ROM

Newsletter of the Guildford PC User Group

Editor's Bit

ROM is issued six-times a year to members of the Guildford PC User Group
All Contributions to the Editor Tony Hawes (details on page 2)

AGM, Subs & a Free Gift

Time again for the Annual General Meeting of the Group. Committee members will explain their past years' activities and the treasurer will present the accounts. Committee members of the Guildford PC User Group will stand down and an election of a new committee will take place.

If you have any points that you think should be raised at the AGM, please let Tony your chairman know before the meeting (you'll find his contact details on page 2).

This year members present on the night who pay their subs will be in with a chance to win a mobile phone or two donated by Doro (the most expensive is listed at £149.95) plus some other hardware and software bargains. All you need to do is pay your sub on the night, collect a ticket from your chairman and see whether it's a lucky one — all totally free! So come on, pay your sub and win a valuable gift!

As the AGM is usually a relatively painless affair we will follow immediately with a demonstration of Lexmark's new and revolutionary Genesis S815 multifunction printer/scanner that as well as having striking good looks is simple to use. What's new about the Genesis is that it stands vertically, as opposed to horizontally as other printers do. So when you want to copy or scan a document, you lift the front of the case forward and drop the paper in rather than lay it horizontally on a on a glass platen. The image is scanned by a 10-megapixel camera sensor which enables the machine to scan much faster than most scanners and printers.

Thanks to our secretary Laurence Fenn for his coverage of recent events which you'll find below.

Remember your editor welcomes contributions that he can publish in ROM covering your personal familiarity with computer software or hardware — he would love to hear from you — thanks.

Summer Break

We start our summer break after this month's meeting, but we will be back in September and finger's crossed will have some new and exciting hardware on show. So enjoy your hols and see you in the autumn.

Secretary's Notes — Recent Meetings

Monday 14th February 2011 - Is a Mac Better? In our first meeting after the Christmas break, John Childs talked about Apple Mac computers. He had a 15 inch MacBook Pro Intel Core Duo laptop (starting price £1530) but his pride and joy was a 27 inch iMac quad core desktop (custom made, £1950). Both run OS X (Snow Leopard), based on a Unix core, which was upgraded for around £40 for five computers. The iMac uses a wireless keyboard and mouse (with no physical buttons on top, but functionally they are there) and has

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ROM is now only available as a full-colour .pdf download from the Group web page at:
www.guildfordpcusergroup.co.uk

NEXT MEETING — Monday 13th June 2011 at 7.45 p.m.

AGM Followed by a demo of Lexmark's new Genesis S815 multifunction scanner/printer.

AGM (with a free draw for some expensive and desirable goodies) followed by a demonstration of Lexmark's new and revolutionary Genesis S815 multifunction printer/scanner. Your editor reckons that the scans can sometimes be better than the originals, so with luck an interesting and fascinating display is promised.

Spread the word and please bring a friend — coffee, tea & chocolate biscuits are free.

Meetings are held on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7.45pm at the Stoughton Youth Club and Community Centre (opposite "The Royal" — Pub) Worplesdon Road (A322), Guildford.

Forthcoming Meetings

Monday 11th July—Summer Break. No meeting
Monday 8th August—Summer Break. No meeting.
Monday 12th September 2011 at 7.45 p.m.
    Final confirmation still awaited, but possibly demo of a high-end laptop with Intel's "Sandy-Bridge" processor and 3D capabilities. Also possible is a demo of Kingston's latest SSD hard drive.
Monday 10th October 2011 at 7.45 p.m.
    In arrangement

(Continued from page 1)

a built in DVD drive and several USB ports around the back. The built in speakers are better than the ones you get on a laptop but the monitor only comes in a gloss format whereas the laptop can have a matt finish. John showed the ins and outs of the OS and the bundled programs, and although Apple has their version of Office/Works, called iWorks (£60), he uses the freely available Open Office. Microsoft Office is available in Mac format, as are many programs. John uses Photoshop CS5 (£530) for his photography work and Adobe Lightroom to organise his photos. The latter costs £200, but Apple has a program called Aperture which does the same sort of thing, and costs £44 from their iStore.

John showed that you can dual boot between the Mac OS and Windows XP using Boot Camp, but with VMWare Fusion 3 (around £70) you can run a Windows OS in a window, much like Microsoft's Virtual PC. He also explained how you don't really need anti virus software as system files are protected and the OS is more secure, but as the majority of computers are PC based, hackers haven't bothered to write a virus for the Mac — yet! There's no denying that Macs look very good and the OS is slick, but the hardware is expensive. A PC equivalent of John's iMac is a Sigma Plus all in one, £960 from Novatech. This has a 24 inch monitor, half the memory (4GB), dual core (not quad core), wireless keyboard and mouse, Windows 7 Home Premium and a touch screen (something Apple doesn't do with their large monitors). It doesn't look as good at John's Mac, but costs less than half of the price. Build quality for Macs is second to none; with a good design and a operating system that really works (I'm quoting from John here!). An interesting evening

Monday 14th March 2011 - Hallmark Card Studio Deluxe.

Tony gave a brief demonstration of Hallmark's latest Card Studio software. It can create all types of cards, calendars, invitations, etc. from its 16,000 graphics, which took over an hour to install. He showed how easy it was to pick a design and customise the card, adding your own text and pictures. The initial designs are "a bit cheesy and Americanised" to quote Tony, but look good when printed out.

You can use special greeting card paper with envelopes, which you can get from places like W H Smiths, although they only seem to stock A4 packs which fold to A5. You can get a package of Hallmark Card Studio Deluxe and 20 greeting card paper sheets and envelopes for about £24 from Amazon, or just the software for £15. Tony did remark on how the software seemed a little sluggish on his laptop (and that's not due to the speed of the laptop itself), but despite this it can produce quality cards that are a lot cheaper than shop bought ones

Monday 11th April 2011 - Xbox 360 and Kinect

The meeting was a little different to normal, as Tony's grandchildren, Ben and Sam came along to demonstrate the Kinect add on for the Xbox 360. This is a camera, microphone and infrared sensor that

allows you to play games on the Xbox 360 by just moving your body. Unlike the Wii and the PS3 controllers you don't have to hold anything. The Kinect does need to be calibrated before you play any

game, but this is fairly quick to do. Ben started with hang-gliding on the Motion Sports game. You also have soccer, boxing, skiing, and American football and his brother Sam then showed the penalty shoot out where you take a penalty and then become the goalkeeper. Ben then showed the downhill slalom skiing which he was quite good at as he had only just the day before come back from a real skiing holiday!

The evening was finished off with Fifa 2010, one of the older Xbox 360 games which unfortunately does not work with the Kinect. Instead you use the wireless controller which has a multitude of buttons to control your player on screen and enable him to pass and kick. The boys certainly know their games (and their football) and are competitive. As they had to get home it wasn't possible for the other club members to try any of the games but it showed how easy it was to play the games with the

Kinect device. The sensor costs around £100 and comes with one game, or you can get it as part of a bundle with the Xbox 360 for £290.

Monday 9th May 2011 - Creating Music on your PC

This will be a bit odd as I'm writing a review of the talk I gave at the club meeting! Laurence has been creating music since 1984, and showed some of his earlier work on a BBC Micro emulator. He followed with a history of the sound card, playing the same music on each of the devices. After clarifying some of the terms used he showed the software you can use to create music, from Dance eJay (£20), n-Track Studio (£40) to Reason 5 (£226). After a demo of a piece using a classical track as it's basis in n-Track Studio, he showed how easy it was to record your music using a MIDI keyboard (in this case a Casio CZ-101), a £6 MIDI to USB adapter and the software. By recording a

few bars on a loop using quantising, you can easily build up a song and change the sounds with a few clicks. He also showed the more traditional sheet music way to record your songs, using Sibelius 6 and PhotoScore (to scan in the music).

The hardware needed, a MIDI adapter and a MIDI keyboard is fairly cheap, at around £86 for the two, but the expensive part is the software itself. Most of them have a trial version available to download but there a few freeware music programs if you search for them. Getting additional sounds, like VST plug-ins or ReFill packs can cost a fair bit as well. For example, the Abbey Road Keyboards ReFill for Reason, which gives you vintage sounds from the famous recording studios, costs around £130. Below are some mp3 files of the songs featured in the talk (you'll need to visit the Group web page to download them from the link).

- Chuckie B (MIDI File)
- Chuckie B (arranged in Reason 5)
- Dance (MIDI File)
- Dance (arranged in Reason 5)
- T.I.M. - Palladio Film (created in n-Track Studio)
- T.I.M. - Cantaloop (example of Soundfonts)
- T.I.M. - Sphere Two (example of Dance eJay

If you have QuickTime installed, you can compare the difference between its own synthesiser and the Microsoft one. Play a MIDI file in the QuickTime player and then play the same file in Media Player and see if you can hear the difference.

An informative and enjoyable evening

Lexmark Genesis All-in-One Printer

Lexmark has launched the latest addition to its award-winning line up of Web-connected, all-in-one (AIO) inkjet printers— the Lexmark Genesis.

In 2009 Lexmark introduced a line of inkjet AIOs that delivered powerful and robust printing technology designed for today's wireless, Web-connected workplace. The Lexmark Genesis, built on the same inkjet platform, extends the line and targets professionals, small business and home office customers who are looking for a device that has innovative technology, is highly productive and is also bold and stylish.

"From its unique, sleek upright design to the broad range of SmartSolutions, the Lexmark Genesis is truly an innovative, one-of-a-kind product in today's AIO market," said Paul Rooke, Lexmark's president and chief executive officer. "Most importantly, after a quick and easy setup, busy professionals will immediately experience its time-saving instant preview,

quick copies and unmatched speed when scanning content to the cloud."

Through its built-in innovative Flash Scan camera technology, which boasts a 10-megapixel imaging sensor, the Lexmark Genesis allows for an instant preview on the 4.3-inch colour touch screen. The Flash Scan technology also delivers blazing scanning speeds that enable the AIO to transfer a page from 'document to digital' in as few as three seconds.

In addition to its innovative Flash Scan

technology, the Lexmark Genesis comes equipped with sophisticated features and functionality, including the 4.3-inch capacitive colour touch screen that is also available on Lexmark's other award-winning AIOs, the Platinum, Pinnacle and Interact. This touch screen serves as the gateway to Web-connected technology allowing busy professionals to access Lexmark's SmartSolutions site, including well-known, cloud-based applications such as Evernote, TripIt, Facebook and Twitter.

The Lexmark Genesis also features the company's Vizix print technology, which uses separate ink cartridges to enable greater speed and produces high quality print output at an economical replacement cost for customers.

Other key features include Wireless-N (IEEE 802.11n) for expanded coverage, built-in two-sided printing, and a 3-year warranty with lifetime phone support.

We'll be having a hands-on demo of the Genesis S815 at the June meeting.

Magix Rescue Your Vinyl & Tapes

Reviewed by Laurence Fenn

This is version 3 of the software that allows to you transfer your vinyl records and cassette tapes to your PC. It presumes of course that you have a turntable and cassette deck to play the originals. All the extra cables you need are supplied with the software, namely a twin phono to twin phono cable, a phono to 3.5mm stereo jack cable, a twin phono to headphone adapter, and a phono pre amp to plug in-between a turntable and the audio in of your PC. Actually, before I continue, I should correct the first sentence as the software is MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab 17 deluxe. They include the pre amp and cables as an extra and then call it Rescue Your Vinyl & Tapes version 3.

After installing the software I set about transferring some vinyl. Now as I was using my laptop which does not have a line in socket (only a headphone and microphone in) I decided to use an external SoundBlaster USB device which gave me all the inputs I needed. If I installed the software on my main desktop PC I could have used the inputs on my case. My turntable is an ION TTUSB, which plugs into a USB port and negates having to use the pre amp and software, as it comes with the open source Audacity software, but it also has a phono output, as would a regular turntable, so I
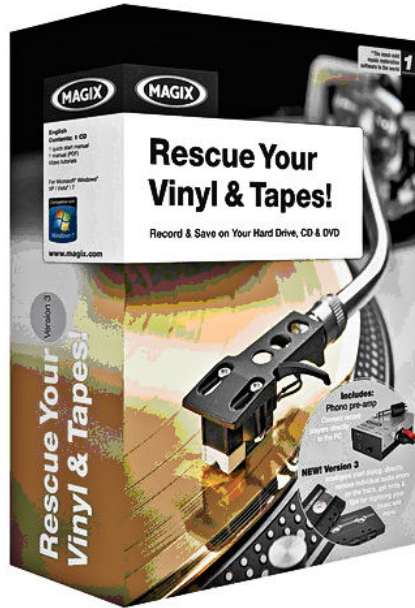
used that output for the purpose of this review.

Pre-amp

I spent ten minutes trying to hear the audio from the turntable, changing settings for the audio driver and mixer, until I remembered that I hadn't switched on the pre amp supplied! This is powered by a PP3 battery (supplied) but it can also run from a DC 9 volt connection, although no adapter is included. The black on/off

switch is on the side which is coloured black and there is no indication that the unit is on, so you have to remember to turn the device off when you are finished. An LED may have taken up a bit more power but you would know when the pre amp was on if it was built in.

