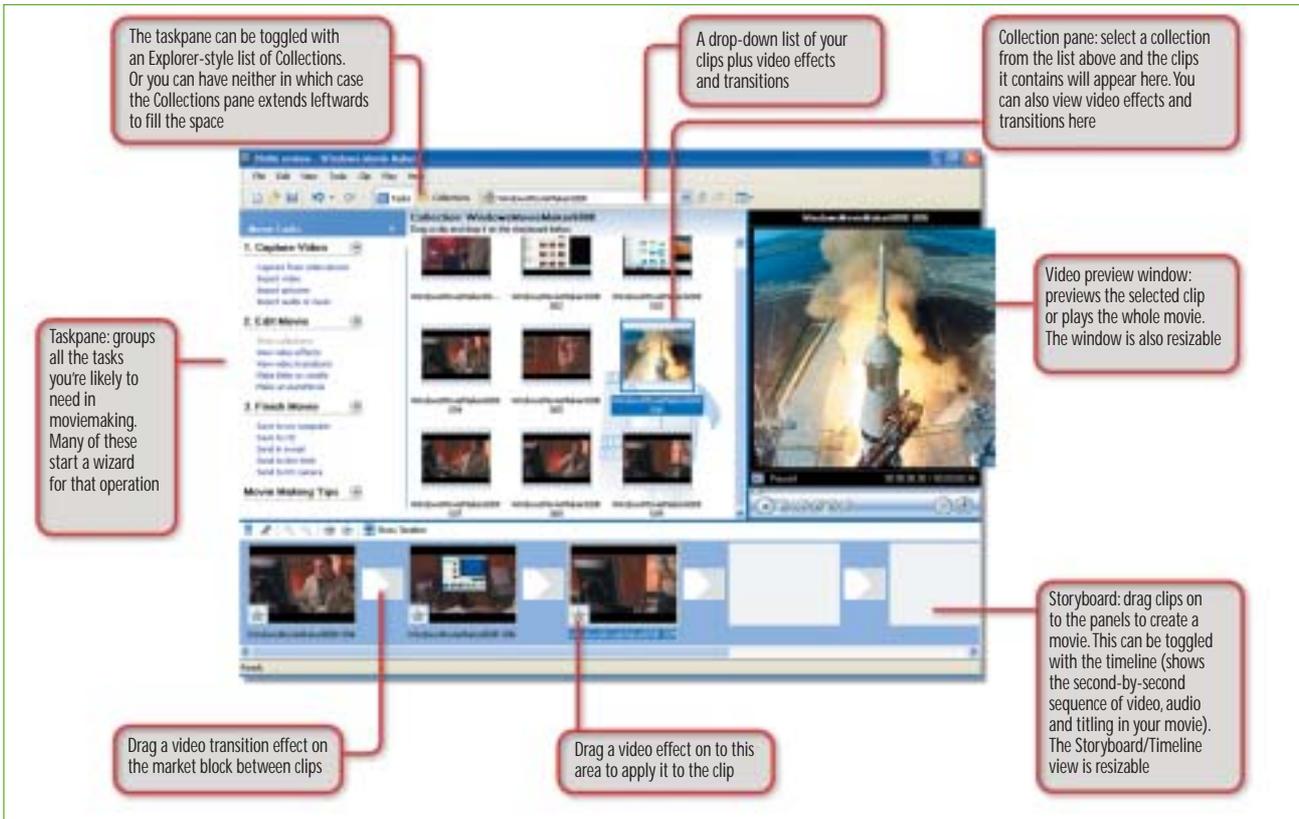
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into version 1.2 for XP. Frankly, though, it was a bit on the skimpy side.

Movie Maker 1.2 did, however, provide a simple way into film creation for the ultimate beginner. It was great for picking up basic concepts like matching the pictures to the music and using drag-and-drop for assembling clips. It was also easy to use, although this was mainly due to the fact that there was little to do. You can't add any special effects other than fades, for instance. For titling you'll need to fire up a separate image editor (Paint will do) and save the text as an image that can then be loaded into Movie Maker.

Movie Maker 2.0: the interface



Performance was pretty crummy, too: loading clips was slow and the sound and video quality of a finished movie tended to be noticeably poorer than the original clips.

Apple's iMovie, on the other hand, was a world away from Movie Maker 1.2. It was harder to use, but then it was loaded with many more functions.

The recently released iMovie 3.0 comes free with Mac OS and has enough editing functions and effects to produce a decent movie from your clips. There's a large library of third-party plug-ins developed for sound and video effects as well as enhanced audio controls.

Second time lucky

A completely redesigned version of Windows Movie Maker was released at the start of the year. It offers plenty of advanced functions and definitely moves Windows ahead of the Mac pack – if you want the best movie-making package without paying extra for the software then this Microsoft offering is for you.

