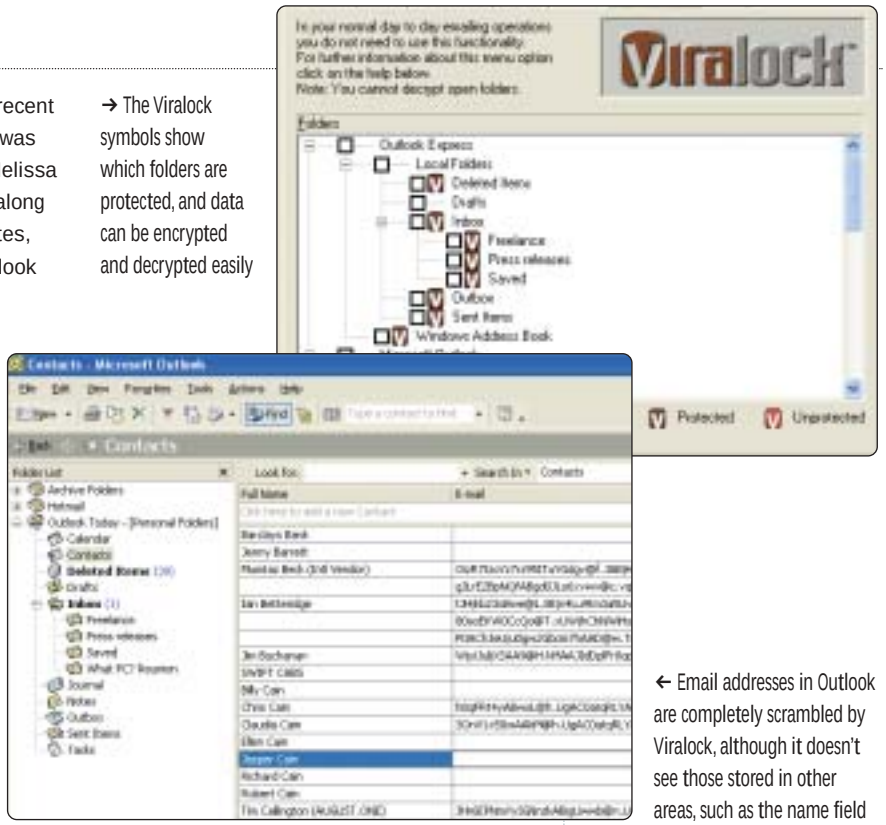
Email encryption package

Sentrybay Viralock



→ The Viralock symbols show which folders are protected, and data can be encrypted and decrypted easily

← Email addresses in Outlook are completely scrambled by Viralock, although it doesn't see those stored in other areas, such as the name field

Of all the viruses to hit PC users in recent years, perhaps the most infamous was Melissa. Though non-destructive, Melissa caused a stir by emailing copies of itself, along with information about pornographic websites, to contacts held in the infected user's Outlook address book. Later, similar strains could forward a document from your hard disk, and target email addresses from any saved messages. One answer to threats like these is to install an antivirus package, such as Norton AntiVirus.

Viralock, however, is designed to be used in conjunction with antivirus software, not instead of it, the program helps prevent the spread of viruses by encrypting all email addresses in your message folders and address book.

Out of sight...

The theory is if a virus can't see any email addresses to use, it can't reproduce itself. While traditional antivirus software generally keeps things out, Viralock keeps them inside. Another benefit to the Viralock approach is that it can stop new, unknown nasties from spreading.

Installation is blissfully simple but can be time-consuming, even on a fairly modern system. To speed things along and keep data safe it's recommended you archive your inbox and other message folders before Viralock works its magic.

The software then proceeds to encrypt your data using a 128bit key and requests a password for later use. Once Viralock is installed you just use your email in the normal way and the software works in the background.

First impressions were good. The email addresses in our Outlook contacts book (it also works with Outlook Express) were completely scrambled, as were those in incoming messages. Even ones inside email messages were unrecognisable.

Clicking the Viralock icon and then entering the password reveals a list of stored addresses, and individual mail folders can be decrypted and re-encrypted with a few mouse clicks.

However, further exploration turned up a few small but irritating flaws. Firstly, only addresses entered in either the email contact or notes field of our contacts were scrambled. Any placed in other fields, such as name, job title or assistant's details, remain unencrypted. We had several of these due to our 'human' filing system and even if current viruses can't, a future strain could easily pick these up.