Initial Options

When you first start the program you can choose from four main options, Restore vinyl sound, Clean tape sound, Optimise voice and audio book recordings or Edit digital file. This changes the filters available on the Cleaning and Mastering pages, but doesn't actually change anything else. Recording a record had a few problems. The input signal was not very high, despite going through the pre amp. The software constantly reported a low volume and I had the input on the mixer set to the highest setting. After I stopped the recording the software offered to normalise the file. Whether this was because it knew the sound was too low or it did this by default I don't know. The second bug I found was that the software tries to auto detect the tracks and puts a marker in the file, but when I saved the recording as a wav file the first marker was reported faulty when I loaded into SoundForge. The recording was fine, and the software did not report a fault when I loaded the recording back later, but obvi-
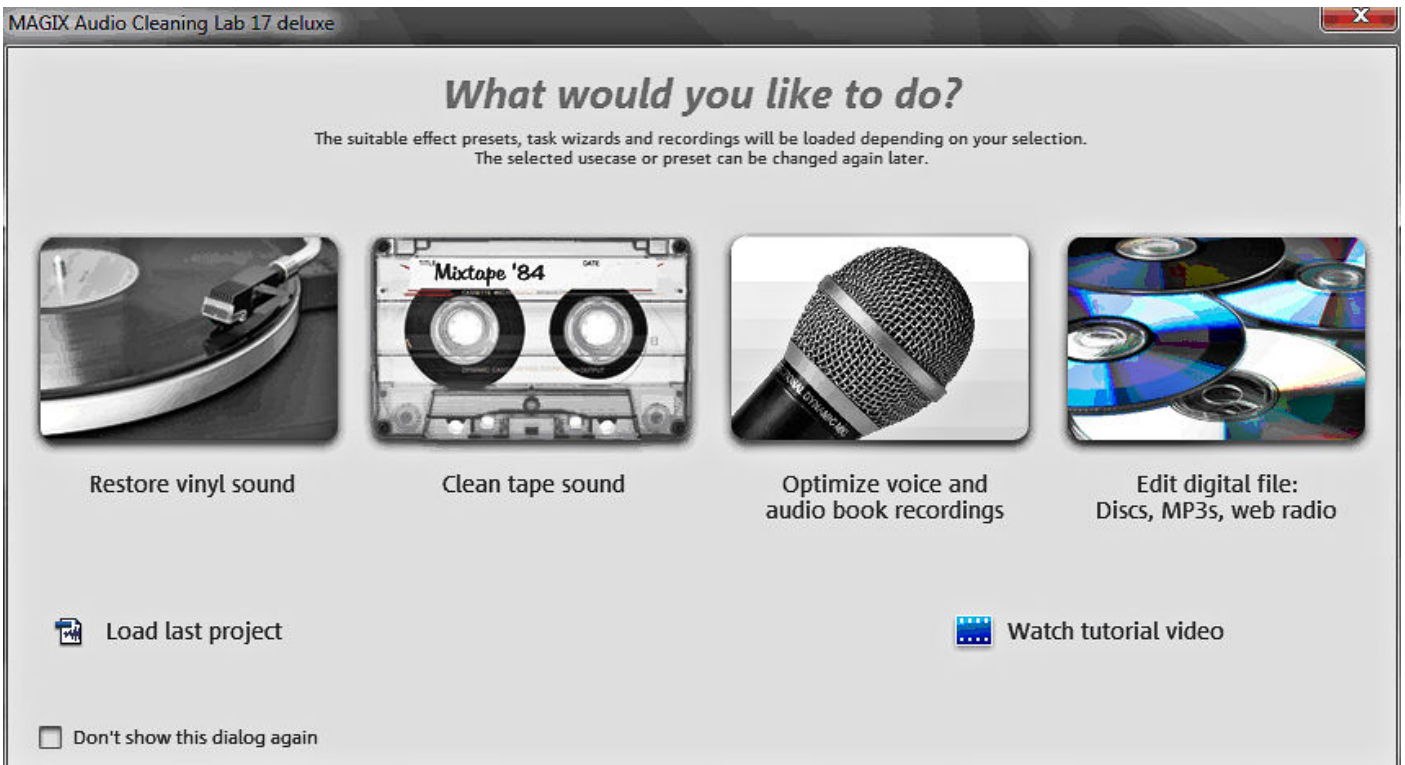
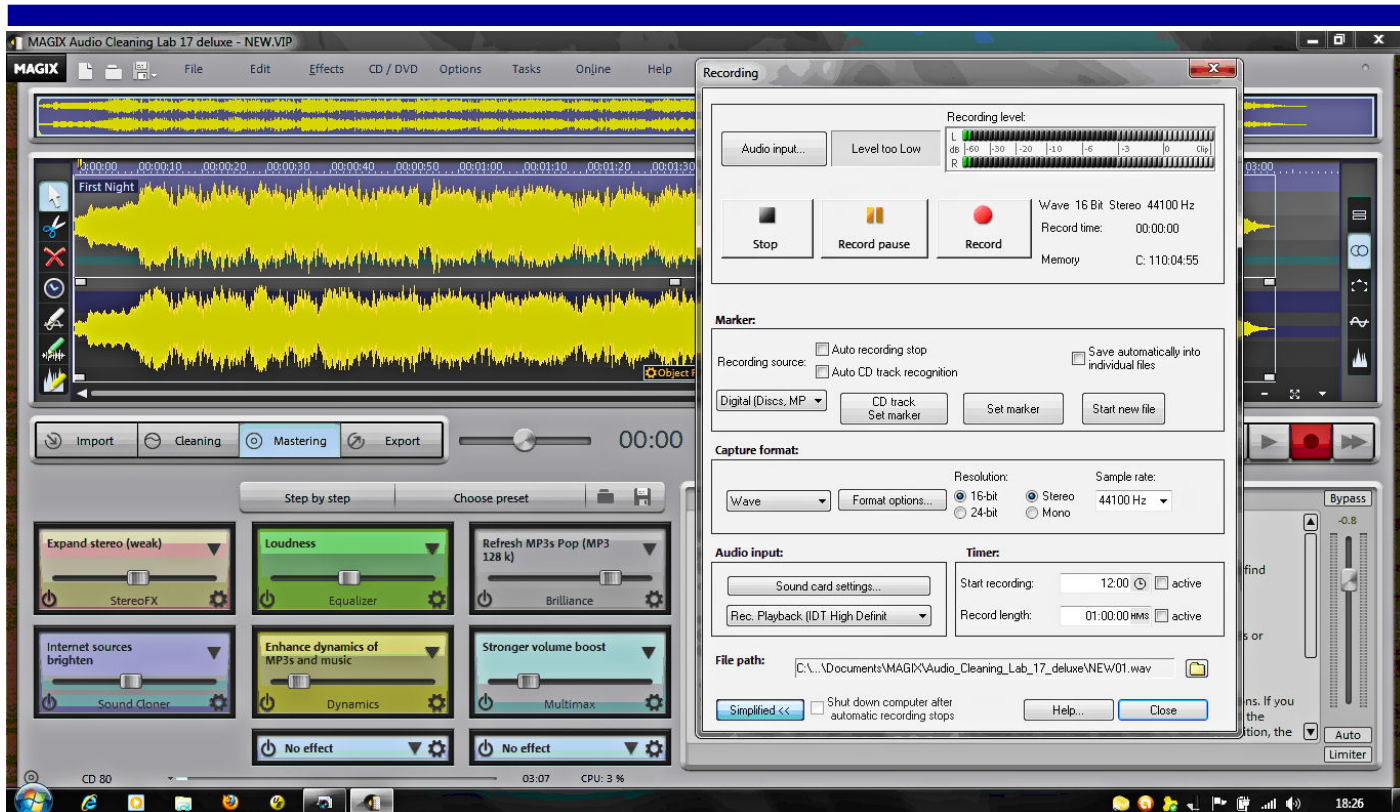Figure 1: Choose from four main options

Figure 2: Filters to reduce pop and crackle.

(Continued from page 4)

ously something is not saved correctly. You can choose to save the tracks as separate files according to the markers, but I had problems with this as the last track always seemed to be missing. I only noticed this later and I ended up having to record one album several times as I didn't notice at the time.

Filters

The filters to reduce crackle and scratches can be adjusted, but some cause distortion in the file which I didn't notice when setting the filter. Now it could have been the small speakers in my laptop, but I didn't notice any distortion when I was applying the filter. Only when I saved the file and played it back later did I notice the problem, but that time I was playing the file on my main PC with proper speakers. Some features were difficult to find, like the resampling function used when recording an album at 45rpm instead of 33rpm. This saves time, but the recording is quicker and higher pitched than the original. I had to search high and low to find the function, which slows the recording down and makes sure the pitch is correct. This is also useful if you want to transfer old 78s, as most turntables don't play at that speed. In that case the function speeds the recording up, but despite all the filtering available you will struggle to get a good recording, as these older records are much more susceptible to scratches and no amount of filtering is going to make them sound like new.

Cassette Deck

Plugging in a cassette deck means you don't have the volume problem as you would use the headphone socket on the device and adjust the volume control. Tape hiss and low treble can be adjusted as can any humming that may be present. The six modules are DeClicker, DeCrackler, DeClipper, DeNoiser, DeHisser and Spectral Cleaning. The interface is a bit confusing and when you are recording the pop up window gets in the way of the display of the sound. One of the features in this pop up window does not work properly. The Auto Recording stop is supposed to stop recording after a number of seconds of silence. If you left the software to record one side of an album it should stop at the end preventing a long gap of nothing. When I used this setting it did not stop recording, probably because of the crackles of the vinyl. As you cannot set the silence level or how long it takes before deciding to stop recording the feature was useless for me. The manual says it would stop after 16 seconds which is far too long.

Information Box

The information box on the bottom right of the screen is handy when you first use the program, as you get information about the feature you click on when you select it on the left hand side. Once you know how to use them you don't need to have this window up, but you cannot minimise it as it is built into the interface. There is no content sensitive help in any of the dia-

logs, like the pop up recording dialog, which you would get with a standard interface (a question mark near the top right of the dialog which allows you to click on an item to get help with that particular setting).

Waveform

One of the filters allow you to redraw the waveform, the DeClipper, and this is very good, but rather than redrawing the waveform it would be simpler to turn the volume down (either on the player or using the mixer input) and re-record the track. Maybe it was the way the interface is set up but I didn't find it very intuitive to use. There are far too many options to alter the recording and I don't think I would use many of them. If I was recording a vinyl record there may be some clicks or surface noise but nothing else to change. With a recording from a tape, there may be some hiss or treble to add, and possibly some change to the stereo balance. I've used SoundForge for several years and Audacity since I got my turntable and found them much easier to use. Even the help file was not indexed properly, as searching for items like 45rpm, to find the resampling feature, came up with no results.

Pricing

The software, pre amp and cables in this bundle have a RRP of £59.99 but are available from Amazon.co.uk for £42.99.

AVID Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate Collection (Version 15)
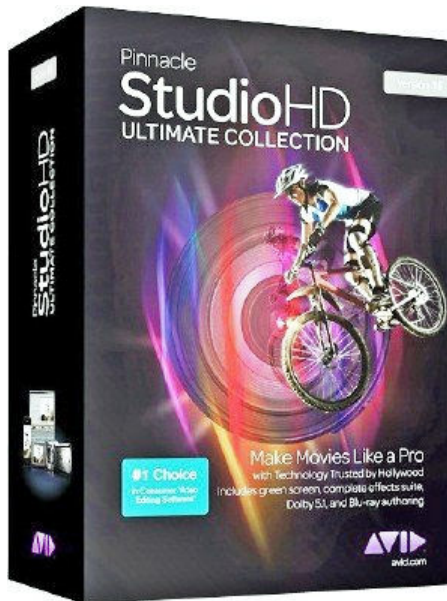
Reviewed by Tony Hawes

Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate Collection (Version 15) was released a couple of months ago and as AVID's press release says about the new version:

"Pinnacle Studio is the top choice in consumer video editing software and is used by more than 12 million customers worldwide. Designed for entry-level video editing customers, Pinnacle Studio version 15 allows users to easily create HD movies and share them directly on YouTube, DVD, the Web and more. New features in Pinnacle Studio version 15 include:

- Archive/Restore feature: Ensures customers' creations are safe in the event of an unexpected computer malfunction by allowing them to conveniently back up all project data in a single location or transfer projects between multiple PCs.
- Intel Processor Optimisation: Enhances the editing experience with improved playback speed and performance through optimisation for the latest generations of Intel processors.
- Expanded format support: Provides customers with the ability to share movies on the platform of their choice with support for today's most popular export formats, including DivX Plus HD, YouTube HD, QuickTime HD, and AVCHD Lite.
- More included content: Equips consumers with professional-quality content to create Hollywood-style productions. Each version of Pinnacle Studio includes more than 1800 built-in effects, titles, transitions and other content. Pinnacle Studio Ultimate and Pinnacle Studio Ultimate Collection also include professional-grade Red Giant plug-ins.

The Pinnacle Studio version 15 family of consumer video editing software is available in three unique packages:

1. **Pinnacle Studio HD**: Includes over 1800 effects, titles, transitions and other content - almost double the amount of content as the previous version of Pinnacle Studio.
2. **Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate:** Includes all Studio HD features plus Dolby Digital 5.1 encoding, Blu-ray authoring, keyframable effects and Motion Titler. Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate includes more than 2000 effects, titles, transitions and other content, including two premium Red Giant plug-ins for Hollywood-style visual effects.
3. **Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate Collection:** Includes all Studio HD Ultimate features plus green screen for creating chroma-key effects. Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate Collection includes more than 2200 effects, titles, transitions and other content, including six premium Red Giant plug-ins for Hollywood-style visual effects.