Windows Movie Maker 2.0 even looks a pretty good choice when set against some of the paid-for alternatives. Not only that, it

compares pretty well to the products the pros prefer – Apple's Final Cut (Mac only) and Adobe Premiere. These are genuine high function, high-end products with prices to match – around £830 inc VAT for Final Cut Pro and £520 for Premiere.

Apple has just released a lite version called Final Cut Express. This package may be cut down but it still boasts a stunning feature set. There's the ability to overlay video from several different clips into a single clip, for example, and Express retains the broadcast-quality audio editing and titling tools from Final Cut Pro. But even this lite app will hurt your wallet, retailing at \$299 (around £185).

Cheaper alternatives for Windows users include the £35 MGI VideoWave Movie Creator, a decent entry-level video editor without many effects or other features, and Ulead's £40 VideoStudio 6.0 (both available from www.amazon.co.uk) which is a good choice for novices.

So what do you get?

Movie Maker 2.0 offers 29 video effects, 60 transitions, a collection of 43 styles for titles and credits as well as a much

improved user interface. If you've used Microsoft PowerPoint then you'll recognise a few of the transition options.

We were particularly impressed by Movie Maker's artistic clip effects – for example, watercolour and 'smudge stick'. There are, however, more useful options such as speeding up and slowing down the action, fading in and out to white or black and applying an aged look to the film.

The main interface is generally cleaner than version 1.2. By default you get a timeline at the foot of the screen, a black preview area on the right, a 'collections' list (a collection is simply a bunch of clips grouped together) and a taskpane. This is a really useful innovation – no guesswork is required as the available tasks are spelt out for you. Click on the arrow by the three major headings – Capture Video, Edit Movie, Finish Movie – and you'll be presented with common tasks that you might want to do.

AutoMovie maker

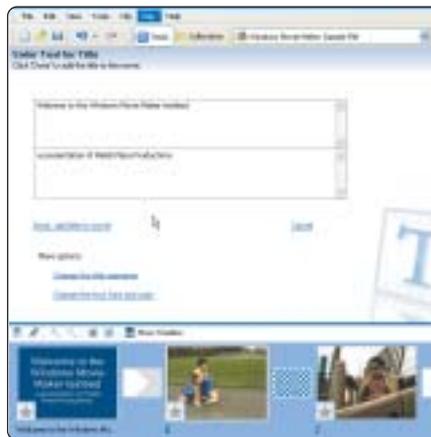
A stunning new feature called AutoMovie can produce fully edited home movies from raw video clips, complete with titles,

Adding titles and credits

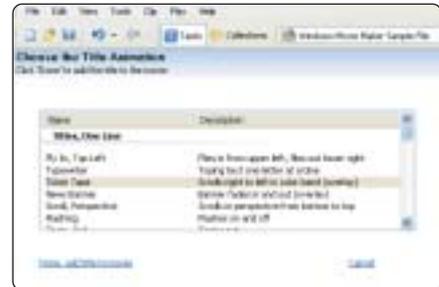
Windows Movie Maker 2.0's text features are a major improvement on its predecessor's and certainly match the facilities provided by the competition. What's more, it's a doddle to get titles and end credits on to your movie.



1 Create a movie sequence in the usual way. Go to the Edit Movie section of the Movie Tasks pane and select 'Make titles or credits'. You'll get a list of choices – put titles at the beginning or end of the movie, add text to a selected clip or after it (just click on the clip in the Storyboard to select it) or place credits at the end of the movie. Let's add a title and some credits – click on 'title at the beginning'



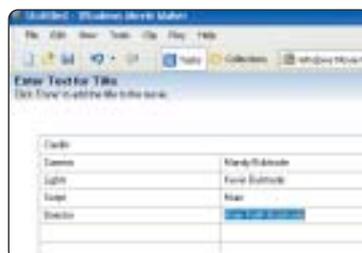
2 Now type in your title. The main title should go in the upper box; a subtitle would go into the lower one. When you click 'Done, add title to movie' you'll see that a new clip is added at the start of the Storyboard sequence



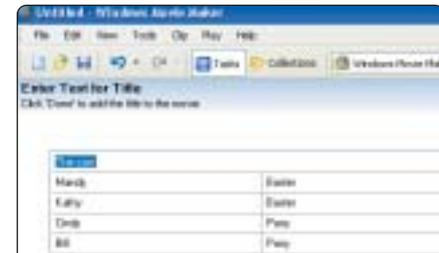
3 Now you can play with some effects. Click 'Change the title animation' and you'll see a collection of different options. Click any of these to preview the effect. When you have found one that you like, click to select it then click on 'Done, add title to movie'



4 Click on 'Change the text font and color'. From here you can select your font (any Windows font that's installed will be available); colour; text size (click the icons to make text smaller or larger); text position (left, right or centre); font style (bold, italic or underlined). There's also a transparency slider. Try any of these to preview the effect. Pick the combination you want then click on 'Done, add title to movie'



5 You create a credit list in much the same way – click on 'credits at the end' and you'll get a table with a topmost cell for a heading. Click on 'Done, add title to movie' unless you want to change the appearance of the credit sequence



6 The usual option is to list the jobs on the movie in the lefthand column and the name of the person responsible on the right, but under the 'Change the title animation' list there are several options that lend themselves to a more creative approach.

