

Extensive features and real-time previews

Video Editing Software
Vegas Video 3.0
Media Studio Pro 6.5

by Kirby Ferguson

While *Adobe Premiere* has established itself as the Windows standard for mid-range video editing (and even some high end productions), less expensive applications continue to chip away at its dominance. Two such powerful apps are Sonic Foundry's *Vegas Video 3* and Ulead's *Media Studio Pro 6.5*. Both programs offer feature sets that are equivalent to *Premiere*, then up the stakes by sporting real-time previews of effects and transitions.

So is *Premiere* now antiquated and overpriced compared to these aggressive competitors? Let's take a look.

SPEED AND KILLER AUDIO IN VEGAS VIDEO

Sonic Foundry is well-known for its superior audio applications like *Acid* and *Sound Forge*, but is less renowned in the video world. With *Vegas Video 3*, however, Sonic Foundry is now a bona fide powerhouse in the DV arena. *Vegas Video* has many

compelling features that elevate it above its competition, and it may be close to eclipsing everything in its price range.

Chief among its extensive assets are swift performance and enviable real-time features. The program even trumps Apple's *Final Cut Pro* by previewing all its effects in real-time. You can apply as many effects and transitions as you like and view them immediately—the only limitation being the processing power of your computer. Of course complex effects get choppy, but you can adjust the quality of your previews to get something serviceable.

These real-time previews, however, are not final renders. You still need to do a final render before you export or print to tape, a process that can easily take hours. But I found the trade-off completely worth making. You can always render your project when you go for lunch or at the end of the day; and I prefer to do all my processing at once, rather than be bogged down while I'm editing.

Vegas Video pairs its excellent performance with a highly customizable workspace that successfully adapts the music score metaphor of its audio siblings. The program's layout is lean and fast, with minimal buttons, a tidy arrangement of tabbed

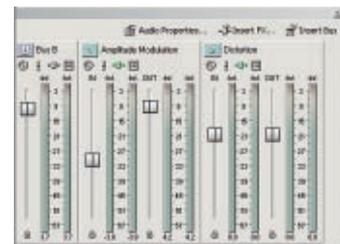
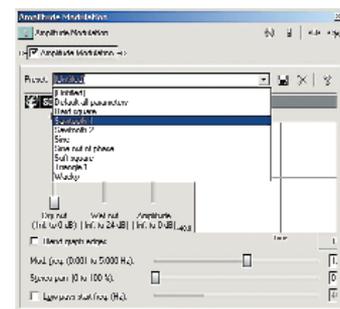
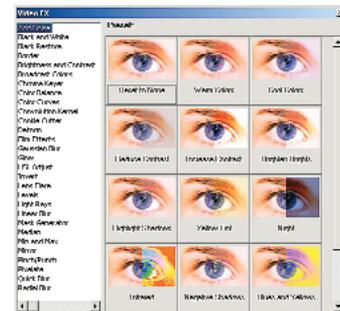
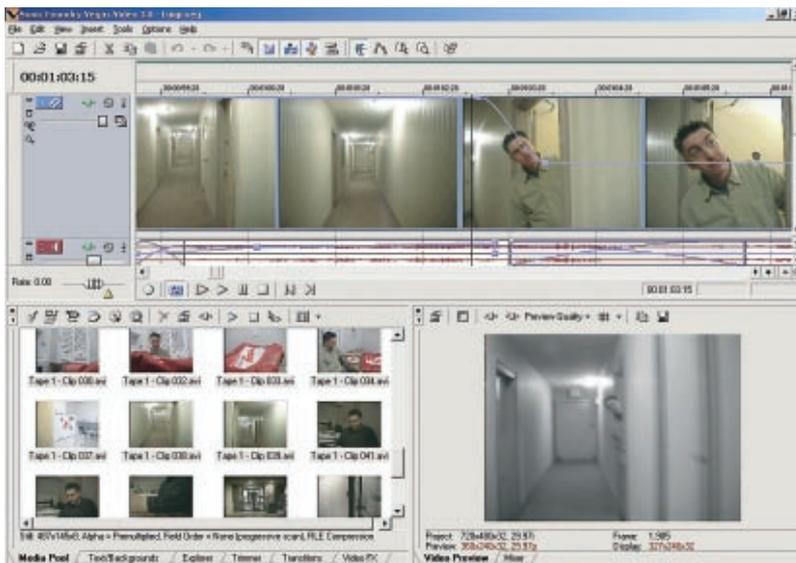
palettes, and excellent context-sensitive features. *Vegas Video's* approach is unorthodox yet intuitive, once you get acquainted, and the skills you develop translate nicely to Sonic Foundry's other apps.