Pricing and Availability: Pinnacle Studio version 15 family pricing begins at £59.95 for Pinnacle Studio HD, £79.95 for Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate and £99.95 for Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate Collection."

Introduction

As a regular user of Pinnacle's Studio video editing program going back as far as 2002 with Pinnacle Studio 8 and the various upgrades since, I am always keen to see what Pinnacle have to offer in their regular upgrades, which this year in 2011 reaches version 15.

As with the earlier versions, with its ease of use Studio has always been aimed at novices, but hidden away are all the features necessary to allow those with video editing aspirations to advance way beyond the novice stage. The launch of Studio 15 whetted my appetite to see what's new — and as you'll see I was not disappointed.

Video Editing — the Basics

Basically you use editing to manipulate your video footage to produce a final presentation quality video. Editing allows you to trim, order, add audio (narration, background music and appropriate sound effects), add titles, add transitions, add still photos and process your clips. With practice good editing can transform dull and uninteresting footage into an interesting final result.

Edits are not done randomly. Both theory and practical know-how are necessary, the process involves dedication and attention to detail; be prepared to spend a lot of time editing your video. If really dedicated it often takes up to one hour of work to put

together a couple of minutes of good completed footage, but with experience this ratio reduces dramatically. The more you work with video and learn to edit, the more you'll understand why a 100-minute Hollywood film can often take a whole year to produce, shoot and edit. However for basic home movie editing the time necessary to put together a worthwhile video depends on how much you want to put into the project and this depends on three vital factors:

1. The length of the original footage
2. Extras to be added to the project such as audio, titles, transitions, still photos etc
3. The planned length of your finished movie

One thing I noticed is that assembling and editing can be an addictive process; I find I always want to improve on what I've already done and the time involved in editing can go through the roof as you strive for that finished masterpiece!

Video Editing Techniques — What's Involved

1. **Import**: Import source video material – your "raw footage" – to your PC hard drive. Possible sources include analogue videotape (8mm, VHS etc.), digital videotape (HDV, DV, Digital8), memory cards and other file-based media including from previously recorded DVDs or files saved to your Hard Disk, and finally live video from a video camera, camcorder or webcam.
2. **Edit:** Arrange your video material as wanted by reordering scenes and discarding unwanted footage. Add transitions, titles, still pictures and graphics, sounds and DVD menus and supplementary audio, such as sound effects and background music. For DVD, Blu-ray Disc and VCD authoring, create interactive menus that give your audience a customised viewing experience. Edit mode is where you do most of your work in Studio.
3. **Make Movie**: When your project is complete, generate a finished movie in your choice of format and storage medium: tape, VCD, S-VCD, DVD, AVI, MPEG, RealVideo, Windows Media, YouTube and more. When you have burnt your movie play the burnt video on your domestic DVD Player or give it to friends or relatives for them to play at home.

In Use — Pinnacle Studio 15

When you first run Pinnacle Studio 15 the intro screen gives you the option of opening the program or running an expert tutorial which shows how to use the program.

Once you open the program the Pinnacle interface is simple. The Album view is a place for loading video, still images and audio files — the basic assets of your project which are

collected into separate tab-selected folders before integrating them into your projects. There are three tabs:

1. **Import**: the new title for what used to be the Capture tab. As mentioned above Import is where you import your video footage for editing.
2. **Edit:** Edit accesses the editing screen
3. **Make Movie**: The Make Movie tab is last and is used once you've finished the edit and are ready to burn your project to DVD, CD, Tape or File.

The Album screen is where the editing takes place and shows the imported clips which Studio has automatically split using scene detection or if imported from a DV camera show where I've pressed the record button and appear as thumbnails at the top left. Top right is the preview screen of the currently running clip and below is the Storyboard showing clips I've dragged down from the imported clips at the top. (Figs. 1 & 2).

The Album

Having imported your video from the source (camcorder or file), Studio presents your imported clips in the Album. The Al-bum is an integral component of Studio's interface: The Album also contains tools for transitions, titles, and menu-effects. The Album isn't a true bin or library, Studio's project file only records the file locations of the assets used and accesses these as necessary to compile your video. The Album simply displays the files available in the currently selected project.

In my case I've imported eight minutes of holiday footage which I'd previously edited and burnt to DVD. As it wasn't imported from my camera the individual clips show where Studio has detected large changes in colour or brightness in adjacent frames to determine where to split the video into usable clips. This method isn't foolproof, but I'm more than happy to let Studio produce a large number of splits at fairly arbitrary locations. Always when you import your footage into Studio there will be many clips that include scenes you don't want as well as the ones you want to use in your video. Trimming this material down into usable clips needs a firm resolve; discard any obviously flawed parts and shots that simply make no visual sense. Don't aim for final quality at this point. The goal here is to discard the obviously bad shots and reduce the video to usable clips.

Transitions

Transitions are effects placed between video clips to help smooth the transition from one scene to another. In films or on TV, for example, when the screen fades to black at the end of a dramatic scene, then fades back in from black to the next scene, it's a fade transition. When two scenes blend together for a moment before the second scene appears clearly, it's a dissolve (Fig. 5). The most frequent transition is a cut, which is actually the absence of a transition, or the instantaneous jump from the last frame of the first clip to the first frame of the second. Studio provides a large collection of transitions, most are useful, others very pretty to look at but not the sort of thing you'd use in everyday life — they're just too flashy. Try them by all means, but reflect for a moment, when did you last see such a transition being used, whether in a Hollywood movie or a TV program on the box?

Video Effects

Studio has two classes of video effects: curative effects, which fix underlying problems with the video and artistic effects, which modify or enhance the footage (Fig 4). Curative filters include brightness and colour ad-

Figure 1: StoryBoard view. Here I've imported my footage from a previously 'burnt' DVD. If I wanted to import from my camcorder I'd click the button (yellow arrow).

Figure 2: Imported clips — Storyboard view. I'm going to edit have been dragged from the album view to the Storyboard.

Figure 3: Here I'm importing footage from my DV Camcorder. Controls at the bottom of the picture control the camcorder via the FireWire port on the camcorder. Green screen background shows I'm using it for a chroma-key shot.
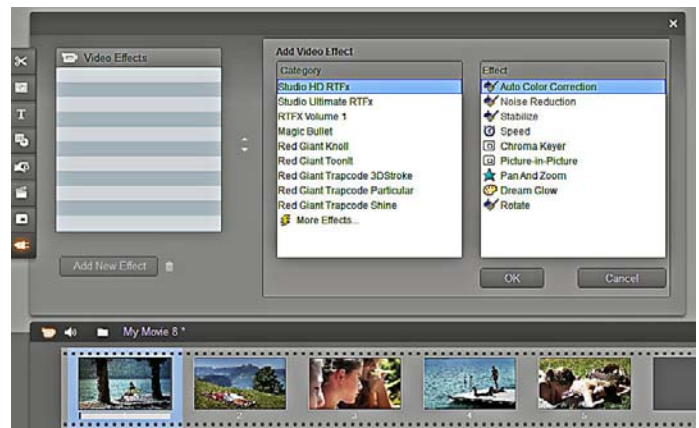

Figure 4: Clicking any of the clips in the Storyboard brings up the menu for adding video effects whether for 'curative' effects like automatically correcting the colour, or using one of the many 'artistic' effects to improve or enhance your movie.
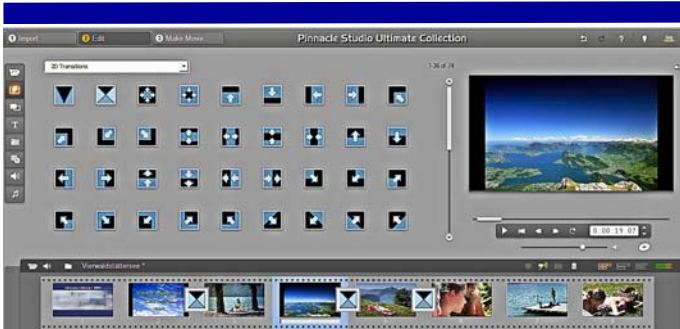
Figure 5: Here I've added transitions between clips, in this case a fade-out and fade-in for a smooth transition between adjacent clips.
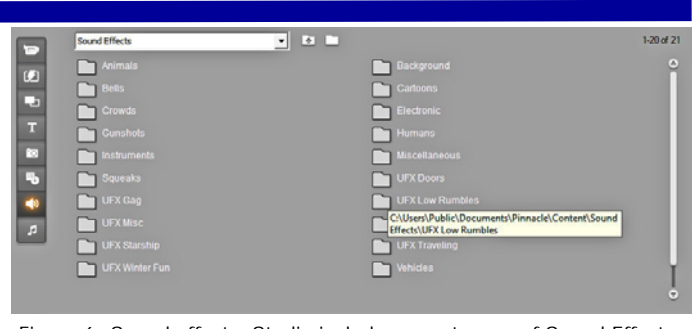

Figure 6: Sound effects. Studio includes a vast array of Sound Effect files for adding to your video. Clicking on the folder icons shown opens folders with a multitude of effects to include in your video.

Figure 7: TimeLine view. The TimeLine is where you fine-tune your editing. This shows the Audio Tracks. I've reduced the volume of my original up-beat music accompaniment track (just below the clips) and added a more soothing mp3 music file from my music library to the background music track (at the bottom).

Figure 8: Using the Audio Effects menu it's possible using the master effects control to manipulate your audio tracks to suit your particular needs, including positioning the stereo image to where you want it.

(Continued from page 7)

justments, while the many artistic enhancements include the ability to convert your video to black and white so it looks like an old film, or create slow-motion or fast-motion effects.

Auto Colour Correction. I've always considered Studio's Auto Colour Correction a major plus feature and if Auto Colour Correction can't fix a poorly coloured video, the RTFX supplied White Balance feature works really well.

Pinnacle Studio HD Ultimate Collection v.15 includes a comprehensive collection of professional effects, titles, transitions, and more e.g.

Red Giant Effects

- **Knoll Light Factory**: Light and lens flares from master effects guru John Knoll (he was the visual effects supervisor for Star Wars, Pirates of the Caribbean, Avatar etc.)
- **Toonlt**: Turn video into animation
- **Trapcode Shine:** Light ray effects
- **Particular:** 3D smoke, explosion, rain effects
- **Magic Bullet Looks**: Change the look of your movie
- **Trapcode 3D Stroke**: Animation and 3D effects

- **Creative Pack Vol. 1:** 32 DVD menus, 91 montage templates, and 28 titles, including: Cool Trees and Leafy Greens, Floral and Botanical, Hawaii, '50s modern, Islands, Red Retro, and many more.
- **Premium Pack Vol. 2**: 54 DVD menu templates, 81 titles, and 79 sound effects with themes including: Baby, Kids, Winter, Travel, and more.
- **Hollywood FX Volumes 1-3**: Over 1000 unique, professional-level transitions and effects with themes including: Waves, Sports, Space, Sci-Fi, Holiday, Weddings, Comics and Cartoons, Pirates, Secret Agents, Tropical Vacation, Historical Architecture, and many more. Also includes HFX Editor for creating custom effects.

Studio's Title Editor

Studio's Title Editor can quickly and easily produce attractive titles. For all video productions, DVD or otherwise, the Title Editor creates full-screen titles, positioned on the Video track, that introduce the movie or new sections, or show final credits. Plus you can create DVD menus and buttons, merging video editing and DVD authoring into one interface and simplifying DVD production immensely The Title Editor also produces the menus needed to navigate through and around your DVD

titles. The Title Editor can produce Overlay titles, positioned on the Title Overlay track, which display over your videos. These are useful for adding logos or descriptions to enhance the video.

Audio

Many viewers will tolerate grainy, postage-stamp-size video, but let the audio break once or twice, and satisfaction quickly wanes. That's why streaming technologies from Apple, Microsoft, and Real Networks all prioritise the delivery of audio over video.

Studio offers three audio tracks:

1. Original audio
2. Narration
3. Background music.

There is also a tool for ripping audio CD tracks and recording narration. However, Studio's audio feature set is special in two respects. First it comes with "ScoreFitter" which produces "themed" background music of any customisable length, there is also a collection of .wav files for special sound effects such as bells, animals, humans, vehicles, music accompaniments and so forth.

If these sound effects are not to your liking, the program makes it very easy to grab audio files from an audio CD or any audio files on your hard drive. Also excellent is Studio's

(Continued from page 8)

Volume tool, a real-time mixer that lets you customise audio volume on all tracks simultaneously. Together, these tools let you easily create and integrate professional-quality audio into your productions (Fig. 8).

Creating Digital Files

When you click the Make Movie tab, Studio has four options for creating digital files: Disc (DVDs), File, Tape or Web (YouTube or Yahoo! Video).

As most compilations are burnt to DVD the DVD tab offers the following record options to: AVCHD, Blu-ray Disc, HD DVD, DVD, SVCD and VCD.

