

Video to DVD – Part 3

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To say that Microsoft's *Movie Maker* is a free application – provided you have a PC with Windows XP – it's remarkably good value! Also, as we've seen in Parts 1 and 2, it's very user-friendly and has many functions we require in a basic, non-linear video editing application, with some particularly effective built-in transitions and effects.

But some people are never satisfied and, as promised, in this third part we'll look at an alternative application which has some valuable, additional features.

Back in 19.1 p51, we mentioned that the obsolescent *VideoDesk* from Irlam, with its two video timelines, was easily able to superimpose one video scene over another for cutaways or 'noddies' (explained in 11.12 p36).

Movie Maker doesn't have this facility and we sorely miss it, so we set out to look for something which does. Within our budget, Ulead's **VideoStudio 9** [now at v10] was the only one which has this particular feature (others have it but are *much* more expensive). So that's what we got – £35 from PC World – and here's our impressions of it.

If you're reasonably familiar with *Movie Maker*, you won't find running *VideoStudio* a problem, greatly helped by the 220-page, printed User's Guide. From the spec, we knew that the version 9 had some new features which we'd never previously experienced. These turned out to be much more extensive yet far easier to use than anticipated, so no problems there.

However, whilst it would be churlish to criticise *VideoStudio*, we've found a couple of areas where it might be said it's marginally less user-friendly than *Movie Maker*. So, purely for completeness, let's get these out of the way first:

– **Immediacy.** With *Movie Maker*, clicking on either **Play** button – one in the timeline area, the other under the preview window – immediately results in the selected clip being replayed from the current position of the timeline cursor.

With *VideoStudio*, there's always a few moments wait (hourglass showing) before play commences. So editing doesn't have quite the same immediacy of *Movie Maker*.

Reportedly this isn't so evident in earlier versions, and whether or not all the additional bells and whistles in v9 mean the application is teetering on the edge of becoming unwieldy isn't clear. But it's something to be aware of.

– **File import.** *Movie Maker* runs in a window, taking up most of the screen area but leaving access to the desktop **My Computer** icon, so digging into the directory structure and importing video clips, images and audio files, by drag-and-drop, is straightforward.

VideoStudio runs in full-screen mode, so the **My Computer** icon is not accessible. However, many of the menu functions such as **File** or **Edit** have sub-menu options to **Insert Video/Image/Audio**, either into the library or onto the timeline. Clicking on the sub-menu will open the most recently accessed directory viewer so, during an editing session, there's a fair chance this may take you directly to the directory containing source clips or images.

Additional features

By 'Additional features', we mean those which exist in *VideoStudio* v9 but which are not in *Movie Maker* v5.1, nor necessarily in earlier versions of *VideoStudio*.

The following is certainly not an exhaustive list as we've yet to try out many of the bells and whistles deep in the inner workings of *VideoStudio*.

Importing digital video files

A major bonus during the Capture phase is that VideoStudio can access a DVD in an internal or plug-in drive and download the contents as *digital* files, which can then be saved as source material and dragged-and-dropped into VideoStudio (or Movie Maker) as required.

Capture speed will depend on the DVD drive performance, so 4× real time is typical.

Clearly this saves the trouble and probable expense of having to procure and instal some sort of digitiser, plug a DVD player into it, replay the DVD (in real time) and capture the material that way.

It also retains the top-quality digital format throughout, rather than necessarily having to resort to digital-analogue-digital conversion, resulting in at least some loss of quality.

It may require a modicum of pre-planning though. Files on DVDs are listed by title and individual chapters, and multiple selections can be made – but there are no clues as to what video material is on which track!

This can soon be resolved by running the DVD through something like *Windows Media Player* and noting which titles/chapters you need. Or you can simply download the full disc contents and sort them out within VideoStudio, as each file (chapter) will have a thumbnail image of the first frame.

Picture-in-a-picture

For editing purposes, VideoStudio has a single, main video timeline but, immediately below it, is another video timeline captioned *Overlay*, onto which either still images or

movie clips can be dropped. As on the main timeline, still images can be dragged out to extend their duration, and clips can be moved, trimmed, etc, in the normal manner.

Using this feature results in whatever is on the *Overlay* line being superimposed over the main video. If desired, the overlay can be faded in and out.

In its default condition, this ‘picture-in-a-picture’ effect (PIP) is superimposed centrally, at quarter-screen size, although it can be moved by select-dragging, and/or re-sized by dragging any of the eight side/corner select boxes. If set, the aspect ratio can be locked, or the shape can be distorted (rhomboid).