While this is easy for users to fix with a bit of reorganisation, we also had problems sending emails using Viralock in conjunction with Norton AntiVirus. Most of the time things would go fine but on other occasions messages simply sat in the outbox or caused a timeout error. We expected Viralock to react if we sent attachments it didn't trust, but even plain text mail often refused to leave our outbox.

In addition, having encoded email addresses inside, message text quickly becomes tedious – especially when you need to respond to an embedded link. Constantly having to decrypt and re-encrypt folders is a pain, and doubly so when in some cases the message you're sending refuses to leave the outbox. To its credit, Sentrybay has said it may include a quick message decrypt button in future versions, and this is definitely needed.

Verdict

Viralock is a neat idea and when it works, it works well. However, the utility has its weaknesses and you still need traditional antivirus software. No doubt similar functionality will soon find its way into the established packages like Norton or McAfee. ■

Chris Cain

Sentrybay Viralock

- ☐ Web sales only
- ☐ www.viralock.com
- ☐ Single-user $19.95 (£12), multiuser options available

System requirements

133MHz processor; Windows 98/Me/NT/2000/XP; Outlook 97/98/2000/XP or Outlook Express 5.0 or higher; 64MB of RAM; 8MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

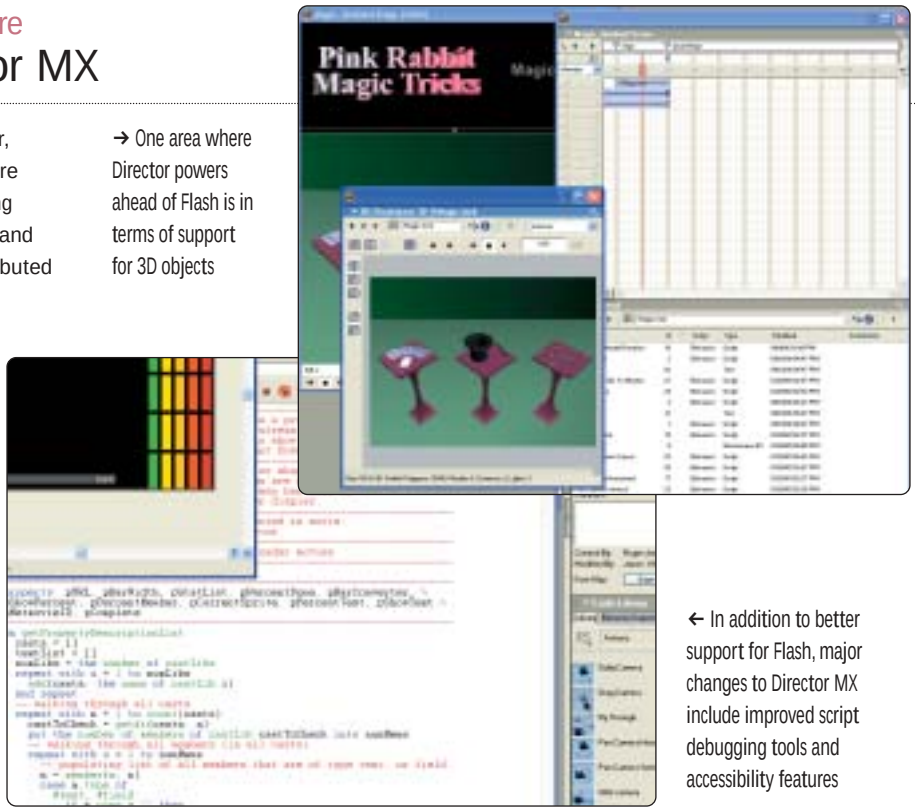
Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Multimedia authoring software

Macromedia Director MX



→ One area where Director powers ahead of Flash is in terms of support for 3D objects

← In addition to better support for Flash, major changes to Director MX include improved script debugging tools and accessibility features

Long before Flash and Dreamweaver, Director was Macromedia's premiere application for multimedia, providing extensive tools for designing animation and interactive programs that could be distributed on CD-ROM and, later, across the web.

The introduction – and roaring success – of Flash has resulted, however, in something of a decline for Director. With the move towards a standard interface across its MX suite (incorporating Flash, Dreamweaver, Freehand and ColdFusion), for a time it appeared that Director was going to be left behind, but the latest version has been integrated into the rest of Macromedia's range.