DVD Authoring

The problem with video is that it can seemingly take forever to create a 30-minute video from your four hours of holiday tapes, and then you still can't quickly find that delightful bit where little Sally fell off her bike while being pushed by brother Johnny.

The beauty of DVD is that once you've created a DVD menu it's pretty much infinitely linkable, allowing you to find the most important scenes quickly. And, though you can dress your videos up as much as you like, you can also choose to break them into scenes (or let scene detection do the work for you) and create a menu with links to the good parts. It's a dream: simple, fast, and better than VHS quality, with tape-like playback simplicity. Just open up the drive and pop the disc in. With DVD recordable drives and media prices dropping every time you buy your daily newspaper, it's also temptingly inexpensive. (Fig. 9).

Conclusions

Pinnacle StudioHD 15 Ultimate is an improvement over its predecessors, especially v.14 which was widely regarded as not particularly good and my first use of version 15 went well — which means that so far I'm impressed.

What I Like: Like its predecessors Studio 15 is a relatively easy to use video editing program with a host of features that work in most circumstances. Also useful are the bundled extras like the three Hollywood FX Packs which include more than 1,000 themed effects and transitions (e.g. for Sports, Sci-Fi, Weddings, Cartoons) more than enough for the most hardened of video makers.

New export options which include AVCHD and Blu-ray Disc etc. Plus of course for compilations earmarked for uploading to YouTube.

Although there is no printed manual there is a short "Quick Install Guide" to get you up and running.

The new Archive/Restore feature, which allows you to bundle up a project and its entire associated media (which may be scattered in various locations around your hard disk) and put it in one place with the

Figure 9: The penultimate action before burning your finished video to DVD is to create 'Chapters' i.e. links to various parts of your DVD, this means it's not necessary to plough through the whole DVD to find a particular scene. Just click on the Chapter link (which you can title accordingly) to go straight to that particular scene. You can set it to return to the top menu after viewing if you wish, and it's pretty well infinitely linkable (see above).

Figure 10. A large green sheet is supplied with the Ultimate Collection for the times when you need to take chroma-key shots. See also Fig. 3 on page six.

ability to back it up is very useful.

Speed: As an experiment I timed how long it took to edit my 8 – minute long holiday video; it took precisely 29-minutes — an outstanding achievement!

The Ultimate Collection version comes with a large green sheet for when you want to do Chroma-key shots — if you haven't tried chroma key it's worth having a go (see Figs. 3 and 10).

What I don't like: The absence of a printed manual is a major let-down, but this follows on from v.14 which also didn't have a printed manual (V.12 had an excellent and profusely illustrated 320-page manual), but printed manuals are no longer in fashion or are supplied with software nowadays, so the user is forced to rely on a very impractical PDF file "manual." To be fair there is a short "Quick Install Guide" to get you up and running, but this is no substitute for a proper manual.

Unless you're a dedicated professional or semi-professional videographer, you'll find some of the included third-party "extras" over the top with long and sometimes frustrating learning curves, but persevere and you'll learn to manage the various features reasonably well.

Technical Requirements

- Windows 7, Windows Vista (SP2), or Windows XP (SP3)
- Intel Pentium or AMD Athlon 1.8 GHz (2.4 GHz or higher recommended)
- Intel Core Quad 2.66 GHz, Intel Core i5 or i7 1.06 GHz or higher required for AVCHD.
- 1 GB system memory recommended, 2 GB required for AVCHD
- DirectX 9 or 10 compatible graphics card with 64 MB (128 MB or higher recommended) (256 MB required for HD and AVCHD)
- DirectX 9 (or higher) compatible sound card
- 5.7 GB of disk space

Pinnacle Studio 15 Versions

1. Pinnacle Studio 15 HD. £52.99.
2. Pinnacle Studio 15 Ultimate £70.70 (This adds 54 DVD menu templates, 81 titles, and 79 sound effects as well as a bunch of attractive professional-level effects from Red Giant Software).
3. Pinnacle Studio Ultimate Collection 15 (as reviewed) £82.99. (The Ultimate Collection offers all that is in the two other versions plus more Red Giant effects and a further 32 DVD menus, 91 montage templates and 28 titles. Plus a green sheet for the time when you want to use it for chroma-key shots).

(Prices as at the beginning of June 2011 from Amazon.co.uk).

Adobe Photoshop Elements 9

Reviewed by John Childs ARPS CPAGB
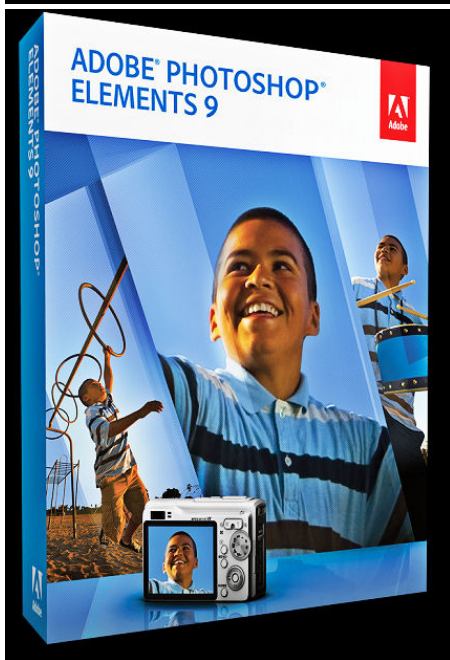
Introduction

This program has a long history, and has now reached version 9. It is a cut-down version of Photoshop (which is the larger, more expensive version used by professionals) and is available in both Windows and Mac versions. It used to be that only the Windows version included an image organiser, presumably on the basis that the Mac operating system has a perfectly decent one built in (iPhoto), whereas the Windows version does not. However, reviewers have always commented on this omission from the Mac version, so maybe Adobe got fed up reading this time and again!

Knowing of my expertise using Photoshop the editor suggested I used the Mac version of Elements for this review with the opportunity to compare it with its bigger brother Photoshop. I must state where I stand regarding Elements. I use Photoshop and Lightroom to organise and manipulate my images. These, though, would be unnecessarily complicated for all but advanced amateurs and professionals. Picasa 3 would suit those looking for a basic solution to their image organising and manipulation needs, especially as it is free, whilst iPhoto on the Mac (also free) would also be a good recommendation. Elements 9 or Corel PaintShop Pro X3 would be my recommendation for more advanced photographers, whilst for those with plenty of money, I would have said a little while ago that the class leaders, Photoshop CS5 and LightRoom 3 cannot be beaten. However, Apple Aperture (a program that does broadly what Adobe LightRoom does) is now available for download from the App Store for £44.99, a huge reduction on its previous price and much cheaper than the

£214 that Amazon are charging for LightRoom 3!

So, the above shows you where Elements is in the pecking order.
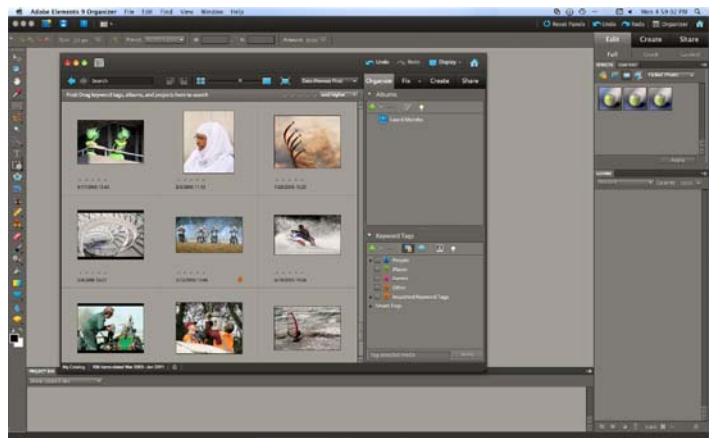
In Use

Elements installed very easily on my iMac. In the Mac version, opening Elements brings up the Edit, Create and Share part of the program, whilst the organiser must be called up from the toolbar (see attached screenshots).

Elements 9 can handle RAW files as well as the usual Tiff and JPEG ones. It can accommodate 16 bit files, but only a few of its image manipulation tools can be used on them. To perform the whole range of adjustments therefore you must first convert the files to 8 bit. This is a bit like how Photoshop handled 16 bit files a while ago. However, I have yet to use a Photoshop process which does not work on 16 bit files, so I can see Elements following suit in future versions.

Elements 9 allows you to choose the colour space it uses for each image. You can choose either sRGB or Adobe RGB. If the image is to be used on the Web, then sRGB would be appropriate, whilst Adobe RGB would be selected when a printed copy is needed. Photoshop CS5 and Light-Room 3 allow you to work with the Pro-Photo colour space (which has a far greater range of colours than either of the two I have mentioned), as befits their professional status.

For all the images shown in the organiser, it is worthwhile to add keywords to each image so that when they start being numbered in their thousands, they will then be easier to find. All in all it took me a while to find my way around, as I am so used to LightRoom, but practice made perfect! Having selected an image, it is then possible to edit it in the "Edit" part of Elements by right clicking the image and selecting "Edit with Photoshop Elements". A new feature in this version is the inclusion of layers and layer masks. These are essential to Photoshop professionals and it is surprising to see that Adobe have thus narrowed the gap between the two programs by including the feature in Elements. Layers are used where extensive alterations are being done to an image. They allow you to group amendments and to delete or amend such groups without disturbing the other groups. This is a very useful feature and its inclusion in Elements is to be applauded.

If RAW files are being worked on, it is possible to open them in Camera Raw 6.3, the same version as in Photoshop CS5 except that there are only 3 tabs in the Elements version as opposed to 10 tabs in the Photoshop CS5 version.

Recompose Tool

One tool that is included in Elements 9, but not in Photoshop CS5 is the recompose tool. I had an image of five motocross riders at the start of a race and a judge said that there were large gaps between the riders. I tried to reduce the gaps in Photoshop, but didn't have enough patience to spend too much time on it. Spotting the recompose tool in Elements 9, I thought of my motocross image and wondered if it could benefit. One selects the tool, paints in green on the parts of the image which must stay the same, and red on the parts you want removed. The tool then works its magic in moving the riders closer together. The edges between them are left a little rough, but a bit of cloning soon fixes that. See the before and

after images below.

As befits a program for less than advanced operators, there is now a "Guided Edit" mode. This hand-holds you when

Recompose Tool. Here I've used this tool to close the gaps between these moto-cross riders. Before above, recomposed below.

carrying out various amendments to the images.

A tool which could be useful is one which, when an image is shown to Elements, it then applies its style to one or more of your own images. So for example you could have a colour image and convert it easily to black and white.

I had previously been playing with a new tool in Photoshop CS5 which removes unwanted objects, much like the clone tool, but instead of cloning in from another area to the area being removed, you just click on the unwanted area and the program then samples the surrounding area and fills in the space with what it thinks should be there. This facility is now in Elements 9 and works in an identical fashion. It works well sometimes, but often the choices the pro-

gram makes are not very subtle and need further work on them. This effect can be exploited when stitching together panoramas. Often the end product of stitching is a pronounced ragged effect as some images are out of alignment with the others. Now, however, the program can fill in the "missing" bits with what it thinks should be there. Again this can be a bit hit or miss but it is worth trying before taking any other action to correct the image.

Conclusions

There are a lot of small improvements in this new version of Elements and I think it is a good buy for the enthusiastic photographer who would like to use Photoshop CS5 but cannot bring himself/herself to pay out the considerable sum involved. My choice for a basic organiser and image editor would be the free Picasa 3. For the very advanced amateurs and professionals, the choice of Photoshop CS5 and LightRoom 3 cannot be ignored (although LightRoom 3 is now very expensive compared to Apple Aperture, it goes well together with Photoshop CS5). In between lies Elements 9 and anyone choosing this program will not be disappointed.

Pricing and Availability

Adobe Photoshop Elements 9 (PC/Mac) for Mac OS X, Windows 7 / Vista £58.89

Or bundled with Adobe Premiere Elements 9 (for video editing), for Mac OS X, Windows 7 / Vista / XP price £79.99.

Prices from Amazon.co.uk

Avanquest Expert PDF 7 Business Edition

A Review by Geoff Arnold

Introduction

You have to give Adobe credit. There aren't many companies that have managed to change the world once, let alone twice. In 1985, Adobe introduced PostScript, which became the rock on which the entire electronic publishing industry was built; they forever changed the world of professional printing. In 1994, Adobe launched the first version of Acrobat, whose file format, PDF, is now the basis for modern electronic distribution of all manner of documents.

PDF files are used by everyone who creates or receives documents in the modern world. Company bosses, secretaries, artists, journalists, students travelling the world on gap-year breaks and almost everybody with a computer who sends and receives documents as PDF, and uses some flavour of Adobe software to read them.

Adobe Acrobat X is the newest incarnation of Adobe Systems' software for viewing, managing, and manipulating PDF files

and reflects years and years (and years!) of Adobe's technological development and end-user experience and if you've bought a copy recently you'll realise Acrobat needs a user with very deep pockets. (Adobe Acrobat X Standard) the cheapest version will set you back just over £300 and if you aspire to the Business Edition version expect to pay much more, around £420.

Which is where Avanquest Expert PDF 7 comes in, but first:

Portable Document Format (PDF)

The Portable Document Format (PDF) has become a de-facto standard for document exchange across platforms and computing environments. Hundreds of million of PDF documents are posted on the World Wide Web. Key benefits that have driven this popularity are:

- Integrity: PDF files look like the original documents they were created from. They conserve their appearance after sharing - regardless of platform, operating system or local settings on each

computer or device.