For instance, there's 'Credits: fly in, left and right'. Put someone's first name in the lefthand cell of the table and their surname on the right, select that animation and their first name zooms in from one side and their surname from the other. With a list of people, each one flies in like this and stays on the screen for a few seconds before exiting the way they came

transitions and even music. It takes just a few minutes – all you have to do is click one button. If you aren't interested in the time-consuming and nit-picking business of editing video then this is an extraordinary tool.

Windows Movie Maker 2.0 saves its movies in Windows Media Video 9.0 format. The files have the same WMV as earlier Windows video formats but version 9.0 now gives much better compression and playback quality.

So what? Well, because of the data compression you can create whole libraries of WMV-format home movies on your hard drive in much the same way as you might create libraries of digital music or photos. You can't say that of the DV-AVI

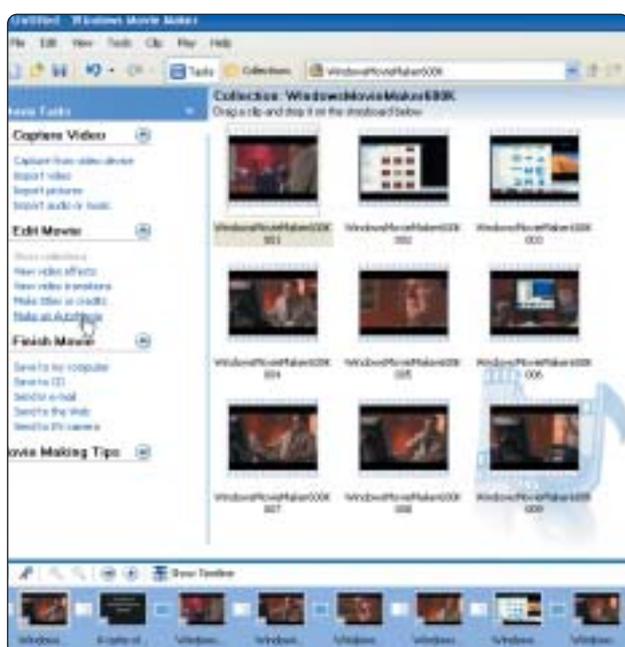
Make instant movies

Most people who want to produce their own videos actually find the business of hand-editing both tedious and time consuming. It's fun for the first couple of clips then it becomes a chore.

For the impatient film director, Windows Movie Maker provides AutoMovie. This wizard analyses the video and audio content in the clips on your Storyboard. And it's clever enough to find the best content, arrange it into what feels like a reasonable sequence then offer you the result as a finished

movie. It's blindingly simple to use. And the results are really quite amazing – AutoMovie seems to get it more or less right most of the time.

This feature is at its best when you're putting together a movie that doesn't depend on a very precise sequence; our best AutoMovies happened when we selected either the Highlights movie or the Music video option. But when we strung together 30 or so clips in a storytelling sequence the results from AutoMovie only needed a little shuffling.

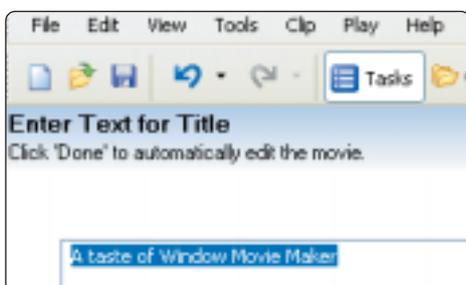


1 Drag and drop your clips on to the Storyboard. With the Movie Tasks pane in view, open up the Edit Movie list if its options aren't already on the screen (click the arrow to the right of the Edit Movie label). The last item in the list is Make an AutoMovie. Click on that

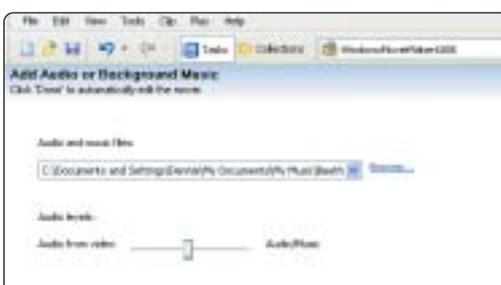


2 The AutoMovie Wizard starts up. You can click on the underlined 'Done, edit movie' link to create a movie with all the default settings, but let's customise it: you can decide what style of film AutoMovie should create. A Highlights movie will have simple cuts and fades and very plain titles. Select Music Video and AutoMovie will edit the show to fit the length of the music you select, adding transitions that match the beats. Flip and Slide gives you some very fancy transitions, some of which are an acquired taste.