Unless you use OS X for the Mac, this release will probably seem much less substantial than version 8.5, which introduced a widely adopted 3D engine, although those who regularly use Macromedia products will welcome its improvements to the workspace.

Flash integration

Leaving interface changes aside, perhaps the biggest differences in the latest release concentrate on integration with Flash. At a first glance, this draws you up against Director's main problem – interactivity – particularly across the web. Flash is ubiquitous, offers small file sizes for downloads and, since the improvements to ActionScript in version 5.0, has moved towards becoming a usable tool for application development rather than just animation – all at a fraction of the cost of Director.

Flash is far from perfect, however. While the MX release included tools for video, these are still inferior to those for Director, as is support for bitmap as opposed to vector images. In addition, Macromedia appears to be considering Director as a support for back-end control of advanced features in Flash, providing features such as copies of Flash Communications Server and Flash Remoting MX that are useful for video conferencing and live control of Flash movies via ColdFusion or Microsoft's .Net server.

Beyond Flash, however, your reasons for upgrade will boil down to two things: do you need to provide multimedia applications on disc for the new Macintosh operating system as well as Windows, and how important are the (considerable) improvements to Director's interface to bring it in line with other MX programs? If you are using version 8.5 and are not particularly interested in using Director with Flash, or in producing applications for Mac, the changes introduced in the last release will probably be sufficient for your requirements.

That said, changes to the interface should not be dismissed if you do a great deal of work with this program. Anyone who uses Director MX is unlikely to wish to return to an earlier release, and Macromedia's general work on interface design looks set to pay real dividends for multimedia professionals. These are also precisely the sort of people who are likely to use both Director and Flash for different applications, so integration between the two (as well as the rest of the MX range) will be greatly appreciated.

Verdict

Director still remains the best of breed for producing interactive multimedia for distribution on disc (DVD and CD) as well as online, with a price to match. However, the very success of Flash means that anyone seeking to enter into multimedia development will consider the cheaper program first. If you need 3D or expect a lot of video and image work on disc, choose Director – but for everything else Flash is generally the better option. ■

Jason Whittaker

Macromedia Director MX

- ☐ Macromedia: 01344 458 600
- ☐ www.macromedia.com/uk
- ☐ £899 ex VAT

System requirements

300MHz Pentium III; Windows 98 SE/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 100MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

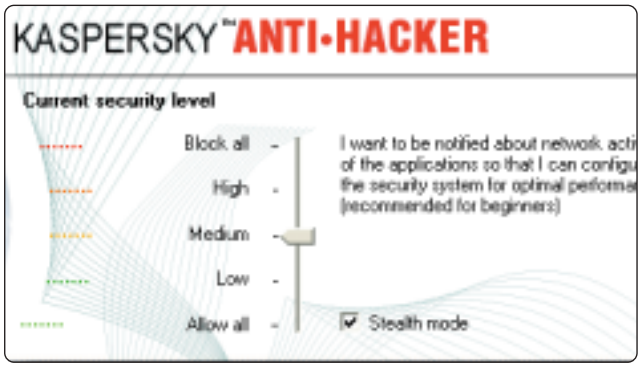
Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Internet security

Kaspersky Anti-Hacker



↑ Adjusting Anti-Hacker's level of protection is as easy as it gets

Designed to keep unwanted noses out of your system while it's online, Anti-Hacker monitors the connection between your PC and the internet. If it spots anything unscheduled going on it stops it, alerting the user to what's happening in the process. Installation is simple and, after a restart, the program is in place.

As well as watching for incoming assaults, Anti-Hacker pops up whenever an application requests web access. Defining which programs can or can't go online is relatively straightforward, and there are set guides for types of access – web browser, instant messenger and so on. At first these continued pop-ups can be annoying but no more so than with similar programs.

Though Anti-Hacker can have beginners protected in a matter of minutes, there are also some nifty features for advanced users. First you can see exactly which ports are being used by each program, and you can track the IP addresses you are talking to at any given point. Unwanted connections can also be broken with ease and there's a log to keep track of blocked attempts at communication.

Sadly, there's one big problem – while it appeared to work fine with our ethernet router, Anti-Hacker admits to currently being incompatible with ADSL modems. That's too big a slice of the market to miss out on, and we can only assume the problem with be fixed soon.