- File size: In many cases, PDF files can be more compact than their source documents - ideal for file transfer.

- Security: PDF files can be encrypted, digitally signed and password protected to prevent unauthorised changes.

- Sharing: While the basic document content can be frozen, commenting and mark-up tools allow collective authoring and document review

The beauty of a PDF is that each file includes a complete description of the text, fonts, images and vector graphics used in a document's layout. When it is opened the result is an exact copy of the original.

In a fit of unusual generosity, Adobe officially released the PDF as an open standard in 2008. It is now the de facto benchmark for electronic document distribution on the internet.

The Adobe Reader, which enables anyone to open and read a PDF file, is free, but Acrobat,

Adobe's PDF creation program, currently Acrobat X (v.9.0) isn't. As mentioned above expect to pay £300 - £420, which if you study the ads in the computer press is more than most people pay for a new PC these days!

However there is a cost effective alternative in the form of Avanquest Expert PDF 7 Business Edition.

Expert PDF 7 Business Edition Product Features

- The fastest, easiest way to create, convert and edit PDF documents
- NEW interface featuring Microsoft Office style 'ribbon-bars' and fully compatible with Windows 7
- Creates 100% industry standard PDF files from any printable PC application
- Word, Excel, PowerPoint, photos and pictures etc.
- One click conversion of PDFs into a document that can be read and modified in Microsoft Word
- Multiple document merge – Select several documents in various formats for conversion as a single PDF
- Text editing features - Cut, copy, paste, resize text and visuals
- Graphic editing tools - Add images, geometric shapes, Bezier curves, and more to a PDF file
- Document Management – Use Bates Numbering to index documents for easy identification and retrieval
- Add interactive features such as we-blinks and bookmarks
- Send PDFs automatically by e-mail

Expert PDF 7 Business Edition Includes Four Modules:

1. **Expert PDF Creator** creates PDF files from print job files.
2. **Expert PDF Business Edition** provides features for you to read, review, and edit PDF files and create forms.
3. **Expert PDF to Word Converter** converts PDF files to rich text format (RTF) files to open in word-processing or text-editing programs.
4. **Expert PDF Batch Creator** converts multiple files (such as graphic files, text files, and web pages) into PDF files.

If you have Microsoft Office installed on your computer, an Expert PDF tab (or menu) is available for quickly converting files from Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint

Installation

Avanquest Expert PDF 7 comes in a standard style box, with a CD and a slim Quick Start Guide 44-pages long. A full reference manual can be found on the CD as a PDF file.

Installation is straightforward, a 29-digit
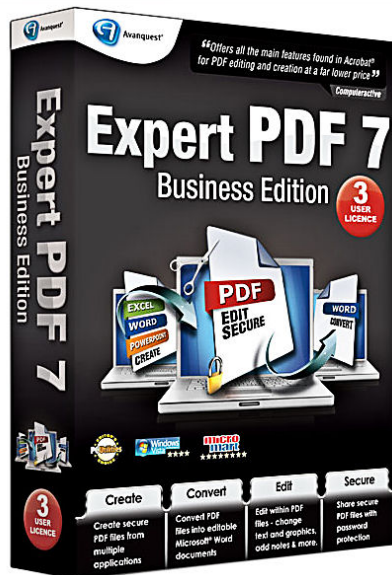
alpha-numeric serial number has to be entered and for full functionality it's necessary to activate the program. If you choose not to activate, it'll run in the less functional 'trial' mode which adds a large stamp on the converted document.

In Use

Once installed and rebooted; Expert PDF 7 adds an **Expert PDF Tab** (or menu) to MS Office programs to directly create a PDF file. For example to convert the Word document you are currently working on into a PDF file click the **Create PDF** button, specify where to save the PDF file, name it, and click **Save.**

Alternatively to print the word file to PDF, use the Print command and specify Expert PDF 7 as the print driver specifying again where to save the PDF file and give it a name. By default the original .doc Word file will be used, but with the suffix .pdf.

Converting a PDF to Word

Depending on the size or complexity of the PDF file to be converted this can take from a few seconds to over half a minute. The converted file is then displayed as a .rtf file with nearly all the original formatting, columns, graphics, tables etc converted ready for editing.

In my experience a good test as to how well PDF conversion works and vice versa is to convert (print) a copy of ROM which your editor creates with Microsoft Publisher. MS Publisher .pub files are not one of the included MS Office file formats designed for direct conversion, Expert PDF 7 only supports Word, Excel and Power Point, so the only way is to convert a .pub file of ROM is to use Expert PDF 7's 'Print To' function, which is not dissimilar to the technique I currently use with Adobe Acrobat, this is easy enough but given that ROM as designed by your editor contains relatively complex formatting I was keen to see how Expert PDF's PDF conversion would compare with the Adobe Acrobat PDF version when asked to convert this MS.pub

document. Remarkably Expert PDF 7 did an excellent and near perfect conversion. Complex formatting such as the ROM masthead with drop-shadow etc. was not perfect, but I seem to recall when your editor reviewed a similar alternative to Adobe Acrobat a year or so ago he found comparable results.

When I came to convert the MS Publisher document I'd printed to PDF to Word for editing, the cover page was pretty dreadful which I attribute to the complex formatting of the original where the ROM masthead upset the conversion process, however subsequent pages were almost flawless conversions as can be seen from the screen shots. Depending on the size and complexity of the original PDF, conversion into editable Word text can take a minute or to, but this is no real pain, but compared to the chore of selecting text in a .PDF file, copying and pasting into Word with all the hassle of removing the ASCI carriage returns characters at the end of each line of imported text.

Asking Expert PDF 7 to convert a password protected PDF document is a no-go — it can't be done.

When transforming "Normal" PDFs, such as the ones found on program CD's in lieu of printed manuals, the difference between the original PDF and converted to MS Word document format are almost impossible to tell apart.

Encryption

When printing Office documents to PDF files one of the options is to allow encryption up to 256-bit AES standard, which will defeat most attempts at "breaking", unless of course you've access to NSA or GCHQ's code-breaking facilities!

Conclusions

I found that for most purposes Expert PDF 7 worked fine, it struggled a little when asked to convert to Word, graphics-rich documents with complex layouts, but on the whole it worked remarkably well. Given that Adobe Acrobat costs so much, if your requirements are solely based around converting PDFs into editable Word, Excel, HTML or plain ASCII .txt or creating PDFs from within Microsoft Office (Word, Excel and Power Point) Expert PDF 7 copes very well indeed and is recommended.

Pricing and Availability

Expert PDF 7 Business Edition (PC) - Windows 7 / Vista / XP and licensed for three users is £79.99. The less well featured Expert PDF 7 (PC) - Windows 7 / Vista / XP costs just £24.97. Prices from Amazon.co.uk.
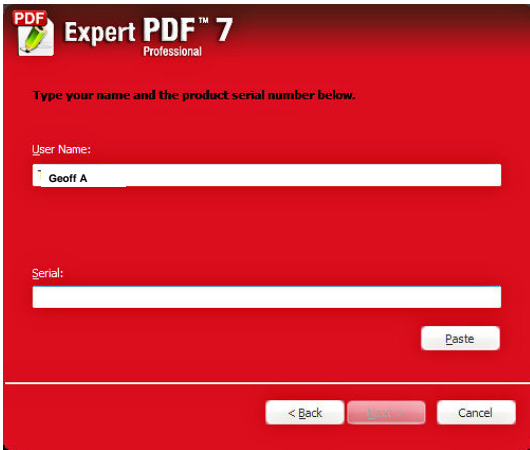
Avanquest have a Free Trial that can be downloaded here:

www.avanquest.com/UK/trialDownload.html

Thanks to Tony your editor for help with the Screen Shots of Expert PDF 7 Business Edition in action (see next page).
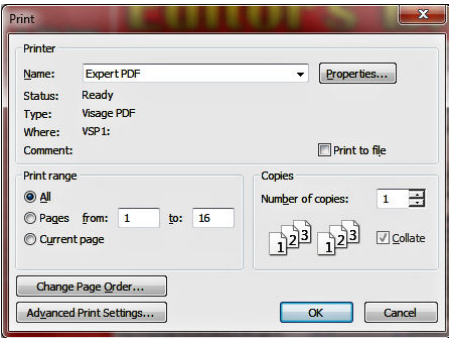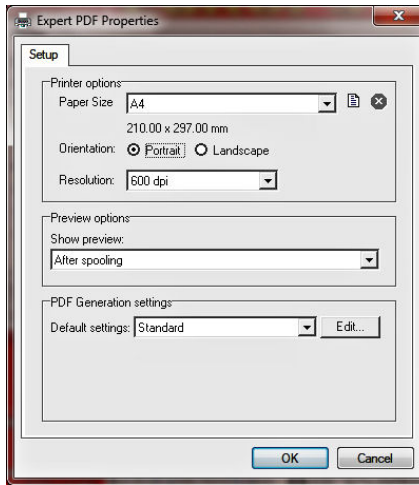
The initial start screen. Rather odd as it states "Expert PDF 7 Professional" rather than "Business Edition" which is printed on the box and CD!
You also need to enter the 29-digit serial number from the CD sleeve to activate the program.
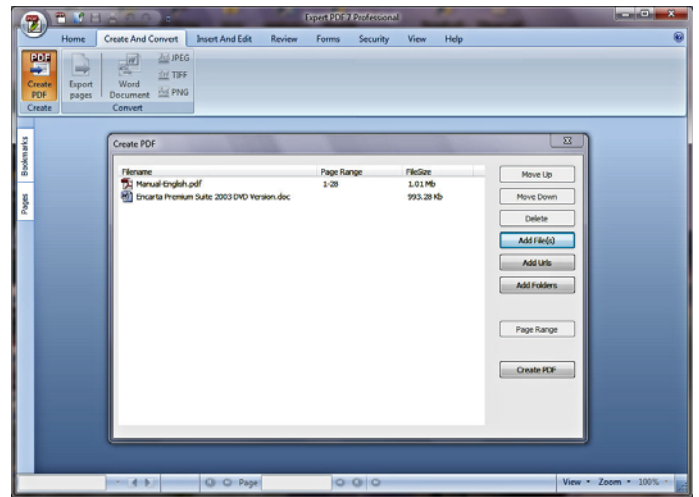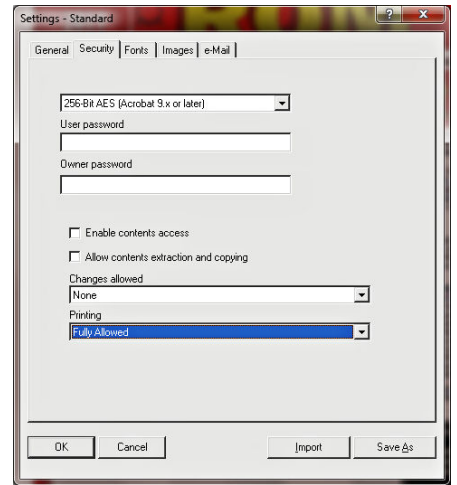

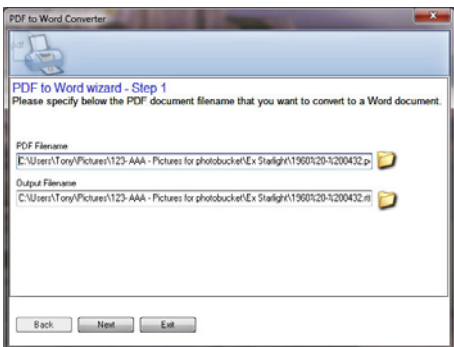Create a PDF from an existing PDF file and a Word .doc

Print to File using the Expert PDF print driver

Print to PDF page properties

Print to PDF — Encrypting the file to the almost unbreakable 256-bit AES standard
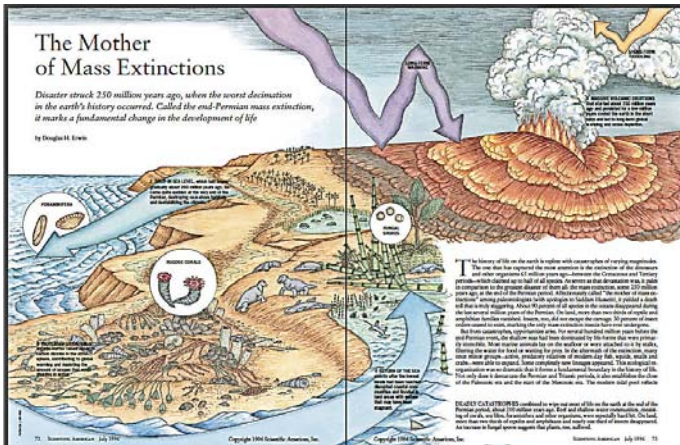

Convert PDF to Word showing locations of input and output files.
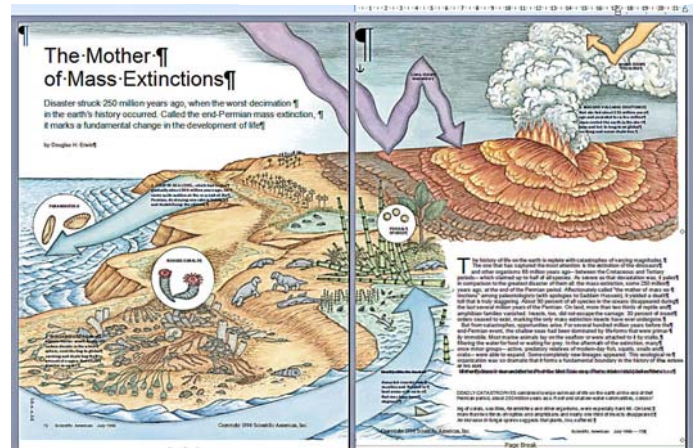

ROM as MS.pub document printed as .pdf. The PDF is indistinguishable from original.