Predictably, *Vegas Video's* audio features are second-to-none. The program even comes with what feels like a miniature version of *Sound Forge*, allowing you to do extensive audio sweetening within *Vegas*. And because the program loops clips by default, you can drop in your *Acid* loops and create basic soundtracks within the program. However, I found adjusting audio levels with rubberbands to be somewhat tricky since there are two draggable controls within audio clips and they sometimes overlap.

One of *Vegas Video's* sexiest features is velocity envelopes, which let you smoothly change the speed of your video, allowing you to do those trendy-but-cool smooth transitions between fast- and slow-motion.

Vegas Video features a wide assortment of both fun and functional EFFECTS AND TRANSITIONS, and they're all rendered on-screen in real-time (provided your computer can keep-up).

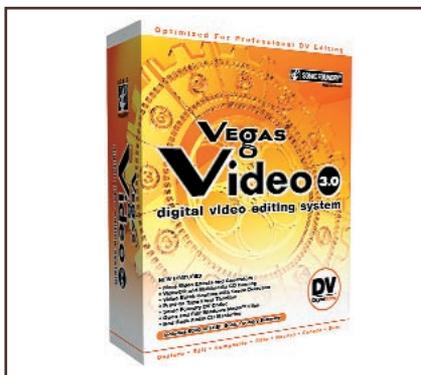
VELOCITY ENVELOPES are the sexiest feature in *Vegas Video*, allowing you to transition smoothly between fast- and slow-motion.



True to Sonic Foundry's heritage in audio editing and creation, Vegas Video sports superior AUDIO FEATURES. Pair it with SoundForge and Acid, and Vegas Video gives you a lot of tools for creating and editing professional-quality sound.

I also loved the ability to apply film effects like scratches, grain and hair to imitate the look of old film.

My one big disappointment with *Vegas Video* is its timeline editing, which doesn't feel as polished and speedy as *Premiere's*. For instance, clips on different tracks don't automatically snap to each other; instead, you have to position the playhead accordingly (which can be done with a keyboard shortcut), then snap to the playhead. This seems more cumbersome than simply having the clips snap into place. I also miss the ability to grab the playhead to scrub playback; a tricky little slider provides this



SONIC FOUNDRY VEGAS VIDEO 3.0

System Requirements

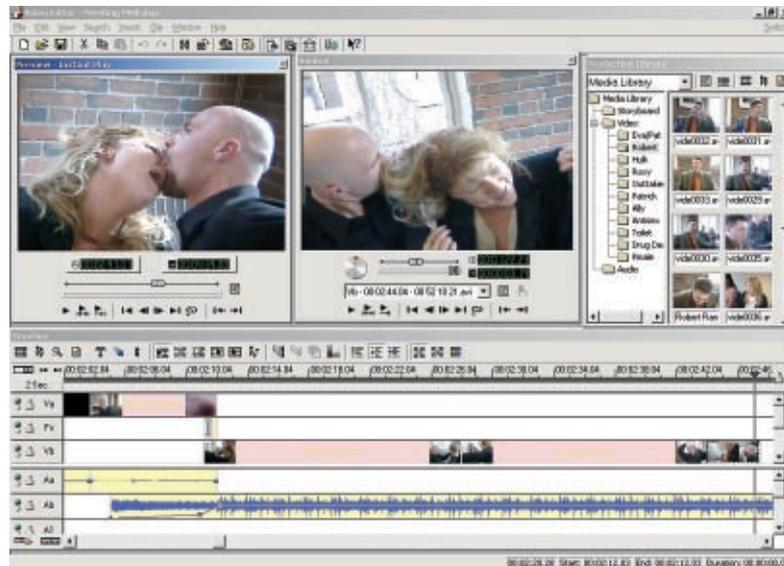
WINDOWS ONLY

- Minimum 400 MHz processor
- 128 MB RAM, 40 MB hard-disk space
- Windows 98SE, Me, 2000, or XP
- Microsoft DirectX 8 or later
- Windows-compatible sound card
- CD-ROM drive
- Supported CD-Recordable drive (for CD burning only)
- 7200 RPM hard disk
- OHCI-compliant IEEE-1394/DV capture card (for DV capture and print-to-tape tools only)
- 24-bit color display recommended
- Internet Explorer 5.0 or later