Verdict

Kaspersky Anti-Hacker provides a user friendly and fairly flexible firewall. However, given the incompatibility with ADSL modems and the fact that ZoneLabs' ZoneAlarm can be downloaded for free, it's hard to recommend buying it. ■

Chris Cain

Kaspersky Anti-Hacker

- ☐ Kaspersky: 0870 011 3461
- ☐ www.kaspersky.com
- ☐ £24.82 ex VAT

System requirements

133MHz Pentium PC (150MHz for 95/Me; 300MHz for XP); Windows 95B/98/Me/2000/XP and NT 4.0 with service pack 6 and WinSock2 preinstalled; 32MB RAM (64MB Windows 2000; 128MB XP); 50MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

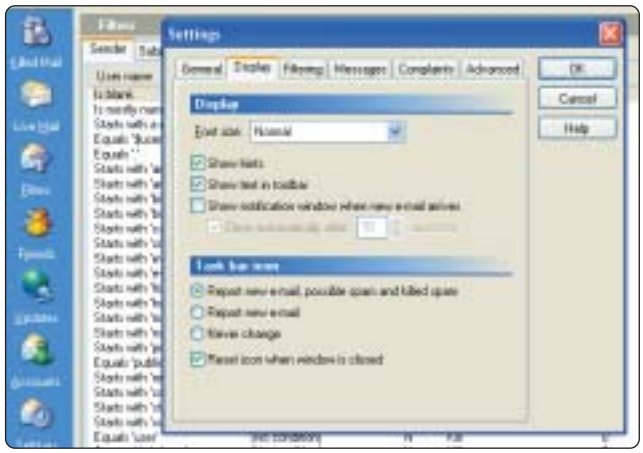
Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Anti-spam software

McAfee SpamKiller 4.0



↑ SpamKiller provides a wide range of options for filtering unwanted email

When McAfee purchased the shareware application SpamKiller, it added a veteran piece of anti-spam software to its arsenal. McAfee has continued to develop SpamKiller and has also dropped the price to £17, making this a recommended addition for anyone's internet security toolkit.

SpamKiller has thousands of preconfigured filters to block out many of the most common bulk email abusers, but it's simple to add your rules for excluding spam. The main problem in terms of ease of use is that you have to use SpamKiller as an external program and customise your email client so that it does not automatically retrieve mail. A real bonus, however, is that the program also filters Hotmail and MSN messages.

Filtered messages are stored in a Killed Mail folder, where you can restore wanted addresses to a Friends list. Particularly convenient is the ability to send error messages to spammers automatically (so that they think the address is invalid) as well as complaints to ISPs responsible for forwarding spam. Version 4.0 lets you read HTML email while blocking scripts and images – as the program works with your server, this saves time downloading large unwanted files.

Verdict

Overall SpamKiller's extremely good at its task. Spam that does get through can be identified for future reference, and it could be just what you need to make virtually unusable email accounts efficient once more.

The only real drawback is that the program does not provide the complete ease of use that full integration with an email client would deliver. ■

Jason Whittaker

McAfee SpamKiller 4.0

- ☐ McAfee: 0800 092 7160
- ☐ www.mcafee-at-home.com
- ☐ £17 ex VAT

System requirements

100MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 40MB hard disk space; POP3 or Mapi email account.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

CD and DVD authoring software

Roxio Easy CD & DVD Creator 6.0

Authoring software used to be just about getting data on to a blank CD, but now, thanks to the rise of DVD burners and online music, you need an entire suite of different applications to take full advantage of your media.

Roxio's CD & DVD Creator is just that, with tools for creating music CDs, video DVDs and photo CDs, as well as any other kind of data disc you can imagine. This edition adds tons of features and three new applications, some of which are here as a result of Roxio's takeover of MGI last year.

There's a new interface for Drag-to-Disc, a utility which sits on your desktop and allows you to drag files directly on to it, so you can treat blank CDs and DVDs as if they were giant floppy disks.

If you want to do anything more complicated than just copying files from your desktop to a disc, you'll need to open the main Easy CD & DVD Creator suite, and choose one of the five applications on offer.

← The main menu provides easy access to all the applications within the Easy CD & DVD Creator 6.0 suite

The first is Disc Copier, a simple application for making backup copies of whole discs. The second is AudioCentral, where you can store and play back your music and burn it to CD.

*£28 a month standard. Free connection offer ends 31/03/03. Standard price £60. Standard equipment costs £80. Subject to availability & survey. BT line required. Minimum 12 month term from connection. Other conditions apply.

Picture discs

PhotoSuite provides an easy way to transfer your digital photo albums to a video CD, as well as simple editing, organising and printing.