ROM as .pdf converted to MS Word.doc. Cover page not too good, page 2 OK.

Scientific American .pdf article. Original before conversion.

Same article converted to MS Word .doc file and ready for editing in MS Word. Note paragraph marks where one can edit as a Word document.

CrazyTalk Animator Pro by Reallusion

Reviewed by Laurence Fenn

Crazy Talk Animator Pro expands on the previous versions of Crazy Talk by including full animation of characters as well as the lip syncing features of the software. Importing a head shot is the same as before and unfortunately the routine has not been improved upon for cutting out the head. You still have to paint out the background which can take a long time. There's no background remove feature like in Paint-Shop Pro but you can import a PNG file with the background removed to make it easier. It's the same when creating a body from a photo, and you need to have a picture with the arms out to the sides and the legs slightly apart. You won't be able to find a picture from the web and use that to create an actor as it's highly unlikely that anyone would pose in that position.

Running across the top of the interface, made up of shades of grey and white, is a panel of buttons to switch between Project, Actor, Animation, Scene, Special FX and Export. Below this are tools for transform, 3D mode, rotate and zoom amongst others while modification and animation tools are kept separate in an arrangement down the left hand side of the interface. On the right is the Content and Scenes window and the timeline is at the bottom of the screen.

You add elements to the scene from the library or any other image. Additional content packs can be bought from Reallusion. Predefined animations for the actor, from walking styles, dance moves or hand gestures can be dragged onto the actor and added to the timeline. It does not fluidly move from one action to the next, so when I started adding the dance moves from the library the actor jumped to each of the moves instead of moving to the next position. This meant the animation did not flow and did not look natural. Mind you, the characters (sorry, actors) all tend to have large heads so they look quite unnatural as it is.

You can use the puppet mode if you want fine control over your actor. A selection of base animations for the head and body, like a frown or waving hands, are controlled by moving the mouse around as you record. Puppet mode has a half-speed setting, so you have more of a chance to match your movements to the soundtrack, and you can move animations around in the timeline later.

Now that you animate the character in a scene as well as the character itself, you have two editing engines, Composer Mode (for the actor) and Stage Mode (for the animation). This can be confusing if you were use to the previous versions of the software as you only had one mode to deal with before.

were a few bugs like this in the software. When editing an actor you can change the head by replacing the image, but when I did this, I had the new face and a pair of eyes left floating. It may have been that I hadn't selected all of the facial features, but it wasn't made very clear (Fig. 1).

You can change parts of the actor, and I managed to give my character a new waistcoat fairly easily, but despite the demo videos included, it's not as easy to as it makes out to be (Fig. 2).

Projects can be started with preinstalled characters, or actors (aka avatars) can be built (faces, body parts etc.) from your existing photos. Alongside the puppeteering, the backgrounds to the animation can be enhanced with props from the existing library or manufactured from any image of our choice (Fig.3).
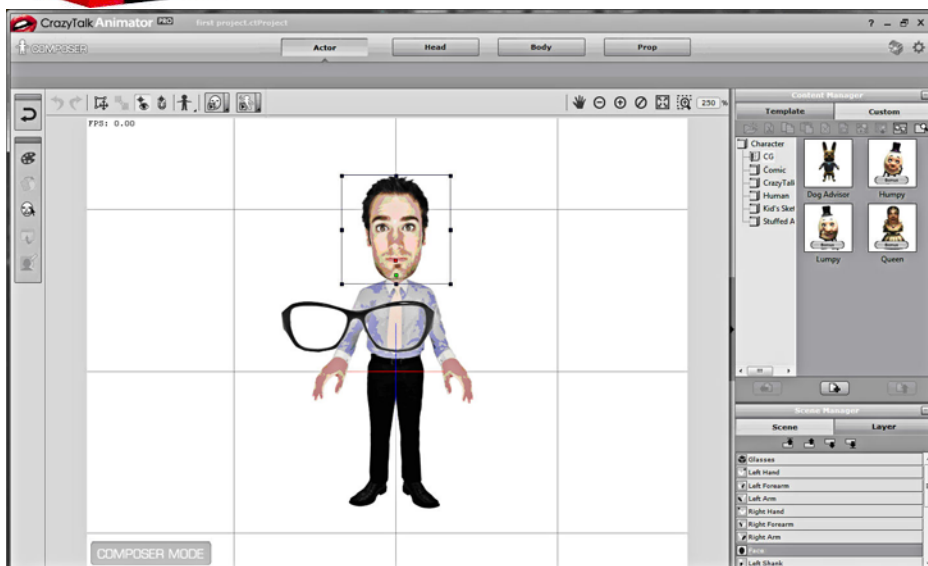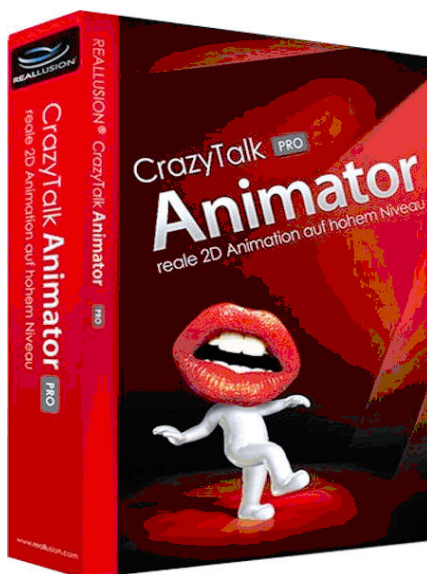

Figure 1: Attaching objects to your actor

There's a Z-depth layering and 3D View Object Management which you can switch between. Now that you can animate with a stage and props, you need to be able to adjust the z-depth of the objects. I had expected an option when you right hand click on an item to bring it further forward or backwards, but instead I had to change to the 3D view and then drag the object in the z plane to change the depth. This was frustrating, especially when I was just trying to add a pair of glasses to a character. Every time I edited the glasses, it did not stay to the same scale as the character. I had to move the glasses way off line in the editing mode to get them to be in the right position when the character was animated. Then I found the glasses did not move with the character because of the way I had imported them. It took a while to attach them to an actor and I had to restart several times as making changes to previous mistakes seemed difficult to correct. In fact, there

Defining your own props and actors from your own photos can be slightly time consuming, as each individual aspect of a character needs to be accurately defined for the puppeteering and facial animations. For the facial animation the editing process is much as that for CrazyTalk with features defined by a series of focal points. However, once the character has been defined, the process of animation can be undertaken using either a series of templates that easily animate the character. Editing of any animation is done on a timeline, allowing frames of animation to be extended or looped. The main difference between the standard and PRO versions of the software is that the PRO version offers much better features with respect to the puppeteering, allowing a much greater range of movements of customisation to any actors.

When you want to export your animation, the program supports WMV, AVI, Gif Anima-

tion (although you won't get any sound with this), iWidget or popVideo formats. I hadn't heard of some of these formats, the latter being another product from Reallusion. When I chose AVI, I then set the various options for the frame size. The preview just creates a bitmap of the stage and opens

I thought I could fade the background music after the last part of the animation, but the timeline did not give me any option like that. It took me several clicks to find the music that I had imported, and the timeline floats in a window on top of the rest of the screen instead of being integrated into the interface. Letting the program render

tered!

Pricing and Availability

Animator Pro costs £116.42 whilst the standard version costs £36.64, both at Amazon.co.uk. That's a significant difference in price. The extra features of the Pro version includes Full-body photo fitting, Composer system - custom body parts, Advanced puppeteering control, Custom puppeteering profile, Custom sprite animation, Custom Facial motion, Advanced timeline editing - Copy, paste, move key, clip loop & speed control, Save custom motion clips from timeline (collect clip), Full Timeline Sub-track Controls (detailed tracks for body segments), Group/ungroup motion clip for advanced key-editing and Access to Developer Whitepaper for content design.
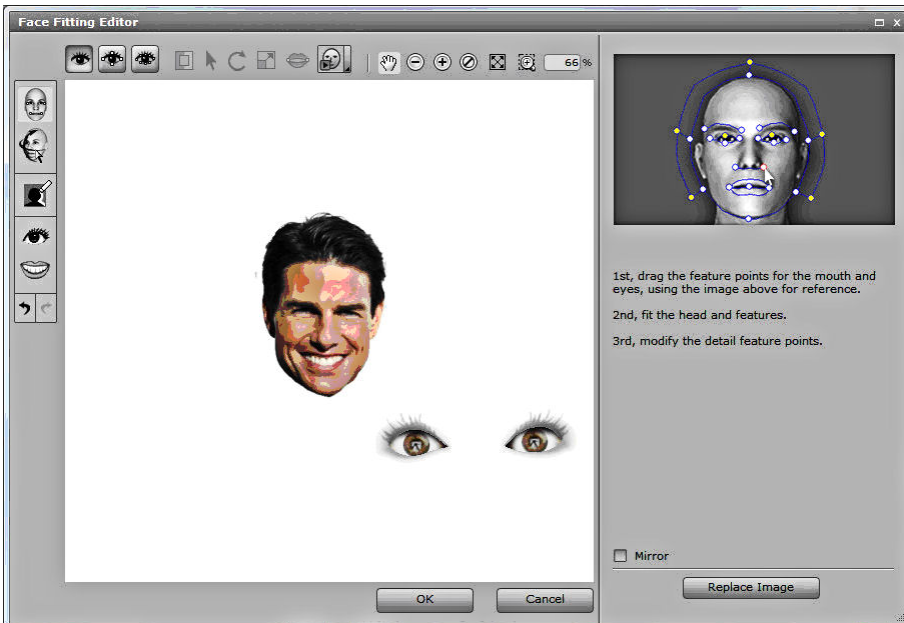

Figure 2 - Replacing the head image leaves objects behind

Figure 3 - The main interface

it in your default graphics program, which I though wasn't really of much use as you can see the stage in the program. I finally got to choose the code to create the AVI with, and I used DivX. As I had imported a song as the soundtrack, to make the actor dance to, I realised that I hadn't animated the entire song. When I clicked to cancel during rendering, the program gave me the option to save what it had created already, cutting the audio, which for these test purposes was fine. However, the resulting video file had no picture and the audio wouldn't play, so obviously cancelling before it has rendered the entire scene does not create a valid file.

the entire AVI file crashed the program when I chose DivX, but did not when I used the XVid codec. To use the MP4 for PC codec you have to activate the feature. This takes you to the website, but not to the page that explains how to do this. After searching the site, I downloaded a PDF but this didn't give a URL. Only after I registered the product on the website did the Activate button work properly in the program, taking me to the correct page. A few error messages should have been shown rather that the default main page. The PDF was not right either, as it shows that you can register on the page it brings up, but the page doesn't appear until you have regis-

Patches

There have been two patches to the program and the changes are noted below:

v1.1 (3/3/2011, 125MB)

- Added: Layer editing in Scene Manager.
- Added: Save motion option with custom layer key.
- Added: Multiple props selection with merge function.
- Added: Flexibility on project timeline editing. Able to delete or insert frames into a Project.
- Added: Able to scale the window size for Face and Body Fitting.
- Added: New connection points to a character for auto snapping when exchanging content.
- Added: For the convenience of the users, we changed the policy to allow for up to TWO simultaneous installations on separate computers. The policy remains a ¡§single-user license¡¨. Permanent use on more than one computer will require an additional license.
- Enhanced: Action Menu Editor with full editing features including; add, remove, rename and sort.
- Enhanced: Better Performance on Switching Modules such as; Key Editor, Face/Motion Puppet, Character Composer and Load Project.
- Enhanced: SWF file compatibility.
- Changed: Content purchase entrance now moved from Backstage application to the Reallusion City Marketplace.
- Fixed: Prop layer order issue.
- Fixed: Sound issue of videos exported with popvideo prop inside.

V1.11 (18/4/2011, 38.6 MB)

- Added: Support for Virtual Machine on Mac.
- Added: Super sampling in export function. (elimination of jagged/pixelated edges)
- Fixed: Crash issue when applying Facial Components from the Face Library.
- Fixed: Motions disappear after ungrouping motions in the timeline.
- Fixed: Thumbnail display replacement issue in the Sprite Editor.
- I had applied both patches before reviewing, so the DivX codec bug has not been fixed yet.

Family Tree Maker 2011 Deluxe

Reviewed by Tony Hawes

INTODUCTORY BACKGROUND

What is Family History?

Your aim may be to draw up a family tree filled with your ancestors. But family history is so much more than that — a fascinating voyage of discovery, back through time, to discover what shaped you.