Pricing

Suggested list US\$479.96 packaged; US\$419.97 downloadable

Sonic Foundry
Web www.sonicfoundry.com



Ulead's *Media Studio Pro* has a comfortable *Premiere*-like **INTERFACE** and good **EDITING TOOLS**. However, first-time users will be baffled by the timeline's layering methods: the bottom video layer is actually the top of the stacking order.

function. And the timeline seems eager to have you select a time range rather than allowing you to choose actual clips. I did, however, appreciate *Vegas's* default behaviour of cross-fading overlapping tracks.

Less crucial but bothersome: some important options are tucked away in easily-forgotten preferences. For example, capture destinations must be set in the "Options" menu instead of defaulting to your document's location. As a result I saved my captures in the wrong directory several times. Audio capture settings are the same: they're in preferences, rather than displaying a button as in *Premiere*. *Vegas Video* also doesn't offer any means to capture audio only.

But with its blistering speed, scads of effects, and enviable sound features, *Vegas Video* could easily take over as top video editor on the Windows platform—if only its ungainly timeline is improved; for now, this single shortcoming prevents *Vegas Video* from surpassing *Premiere*.

A demo of *Vegas Video 3* is available from www.sonicfoundry.com. It's well worth the download, even if you're a dedicated *Premiere* user.

MEDIA STUDIO PRO: STILL CLIMBIN' THAT HILL

For a long time Ulead's *Media Studio Pro* has been positioning itself as a viable—

and less costly—alternative to *Adobe Premiere*. When it comes to features, this ambitious suite is clearly in *Premiere's* league, even offering cutting-edge capabilities you won't find in *Adobe's* market leader (basic DVD authoring and real-time rendering among them).

But slow, jumpy playback and a clunky feel undercut *Media Studio Pro's* technological merits, preventing the suite from being a legit contender.

Media Studio Pro is actually a suite of applications: *Video Editor*, *Video Capture*,

Audio Editor, *CG Infinity* (for animation and titling) and *Video Paint* (for painting on individual frames, allowing you to create things like smoke effects). This is a lot of power to get in one package. But I'm not fond of the extra time and ad-



Media Studio Pro packs in plenty of **VIDEO EFFECTS AND TRANSITIONS**, but many are gimmicky enough to be considered useless. You're just begging for ridicule if you decide to apply filters like **Accordion (I)** and **Flying Cube**.

ministration required to work multiple apps at the same time. And of course, these components can't compare with standalone competitors (*Audio Editor* is

no *Sound Forge*, *CG Infinity* is no *After Effects*), but they do have the enormous benefit of being virtually free. For this review, I'll concentrate primarily on *Media Studio Pro Video Editor*, which is where you'll do most of your work.

Media Studio Pro installed easily on my Windows 2000 system and I had less configuration headaches than I did with *Premiere*. I found capturing in particular to be a breeze. *Media Studio Pro's* video editor is built on the *Premiere* model and includes all the editing features one would

Unfortunately, that's all rendered moot once you actually start editing. Sluggish, chunky playback is the glaring flaw that overwhelms all of *Media Studio Pro's* other strong points. Even playing hard cuts is preceded by a pause before playback kicks into motion, and then the preview itself is often jumpy and pixelated. Sure, real-time rendering of effects is nice, but without clean, immediate playback of straight edits, that seems like putting the cart before the horse. It's a shame, since this one major failing overwhelms everything else that *Media Studio Pro* has going for it.

Other gripes are less critical: I had consistent trouble selecting neighbouring clips for trimming, and I didn't like the timeline functioning upside down (lower layers actually appear above higher ones). This little interface twist seems highly counter-intuitive. And of course *Media Studio Pro's* more ghastly visual effects should be weeded out.