One of three new applications is DVD Builder, which allows you to capture video from your DV camcorder or import footage stored on your hard drive. It can also create Video CDs that can be played in most consumer DVD players.

Creator Classic is the principal data authoring package. Similar in most ways to its predecessor, it now includes the ability to save a large project across multiple discs, and you can use the same project window regardless of whether the target is a CD or a DVD.

When you open any of the applications, the main interface menu shrinks to the top of the screen so you can get to any of the other elements of the suite. The menu lets you access a number of extras including Roxio Player, a compact toolbar-style media player; Roxio Retrieve, an application for keeping track of files from a multiple disc project; a link to Roxio's website and Roxio Label Creator.

→ Creator Classic provides a full-featured interface for creating data discs. The software automatically divides up a project if it's too big to fit on a single disc

Verdict

This amazingly versatile package covers every media creation requirement we can think of, yet Roxio has kept the software easy to use so it won't be too daunting for inexperienced users. It's excellent value for money too. ■

Alex Katz

Easy CD & DVD Creator 6.0

- ☐ Roxio: 01980 278 100
- ☐ www.roxio.de/english
- ☐ £42.54 ex VAT

System requirements

200MHz Pentium or faster for audio; 800MHz Pentium III or faster for Mpeg capture; 1.6GHz Pentium III or faster for realtime capture from DV; Windows 98 SE or later; 128MB RAM; 815MB hard disk space.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

With BT Broadband, downloading files is really quick (even the larger kind).

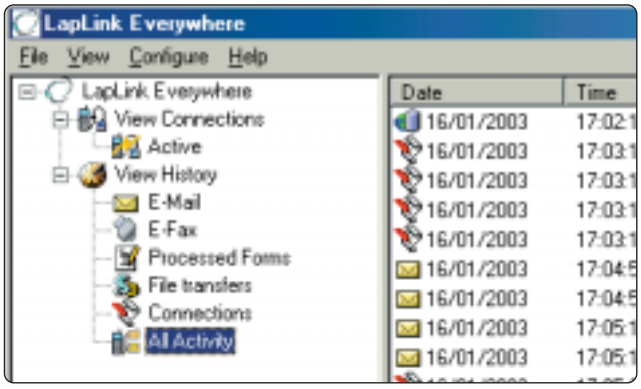
■ Now you can download emails and web pages up to ten times faster than you could with a normal dial-up Internet connection. BT Broadband uses your existing BT line. Unlimited use costs just £27 a month with Direct Debit, which is included on your telephone bill. And if you sign up before March 31st, connection is free of charge and you'll get £30 off your Broadband modem.

Bringing you and big fat files together.

bt.com/btbroadband 0800 800 060

Remote access utility

LapLink Everywhere



↑ LapLink Everywhere's Control Panel shows you exactly what's going on

LapLink Everywhere lets you access email and files from up to three PCs via any browser-enabled device, be it Mac or PC, PDA or Smartphone. The software itself is free but the service isn't – there's a monthly fee of $9.95 (£6), or slightly less if you pay annually upfront.

LLE is also available in the £149 LapLink Everywhere Deluxe suite which includes 12 months of LapLink Everywhere service, LapLink Gold and the new Remote Network Accelerator.

The download from MyLapLink.com is a mere 6MB and installs on the host PC, which must have a broadband internet connection and be running Outlook or Outlook Express. LLE is loaded at bootup and runs in the background.

To connect to your host PC, you simply visit www.mylaplink.com and log in. You can then choose which of the three PCs to connect to. It doesn't actually open applications on the remote PC, but opens the data file and renders it in HTML, formatted for the client device in use. LapLink's SpeedSync allows you to perform fast file transfers to and from the host PC. You can also send 'e-faxes' (another subscription service) and access SQL databases but that's as far as the remote control goes.

LLE provides good security by encrypting and routing the data traffic through 128bit SSL servers. But you do have to constantly leave the remote PC on which could be risky. However, it's easy to use: accessing my Outlook Express inbox from an Orange SPV Smartphone went smoothly.