Although termed ‘picture-in-a-picture’, one or both objects can of course be movies, so the example shown in Fig 1 might better be termed ‘movie-in-a-movie’.

The PIP frame can be given a border and, if desired, given an animation; e.g. fly in from top-right; hang around for 5 secs; fly away bottom-left.



Fig 1 Picture-in-a-picture (both video clips)

Cutaways & ‘noddies’

The function we specifically bought VideoStudio for was the ability to superimpose a *full-screen* image or clip over the main video, producing a cutaway effect.

This is a very simple sub-set of the PIP Overlay function just explained. We merely have to drag-and-drop the ‘noddy shot’ onto the **Overlay** timeline, drag out the boxes into the opposite corners so that it fills the screen (aspect ratio locked) – and that’s it... How simple can that be? Worth every penny.

Chroma key

Another new function is the sort of thing regularly seen on TV where just a ‘talking head’ is superimposed over the main video, as in weather forecasts or signing for the deaf (e.g. Fig 2 – snapshot of a signed soap).



Fig 2 Example use of chroma key

We had a very hazy understanding that this is achieved by recording the object to be superimposed in front of a plain blue background and that, somehow, this blue ‘key’ colour is then made transparent, leaving visible just the talking-head, as an overlay.

As it turned out, we were generally on the right lines – but we’d absolutely no inkling just how extraordinarily competent and flexible VideoStudio is in providing this feature, and how user-friendly it is.

First, capture your clip or static image to form the overlay. In VideoStudio, it doesn’t *have* to be with a blue background; any key colour can be made transparent, the only limitation is that there must be a reasonable colour contrast between that and the foreground image. So for a ‘talking head’, don’t use a flesh-toned background!

Nor does the key have to be a perfectly constant colour, as VideoStudio can handle quite a wide range of shades within a particular colour band, which is controllable. Even deep shadows or highlights are not normally a problem. So, for example, you could film your subject in front of a painted wall (either matt or silk will do, but good natural or flood/flash lighting will give best results). Alternatively, a background of single-colour curtains might be OK, even if draped.

To show just how easy the feature is to embody, let’s use the supplied movie clip of ‘Miss VideoStudio 2005’ as our smiley subject (Fig 3).



Fig 3 Example overlay (movie clip)

In this example, the background happens to be green, but note there are significant variations due to the shadows.

Now we superimpose the clip over the main movie by dropping it onto the **Overlay** track, using the same PIP procedure as before.

We move it from its default, central position to where we want it (partially off-screen if necessary), and re-scale it from the default quarter-frame size, as required. In this example, this is almost up to full-screen, you'll see why in a moment (Fig 4).



Fig 4 Positioning & sizing the overlay

Finally, the exceptionally clever bit. All we need to do is to click on **Mask & Chroma Key** to get into the chroma key control window and then click on **Apply overlay options** to apply the transparent mask (Fig 5).



Fig 5 Application of transparent mask

Without further intervention, VideoStudio looks at the overlay clip or image, sees that the outlying area consists of reasonably close shades of green, whips away the studio backdrop and leaves our smiley person

seemingly standing on a sunlit station platform. The purists will say the shadows are all wrong (don't expect to keep everyone happy all of the time) but the resultant effects in Fig 5 compare well with those in Fig 2.

Bearing in mind the overlay is a short movie clip, we can run the animated sequence and see what happens. The result is self-evident – very impressive and extremely user-friendly (Fig 6). Not surprisingly though, rendering this lot can take some time.



Fig 6 Movie clip overlay

There are many other ways of using this function, too many to cover here. But an occasionally useful one is to invert the effect so that, for example, an overlay clip of curtains opening will reveal the main video, running in the background; the key colour mask here being *inside* the overlay, rather than outside.

Audio track handling

Movie Maker's audio handling is rather basic, a potential problem being that the main audio channel is tied to the main video. So if you cut out and delete an intermediate video clip, there may well be an evident and unnatural break in the audio.

VideoStudio has more audio channels and is far more flexible; for example, the audio can be separated from its related video track, which solves the above problem.

Rendering in MPEG 2 format

When you come to save (render) the edited video file, VideoStudio's Save options are more extensive than Movie Maker's and, crucially, include the MPEG 2 format needed for DVD-burning.

By default, VideoStudio also captures source movie files in MPEG 2 format so, in principle, rendering times can be very much shorter than with Movie Maker (offset by the need to process the more complex effects such as PIPs or the chroma key feature).