The growth of the internet and the popularity of television programmes about family history have sparked off huge interest in finding out more about our past. The sense of achievement in tracing our ancestors has added to the appeal of this fascinating hobby, and more and more people are motivated by the desire to create a legacy to pass on to their children and grandchildren.

The Internet Makes it so Easy.

Until the 1990s, family history research involved visiting local, county and national record offices to trawl through records.

Now, with the ease and speed of the internet, it's all so much faster. The internet has chat rooms where you can swap hints and tips, get advice if you are stuck, and where people will share their stories — especially if they discover a link to your family. Message boards are an excellent place to meet people to discuss your findings; you'll find a good selection if you key 'family history message boards' into Google.

Not everything is available online yet and you may still have to visit some record offices, but the advantage is that many of them have exhibitions and displays which may help to bring the past to life for you.

Two Routes to Choose From

When you decide to start tracing your family's history, there are two main areas you can focus on. One is building a family tree and peopling it with as many ancestors as you can find. The other involves investigating a particular story, or ancestor, in detail.

To begin with, most people choose the family tree route, because it gives you an overview of your family. The obvious starting point is your paternal line — you probably share the same surname and can track it back into the past. This might be quite straightforward if you have an unusual name.

If your name is more common — Jones, Smith, MacDonald or Murphy, for example it might be easier to start several lines of enquiry at once. This way, you'll find as many direct ancestors as possible. Remember that the number of people to think about and trace doubles each time you work back a generation — you have four grandparents, eight great grandparents, 16 great
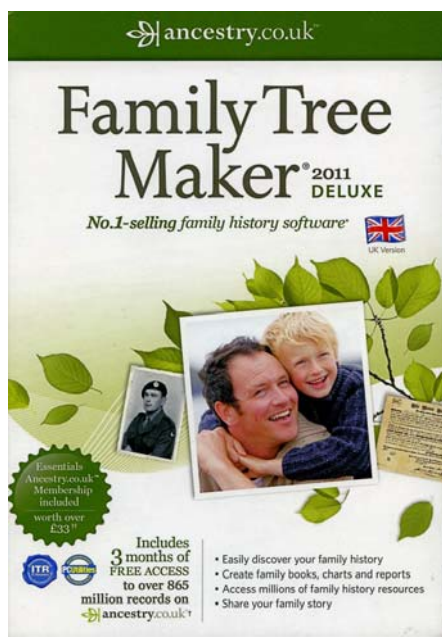
great grandparents, and an impressive 32 great great great grandparents.

Searching through so many generations doesn't have to be daunting, if you start with what you already know — your immediate living family. Start by asking your parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts to tell you what they remember. If they're no longer alive, it's possible you may already have — or can get access to — family documents that will point you in the right direction.

Census Records Online — a Priceless Resource

All the major censuses are now available on the Internet, so you can search this vast store of records from home on your computer.

You can get to original census images online through databases that are searchable by the name of a person. Access to the census collections is rarely free — most companies ask for fees to access the data.

Ancestry.co.uk who have digitised the censuses, will charge you a subscription to view their images. If you don't want to pay, you'll have to visit local archives to view microfilm versions (assuming they hold microfilm records — not all do), or allow you to research them for free. For example my local library in Fleet allows free access to Ancestry.co.uk (and other online resources) from terminals in their reference library. Similar facilities are available in the Farnborough library. The other method is to look at the digitised records for free at The National Archives (TNA) in Kew, in London, but unless you live in London this option is not very practical.

All census returns tell you who was staying in a specific property on the night of the

census — wherever they normally lived. In addition to the basic information listed by all censuses, the census returns from 1851 to 1901 include marital status, relationship to the head of household and place of birth (county and parish). They declare whether an individual is 'deaf-and-dumb' or 'blind', and by 1891, whether they're 'lunatic, imbecile or idiot'.

By 1901, the records also show a person's employer or employee status. The 1841 census is different; the ages of children under 15 were recorded accurately, but ages over 15 were rounded down to the nearest five-year band — so someone aged 34 in 1841 would be recorded as being 30. Place of birth isn't given, other than whether or not they were born in the county of residence. If someone was born elsewhere, this was indicated with I for Ireland, S for Scotland or F for Foreign.

The last census returns to be released (the 1911 census) were released early by TNA in 2009 and are available online. Interestingly the Information Commissioner gave a ruling that the 1911 census could be opened early, but this will not apply to the next (1921) census because, unlike the 1911 census, the 1921 census was conducted under the 1920 Census Act, which is still in force today and which contains a statutory prohibition on disclosure by the ONS under the '100 year rule' whereby the government gave an undertaking of confidentiality for data collected for 100 years.

And for what it's worth there won't be any release of the 1931 census returns as the whole lot was lost in a fire in December 1942; not to enemy action, but by carelessness by a firewatcher in the census repository at Hayes in Middlesex who threw away a lighted cigarette end that set the whole warehouse ablaze, destroying everything!

Why Trace Your Ancestors?

There are many reasons why people wish to trace their ancestors. As a rule, there is no practical motive at work; it is simply a matter of interest for most people to know how they came to be who they are. There is not necessarily any snobbery involved, although it must be admitted that this has often been a major element. Middle-class Victorians were desperately keen to prove they had ancestors who came over with the Normans in 1066!

The descendants of European settlers in North America, Australia and other countries overseas are often more concerned with their roots than people whose ancestors have lived in Britain for many centuries.

Often the search is set in motion by some long-repeated but unsupported family legend that they come from noble blood or had great estates, or when, by an odd coincidence during a conversation between strangers, a chance

remark reveals that they are distantly related. Everybody has far more relatives than he or she knows personally: family circles seldom extend much beyond first or second cousins, if that. In fact most of the people whose families have been settled in this country for many hundreds of years are probably remotely related to each other. This is the result of the way in which ancestors multiply as the generations march backwards in time.

A complete family tree resembles an inverted pyramid, with you as the sharp point at the bottom. The next generation contains two people (your parents), the next generation four (your grandparents), the next eight (great-grandparents) and the next sixteen. All this — five generations — is quite manageable, but go back another six generations and your direct ancestors, doubling in size each generation, have reached the unwieldy number of 1,024 (assuming there are no marriages between cousins, which cuts down the number). In twenty generations the number will have grown to over half a million; if you go back a generation or two further than that to about 1348, the time of the of the Black Death in the 14th century, you find that the number of your ancestors exceeds the total contemporary population of England!

Enough Background — Back to Family Tree Maker 2011

For the last 20 years, Family Tree Maker has provided tools that make it easy to build family trees, record memories and organise family photos. Family Tree Maker also enables users to capture stories and attach videos and audio clips in a way that will help them easily capture and share the story of their ancestors both on-and offline.

Without leaving Family Tree Maker, users can search the robust collection of family history records on Ancestry.co.uk and simply incorporate matching results directly into their tree. Family Tree Maker 2011 automatically searches Ancestry.co.uk for historical documents about the individuals in the user's family tree when connected to the Internet. Family Tree Maker 2011 comes with either a free trial or subscription to Ancestry.co.uk.

To help beginners, Family Tree Maker 2011 comes with a number of interactive guides with simple instructions to get them started and quick lessons that will make research fun and fast.

The 2011 edition includes new and enhanced reports to make it easier for users to organise and categorise their research findings.

New Ancestry.co.uk Family Tree Maker 2011 Features

The following new and improved features expand Family Tree Maker's capabilities:

- Smart Stories - Ready to start on an ancestor's story? The Smart Story edi-

tor makes it easy to drag and drop text and photos from your tree into story pages that will update automatically when you make changes to your tree.

- More Complete and Relevant Timelines - Find and add more events to your ancestors' lives. Add, edit and delete your own historical events and apply historical events by time and geography.

- New and Improved Charts - Enjoy four new fan chart styles. Enhance charts with backgrounds, borders and embellishments. And use fonts you can change based on fact type.

- Improved Integration with Ancestry.co.uk - Ancestry.co.uk has millions of members all over the world. Now you can find out if any of them are searching for your ancestors by viewing Member Connect activity on your home page, plus links to related message boards and new messages in your inbox. You'll also enjoy faster uploading and downloading of your tree.

- New Media Management Tools - Drag and drop, cut and paste, and even categorise multiple items at the same time. You'll also find a new tool that will help you locate missing media files.

- Enhanced Reports - Ancestor and descendant reports have been enhanced, a surname report added and the functionality to sort custom reports, as well as the option of saving and re-using report settings.

Family Tree Maker 2011 Deluxe Edition (SRP £39.99) comes with three months free Essentials membership to Ancestry.co.uk, worth over £33 and an electronic version of the companion guide. Ideal for the family historian who wants to start exploring their family story.

Family Tree Maker 2011 Platinum Edition (SRP £59.99) comes with six months Premium membership to Ancestry.co.uk, worth over £77 and a printed companion guide with over 350 pages of information. Perfect for genealogists who want to travel further back into their family history.

Family Tree Maker 2011 World Edition (SRP £99.99) comes with six months Worldwide membership to Ancestry.co.uk worth over £113, a printed companion guide, plus software to protect precious data and create your own family tree website. Suited to family historians with ancestors abroad and whose research will take them overseas.

Each package also contains a printed 'quick start' guide and interactive training tutorials to help users grow their family tree.

Installation

Installation was a breeze: Insert the CD and run the setup program. Full install took about five minutes and at the end one is invited to register the program. Registering

has benefits, most importantly 3-months free online access to Ancesty.co.uk's records of all UK Census returns 1841 — 1911, Birth Marriage and Death registers, Baptismal records etc. etc.

In Use

Entering Family Information

Some years ago in the late 1990's I'd used an earlier version of Family Tree Maker when it came with a bundle of CD's with copies of some genealogical records and traced my family back to 1800. My research in those days entailed visits to the London Metropolitan Archives in Bloomsbury, the General Records Office in Aldwych (it's now The National Archives and located at Kew) and the Church of the Latter Day Saints (The Mormons) library in Exhibition Road, South Kensington. Each in it's separate way was a tremendous treasure trove of genealogical information and making a personal search in their records was totally free, but needed a trip to London. Now of course with the internet things are much simpler and quicker, but most online access to genealogical data has to be paid for. So I am lucky that I had basic info about my family before I installed Family Tree Maker, but it came up trumps in allowing me to find info that I'd not till now had access too, such as Baptismal Records, and the quarterly registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths back to 1837.

Entering Facts

Much of your time in Family Tree Maker will be spent entering the facts you have uncovered about your family. At first, this information will likely focus on your small family group: yourself, your parents, and your children. As you continue, your focus will likely turn to your ancestral lines and other family groups: your grandparents and your great-grandparents.

The People workspace has two tabs where you will enter and view information about your family. The Family tab allows you to easily enter basic information about an individual and navigate between family groups (you can view several generations at a time). On the left side of the window you'll see an Index, which lists all the individuals in your tree. Click on a name to access an individual's information.

The Person tab gives you a more compre-

hensive view of an individual. You can add facts, notes, images, and sources for an individual and view timelines and relationship information. (See Fig. 1 alongside).

Documenting Your Research

Documenting sources—recording where you discovered a fact about your family—is one of the most important aspects of your research. Sources help others follow your research footsteps and describe where you found information you've entered in your tree. To view all the sources you've entered in your tree, go to Sources workspace.

Viewing Maps

As you gather the names and dates of important events in your ancestors' lives, you'll also record the locations where these events took place—the homes, towns and cities, counties, and countries that shaped their daily lives.

Often, these locations exist only as names in a report or on a pedigree chart. Family Tree Maker brings these ancestral homelands to life by letting you virtually visit maps of each location—without leaving your tree. To view a map, go to the Places workspace.

Note: You must be connected to the Internet to use the online mapping feature.

Enhancing Your Tree with Photos and Media Items

Family Tree Maker lets you store almost any type of information, from sound, video, and text files to a variety of picture formats such as bitmaps, TIFF files, JPEGs, and many others. In addition, you can select pictures from your media collection to add to trees, reports, family history books, and even slide shows. You can add media items for individuals and relationships, so you can maximise, your creativity as you gather and preserve a wonderfully complete collection of family history to pass on to future generations. To add a media item, go to an individual's Person tab or the Media workspace

Searching for Additional Family Members

Family Tree Maker makes researching and expanding your family history easy by providing powerful search tools and links to genealogy-related websites. You can search for information on RootsWeb.com, Genealogy.com, or any of your favourite websites.