Verdict

LapLink Everywhere is easy to use and offers secure remote access to email, contacts, calendar and files, cleverly using standard web protocols. It's cheap to run, too. However, if you want full remote control or if you don't use Outlook or Outlook Express, you'll need the LapLink Everywhere Deluxe offering. ■

Roger Gann

LapLink Everywhere

- ☐ LapLink: 0870 241 0983
- ☐ www.laplink.com
- ☐ $9.95 (£6) per month ex VAT

System requirements

Windows 9x/NT/2000/XP; Outlook or Outlook Express; 5MB disk space; broadband internet connection.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Internet monitoring software

McAfee Parental Controls 1.0

↑ The administrator's panel provides simple means to set up access controls

Previously released as part of its Internet Security Suite, McAfee's Parental Controls is now available as a standalone product in updated form, offering protection for kids when they're surfing, using chatrooms or instant messaging.

The software provides a list of restricted words and sites, but an administrator (in other words a parent) can add other taboo sites, regardless of content, and enter additional keywords for filtering. The latter can be slightly tricky, as well-intentioned and useful sites can be inadvertently banned, but it's an important feature as database-only controls can quickly become outdated.

You can import other ratings such as those supported by RSAC (the Recreational Software Advisory Council) and Icra (the Internet Content Rating Association), and the program's three presets (administrator, adult and restricted) make it fairly easy to use. But in terms of blocking inappropriate websites it appears to offer little over the competition.

The tools for controlling access to certain programs, protecting private data and enabling an administrator to specify times when restricted users can go online are well worth the money, however.

Verdict

Parental Controls is one of the most comprehensive applications of its type. The main problem is that it can all too easily block out useful sites although this is also true of its main rivals, Cybersitter and Net Nanny.

Of less concern, but also worth bearing in mind, is that the program has been designed to work with Internet Explorer, and though it can work with some versions of Netscape Navigator it isn't as well integrated. ■

Jason Whittaker

Parental Controls 1.0

- ☐ McAfee: 0800 092 7160
- ☐ www.mcafee-at-home.com
- ☐ £17 ex VAT

System requirements

100MHz Pentium; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP; 32MB RAM; 40MB hard disk space; Internet Explorer 4.01 or later.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Video-editing software

Magix Video Deluxe 2.0 Plus

We normally associate FastTrak with low-cost hobby software, so at nearly £60 Magix Video Deluxe 2.0 Plus is a more ambitious product for the company. If your hobby involves filming and editing your own videos then this could be right up your street. The three-disc set covers all areas of the desktop video-editing process from capturing footage to trimming clips, tweaking audio and outputting finished work to an appropriate format such as VideoCD, DVD, DV tape, VHS or even an email or website.

A clip in time

However complete the software selection may be, you still need the right hardware to use Video Deluxe Plus properly. To transfer your footage from camcorder to PC, DV users will need a FireWire port while analogue users will have to investigate the slightly more complex world of TV tuner cards and video digitising boards.

Unfortunately neither is included in the package, so we cannot vouch for the application's ease of setup with every third-party capture device available. On the bright side, Video Deluxe Plus has some relatively low system requirements.

Capturing clips is relatively painless. With your video source connected to your PC, it boils down to a simple matter of hitting play and then clicking the record button just below Video Deluxe Plus' preview window. The process is similar whether you use an analogue or digital playback source. While this is not problematic, it is imprecise and DV/FireWire users may want to experiment with the program's scene detection capabilities to split the footage into manageable chunks.

With all your footage captured to disk, it's time to get down to cutting together your movie. The simplistic storyboard style of editing is a great place for beginners to start, while the timeline approach affords more precise control over your project.

Each of the 32 tracks in the timeline can be used for video, audio, transitions, titles and graphics. There are plenty of effects and transitions to play with, plus a fairly simple titling tool to add credits, subtitles and captions to your work.

Every cut, splice, effect or graphic you create can be previewed as you go and, once you're happy with your efforts, there are a number of output options available.

↑ Video Deluxe 2.0 Plus comes with its own media jukebox program for playing music and videos

Magix Video Deluxe 2.0 Plus

- ☐ FastTrak: 01923 495 496
- ☐ www.fasttrak.co.uk/magix
- ☐ £51 ex VAT

System requirements

400MHz Pentium II; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 2GB+ hard disk space; 4MB graphics card; FireWire card; analogue video capture card or TV tuner.

Ease of use

Features

Value for money

Overall rating

Verdict

Nothing flashy like 'real-time' editing here, just a solid set of desktop cutting room and media-creation tools. Video Deluxe 2.0 Plus is competitively priced but still falls between the cracks. Beginners might feel safer with Pinnacle Studio, while experts will hanker after something more powerful. ■

James Bennett