Old Movie uses an ageing effect on the clips, while Sports Highlights selects the fastest movement and applies fast-cutting effects with an exploding title and end credits. Take your pick. And don't forget that you can always run AutoMovie again on the same clips to try a different style



3 Click on 'Give your movie a title' and you'll be able to type in a relevant one. The way the title appears will depend on the style of movie you selected in step 1, but in any case you can revisit the finished piece of work and finetune it to make any changes you want – so if you don't like the titling style, you'll be able to alter it



4 Now you can add some sound by clicking on 'Add audio or background music'. Be careful with background music if your clips already include audio; the two soundtracks can easily get in each other's way. However, you can always tweak things later on and, in any case, you can select the relative audio level on a slider.

Now you've finished, click on 'Done, edit movie'. AutoMovie will take a minute or two to create its masterpiece then you can preview the result. And don't forget that AutoMovie has just created a standard Windows Movie Maker 2.0 project that allows you to edit and re-edit to your heart's content

Applying video effects and transitions

The Storyboard view is a series of boxes separated by smaller rectangles.

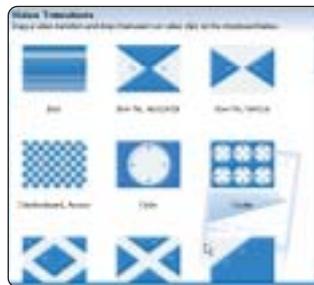
The boxes are containers for clips; drag a clip on to the timeline and it will be dropped into the next available box. You can subsequently reorder the sequence by dragging and dropping clips somewhere else in the Storyboard.

The smaller separator boxes are for transition effects to move from one clip to another and they work in the same way – display the list of transitions available, select one, drag it on the relevant separator and drop it there.

In the bottom lefthand corner of each clip is a star inside a square. This represents any video effect that has been applied to that clip. You can incorporate one or more such effects on any clip in the movie. Again, apply an effect simply by listing those available and dragging your chosen effect on to the star.



1 Set up a sequence of clips in the usual way. To add a transition, select 'View video transitions' in the Edit Movie section of the Movie Tasks pane



2 The Video Transitions view will appear in place of the Collections in the centre pane. Double-click any of the transitions and a preview of the effect will be displayed in the righthand window

3 When you have a transition you like, drag it down to the separator box between two clips. And that's it – you instantly have an transition. Check it out by previewing the movie



4 Video effects are added in much the same way. Click on 'View video effects' in the Edit Movie section of the Movie Tasks pane to see what's available. As with transitions, all the video effects available are shown in the centre pane. Double-click on any of them to see a preview



5 Drag the effect you want on to the target clip and drop it on to the arrow. Now preview the movie to see the finished result

format widely used by other movie editors – and the DV format used by Apple is equally elephantine when it comes to saving files. A minute of video, for example, occupies around 14MB of disk space if you saved it as a WMV file at the highest quality. In DV-AVI format at equivalent quality the same one-minute movie would take up a whopping 178MB.

Getting started

Connect up a DV (digital video) camera and Windows XP will add 'Capture Video using Windows Movie Maker' to the Autoplay dialog. Or you can fire up Windows Movie Maker and select Capture Video from the File menu – this caters for analogue or digital sources. Either way you'll get an excellent Video Capture Wizard. With this you can simply capture the entire video automatically or you can manually select particular segments to bring in.

It's simple to import video clips from your hard drive using the File, Import into Collections option. Not only that, you can import audio and still-image files too. Movie Maker will automatically create separate video clips for easy editing – it detects where new scenes start based on lighting or scenery changes.

Now the fun starts: it's time to edit. The simplest option is to drag some clips from a Collections folder and drop them in sequence on the Storyboard then take a look at the Workshop panels. And don't forget, it's easy to revisit a movie project and change anything.

What you need

- Microsoft Windows XP (Home or Professional edition).
- At least a 600MHz processor, but preferably a 1.5GHz chip.
- 128MB memory as an absolute minimum; 512MB would be better.
- 2GB of hard disk space.
- A DV or analogue video-capture device if you want to grab video from an external source. If you have a DV camcorder then you'll need a FireWire connection or an analogue video capture card which will take both analogue and digital cameras. ■



Unsure of a technical term? Find out exactly what it means in our searchable Glossary which is on the cover disc