In Use

As shown in Fig. 1 I've traced my family back to the early 1800's, but am missing some info: Death dates, Baptism dates etc. and here Ancestry.co.uk came into it's own. For example I now know my great grand mother Amy Caroline Hemsley nee Blackborow was born in 1868, baptised on 3rd Jan 1869, married on 1st July 1888 and died in the first quarter of 1910. Prior to this I only knew her estimated date of birth
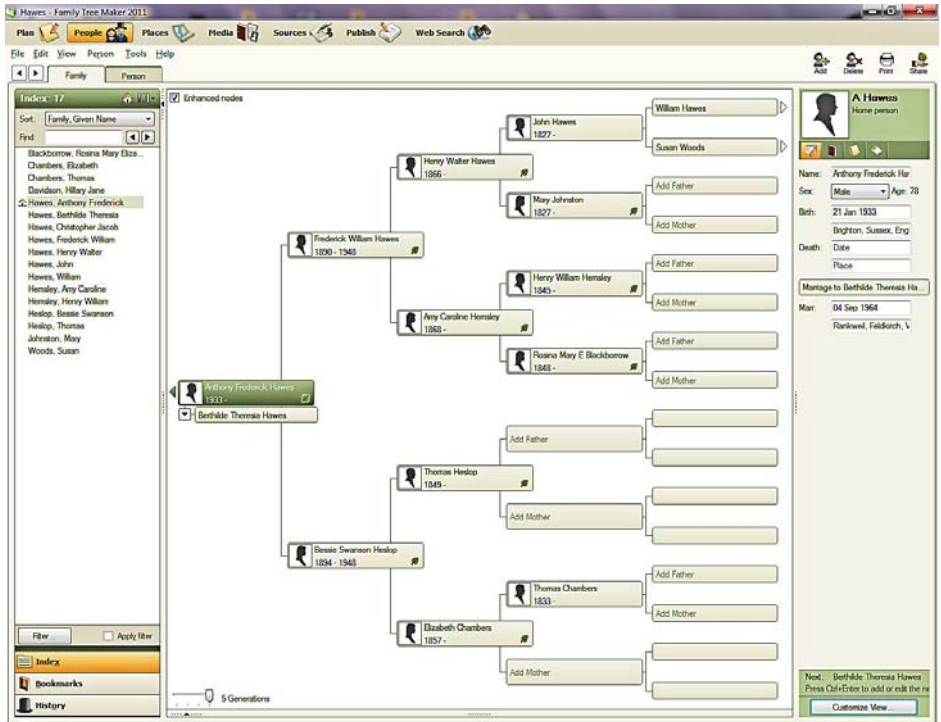
Figure 1: The People workspace has two tabs (Family & Person) where you will enter and view information about your family. The Family tab allows you to easily enter basic information about an individual and navigate between family groups (you can view several generations at a time). On the left side of the window is the Index, which lists all the individuals in your tree. You click on a name to access an individual's information.
The Person tab gives you a more comprehensive view of an individual. You can add facts, notes, images, and sources for an individual and view timelines and relationship information. I've traced my family back to my great, great grandparents who were born in 1800 and recorded it accordingly as above.
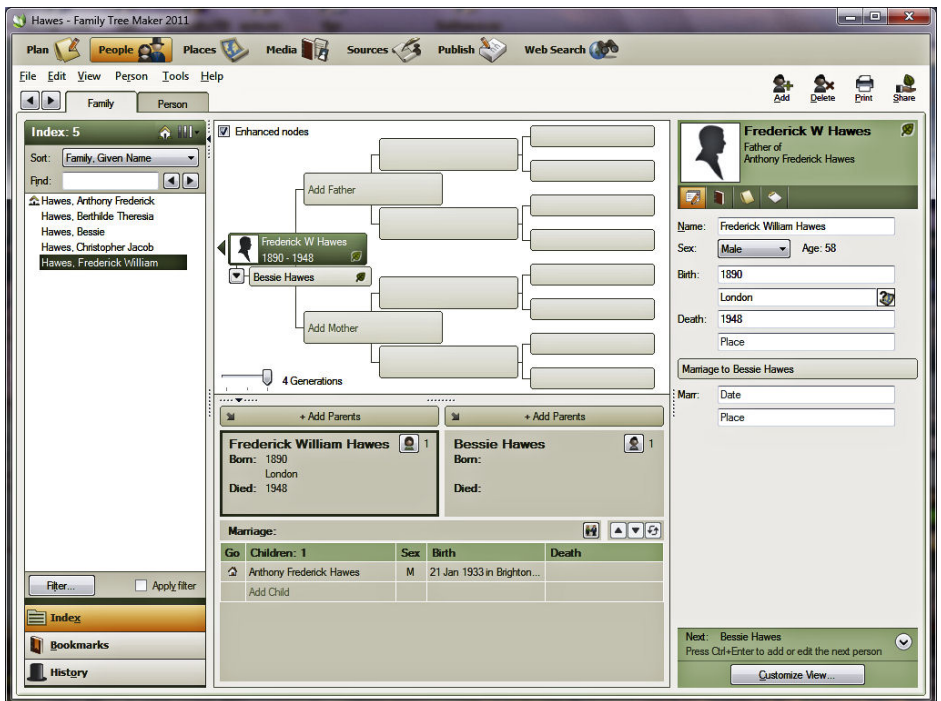

Figure 2: Here you can add additional information. Add parents, dates of birth, marriage, death and so on.
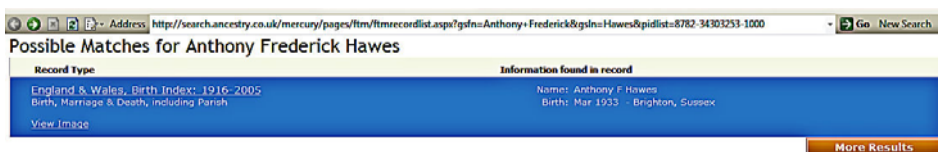

Figure 3: Doing a search on my name comes up with a record in the Births, Marriage and Deaths register for the March 1933 quarter. Clicking on the "View Image" tab brings up my entry in the births register (see next image). From here it's possible to order a copy of my birth certificate online. The standard General Register Office fees (£9.25) apply for a certified copy.

— pure magic!

Conclusions

It's been a long time since I looked at a Family Tree Maker, probably in the late 1990's, so I was keen to see how things have changed. The interface is relatively easy to navigate, but when you want to access more advanced features the more difficult the program becomes. However don't try to run before you can walk, start as a beginner and graduate to advanced techniques as you gain experience. If you do get stuck, there is an electronic PDF manual, online help and access to user groups / forums that can assist or point you in the right direction.

There are a variety of video tutorials covering the different features of the program from showing how to use the basic interface to using advanced online search techniques at Ancestry.co.uk.

Family Tree Maker 2011 has all the functions to record your family history data and can print out charts and maps. It comes with a good selection of charts and reports, including the Family Book feature – which assembles a 'book' from your choice of trees, reports, and placeholders, along with a Table of Contents and Index (Fig. 9).

Browsing the Family History magazines it's clear there are some well regarded competitors, Family Historian and RootsMagic being two with good write-ups, but neither has the trump card of being integrated online with a database such as Ancestry.co.uk. This makes Family Tree Maker 2011 a "must-have" for genealogists whether new to family history research, or more experienced users.

My recommendation is to buy it and get the data you want online from Ancestry.co.uk during the 'free' 3-months online access — you won't be disappointed.

Pricing and Availability

Family Tree Maker 2011 Deluxe with 3-months access to Ancestry.co.uk is £24.99 from Amazon.co.uk.

Figure 4: Here's my entry in the Jan—March 1933 Birth's Register. Note my mother's maiden name is shown together with the District where I was born.
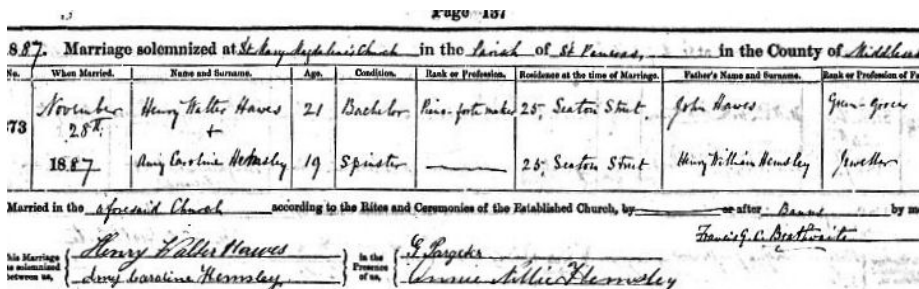

Figure 5: Copy of my grandparent's marriage certificate. It shows how old they were, profession, address and most importantly for family historians the bride and groom's father's names and professions. Armed with their father's details one can trace back a further generation.

Figure 6: Searching online and my father's baptismal certificate is available to view online. His mother's name is given as "Anny" Caroline, rather than "Amy" Caroline. This is probably a transcribing error — the "Amy" on the baptismal certificate (see below) looks at first glance like "Anny".
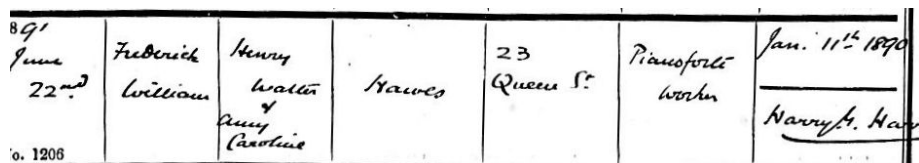

Figure 7: My father's baptismal certificate. It shows he was baptised in St. Matthew's Church, St. Pancras, London on 22nd June 1891, 18-months after his birth. I was under the impression that baptisms took place soon after birth, but in his case obviously not!

Figure 8: My grandfather's details are recorded in various locations online (see right), just click to access the record. Or to open the baptismal record click the view original image link at the top.

Figure 9: Family trees can be published (printed) in a variety of styles.

Acer Aspire TimelineX — The Next Generation

Acer Aspire TimelineX — the next generation

London, June 2011 – The all-new Aspire TimelineX Series builds on the achievement of the previous generation and reaches unprecedented levels of performance, convenience, connectivity, and battery life.

The next-generation Acer Aspire TimelineX Series is stunning in many ways. From the ultra-thin and smart design, to the powerful processor and graphics, to the advanced audio technology and seamless connectivity, you'll be amazed. The first thing that catches the eye is the new Cobalt Blue aluminium cover that blends with the silver profile to create a futuristic effect. The clean lines, geometric shapes, and smooth angles conjure up a minimalist and ultra-stylish look and feel.

The multi-gesture touchpad, in the same colour as the cover and palm rest, maintains a consistent overall look and feel, yet is easy to spot thanks to the slightly recessed design. On the side, the clear-cut design of the hinge becomes a rich visual element. The next-generation chiclet keyboard, set out on a silver base, makes the operation area look neat and tidy and is easier to clean.

Having achieved the standard of more than 8 hours, the next-generation Aspire TimelineX takes it a step further with as much as 25% more power: up to 10 hours of battery life for an entire day of work and entertainment on a single charge. In addition, the battery pack boasts a super-long life cycle.

While the power capacity of a conventional battery starts to fade to 80% at around 300 charge cycles, Acer's new long-life battery formula retains 80% capacity for over 1,000 charge cycles. This means up to 4 years of use and translates into fewer battery replacements, which amounts to reduced energy and resources consumption. Furthermore, the battery is built-in, allowing a thinner, neater design and eliminating any risk of accidentally being released during operation.

To easily keep an eye on the battery level, the Aspire TimelineX Series is outfitted with a one-touch LED indicator that shows low, medium, and full battery levels in different colours while plugged in and unplugged.

New power-saving features have been implemented in the Aspire TimelineX Series, including the power-saving mode for the optical drive, which helps extend battery life and gives you more time for work and entertainment.

The Acer Aspire TimelineX Series features the second generation of the Intel Core processor family, combining high performance with lower power consumption, along with fantastic graphics. This ensures better media processing for faster video editing and sharing, superior HD video playback with top-notch picture quality, and a terrific gaming experience. Aspire TimelineX laptops are also available with dedicated NVIDIA GeForce graphics, enabling incredible gaming performance and superior image quality with stunning 3D visual effects, realistic lighting and lifelike imagery. To meet the needs of enthusiast multimedia collectors, the Aspire TimelineX Series comes with up to 750 GB of hard disk space. Alternatively, all-new TimelineX models can be equipped with an SSD drive for ultra-fast boot times and application loading.

To intensify digital media enjoyment, HDMI connectivity brings HD entertainment to your big-screen TV for the ultimate high-definition experience. The optional USB 3.0 port, meanwhile, transfers data to and from external devices up to 10 times faster than before. The rich entertainment experience is enhanced even further by realistic and vibrant sound, courtesy of Dolby Home Theatre v4, enabling maximized volume without distortion and improved dialogue clarity through PC speakers, headphones or your home theatre system.

Ranging from the compact 34 cm (13.3") 3830T model up to the super-sleek 35.5 cm (14.0") 4830T and 39.5 cm (15.6") 5830T versions, the Aspire TimelineX family features slim Acer CineCrystal LED backlit displays with a 16:9 aspect ratio and 1366 X 768 HD resolution. These displays present razor-sharp images and breathtaking visuals in high definition for the ultimate go-anywhere cinematic entertainment experience.

The Aspire TimelineX family integrates state-of-the-art wireless and wired technologies: Wi-Fi Certified network connection, Bluetooth 3.0 (optional) and Gigabit LAN. The new 1.3 MB high-definition webcam not only lets you keep in touch with your friends or business contacts through high-resolution video-chats, but offers improved video quality under low light and permits you to record your own brilliant HD 720p videos with audio to share on your social networks.

Stay powered up with the Aspire TimelineX by charging your smartphone or other USB devices without even turning the laptop on. With your laptop as your charging station, you can travel yet lighter because you don't have to carry so many power adapters. It's smarter than you ever thought a laptop could be. You can even plug in your smartphone headset to listen and talk through the combo audio jack.

The Aspire TimelineX series exceeds any expectations and is extreme in every way, in just one inch.

The Aspire TimelineX series will be available from 1st August. Final pricing and specifications to be finalised.