Burning DVDs

At this final stage, VideoStudio is far more proficient than Movie Maker. In burning our own DVDs, as yet, we've barely scratched the surface of the full repertoire of functions, but the following are considerable bonuses:

- Setting up a 'front-end' menu and the complete disc burning process are done by – and within – VideoStudio, so separate DVD-burning application software isn't required, and there's a much wider choice of template styles.

- Assuming you've saved the video file in MPEG 2 format, no re-formatting and minimal number-crunching is required before the disc is burnt. Compared with the time taken by the third-party, DVD-burning application to convert Movie Maker's output files from AVI or WMV to MPEG 2, the saving is enormous. For this reason alone, much longer movies can be considered, opening the door to capturing complete, live or recorded TV programmes (for example), editing out trailers, adverts, etc, and (re-)recording them onto DVD.

- The 1-hour recording limit of third-party DVD-burning software is avoided. Among other quality v time formats, VideoStudio supports HQ (1-hour 'high quality'), SP (2-hour 'standard play') and LP (3-hour 'long play'; cf 4 hours on stand-alone 'consumer' DVD recorders).

'Auto' slideshows

Although to date we've concentrated on movies and video clips, both Movie Maker and VideoStudio are great for setting up 'slideshows', on DVD, for viewing on TV – and boring your friends and relations silly. There's no faffing about with a projector, a screen or boxes of grubby, upside-down and wrong-way-round slides, *and* you can leave the lights on so your victims can't nod off in the dark.

Setting up a slideshow in Movie Maker is generally a trivial task. Firstly, the default Picture duration and Transition duration can be set up in the Tools-Options page. We find a nice compromise is 12 seconds per picture, of which the last 2 seconds is for a transition to the next. And if you wish to ramble on while a particular piccy is displayed, pressing Pause on the DVD player does the trick.

Loading the piccies into Movie Maker is simply a case of selecting them as a batch, drag-and-dropping them into the Collections pane, and thence onto the timeline. They're automatically arranged, in alpha-numerical order, each lasting for the pre-set default time.

The only other thing is to add the intermediate transitions which again can be done by drag-and-drop, and is arguably more easily done with Show storyboard selected. But it can be a pain repeating this, (*nnn*-1) times, for an *nnn*-slide show...

VideoStudio makes it much easier as, in the Tools-Preferences menus, you can pre-select the default picture and transition durations, as before, but also select a default transition style, such as a simple A->B fade (Fx-Fade).

So to set up a slideshow using VideoStudio, all you then have to do is to sort out your piccies; renumber them into alpha-numeric order if you wish; select them as a batch; drag-and-drop them onto the main timeline; wait a few moments – and that's it. Done!

(Re-)Enter RISC OS

In Part 2, we looked at how RISC OS applications can greatly help in preparing quality titles which have more ‘zip’ and, if superimposed over a still image, can be more legible than those prepared using Movie Maker’s built-in titling facility.

This doesn’t necessarily apply with VideoStudio as it has a far better built-in setup. However, we shouldn’t dismiss RISC OS utilities such as Cerilica’s *Insignia* for helping with the job.

But having just talked about displaying still images as slideshows – maybe a bunch of JPEGs from a digital camera – there’s still potentially a *lot* of preparatory work to be done before cobbling them together within either Movie Maker or VideoStudio, and again this is where RISC OS utilities really do come into their own for:

- previewing the exposures.
- discarding the duff ones and selecting images for your slideshow.
- getting them into the preferred alpha-numerical order.
- correcting the gamma, brightness, etc.
- batch re-scaling the landscape-format images for ‘shimmer’-free display (768×576 pixels; see 17.9 p47).
- batch rotating the portrait-format images through 90° and re-scaling them to 432×576 pixels (17.9 p49).
- doing any necessary cropping (17.9 p50).

Try doing all that in Windows... Clearly this is a job for RISC OS apps such as *Swift JPEG*, *DPIngScan*, *FSI_Batch* and *Jcut*.

And if the occasion suits, perhaps with aged aunts in your audience, you can cunningly increase the *Aaahhhh* factor by adding a mask (Fig 7), using Alan Wickham’s ‘fading mask generation’ programme (18.11 p35) or Rob Davison’s *Variations* (18.12 p41).



Fig 7 Upping the Aaahhhh factor!

The end bit

Once again you’ll need to see the illustrations at full size and animated to get the best effect, especially for the use of the PIP and chroma key functions, so we’ve knocked up a few example movie files for you to run and which accompany this article.

We aim to use Part 4 as a vehicle to pick up on a couple of points we forgot to include in earlier parts, and deal with various queries received from readers.

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