You get plenty of bang for the buck with *Media Studio Pro*, but the diverse features aren't worthwhile without sharp performance. It feels like a lower end application that's gotten ahead of itself, adding high end features without first providing a solid foundation. Should Ulead address *Media Studio Pro's* speed issues, this program would see drastic improvement. Until then, it can't compete with either *Premiere* or *Vegas Video*.

TIME TO FORSAKE PREMIERE?

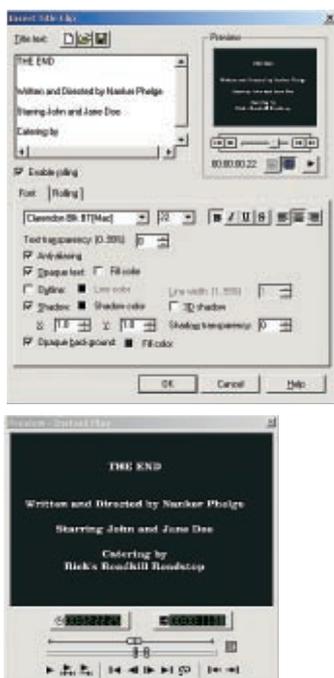
While both *Vegas Video* and *Media Studio Pro* match (and often exceed) *Premiere's* list of features and seem less prone to configuration woes, neither managed to top *Premiere's* rock-solid timeline editing. Real-time effects aside, *Media Studio Pro* is much slower to use than *Premiere*.

Vegas Video's strengths, on the other hand, are impressive enough to deserve attention right now. In particular, if you do a lot of effects-heavy work or regard audio as a vital aspect of your video-making, *Vegas* should be a serious consideration. When paired with Sonic Foundry's superb audio applications (with which it integrates nice-

ly), *Vegas Video* becomes an AV dynamo. With just a modest amount of nip-and-tuck, *Vegas Video* is going to give *Adobe Premiere* some stiff competition for top honours in Windows prosumer video editing.

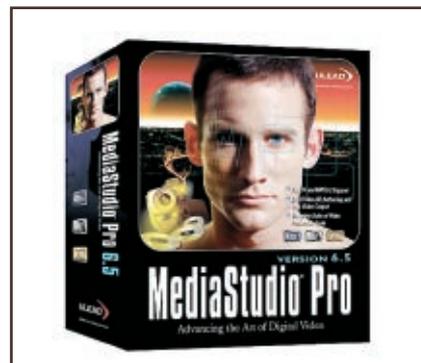
Kirby Ferguson is a Toronto-based zero-budget, guerrilla filmmaker. To find out what he's currently up to, visit www.kirblooey.com.

TITLES are quick and easy to create in *Media Studio Pro*, but pro features like leading and kerning are nowhere to be found. You'll have to switch to *CG Infinity*, *MSP's* animation and titling component, for that, and even there, these features are mediocre.



expect. The program's interface is easy to use and familiar. Timeline features are arranged in a button bar atop the timeline window. Media, effects and transitions are nicely packaged in an *Explorer*-like palette. Like *Vegas Video*, *Media Studio Pro* offers a wide assortment of transitions and filters, but unfortunately they're considerably less tasteful than Sonic Foundry's. In fact, many are too gimmicky to be of any real use.

So on first blush, *Media Studio Pro* seems to be a very solid editor; capturing is quick and easy, and all the necessary editing tools and niceties are at hand and sensibly arranged.



MEDIA STUDIO PRO 6.5

System Requirements

WINDOWS ONLY

- Windows 98, 98 SE, NT 4.0 with Service Pack 6, ME, 2000 and XP
- DV support requires Windows 98 SE, 2000 or higher version
- Intel Pentium with MMX compatible system
- minimum 64MB RAM (128 or higher recommended), 300MB of available hard disk space required (4GB recommended)
- True color or high color display adaptor
- Windows-compatible sound card & speakers
- OHCI compliant FireWire (IEEE1394) card for use with DV camcorders

Input/Output Device Support

- WinTab compatible pressure-sensitive digitizing tablets
- MCI and V-LAN device controllers
- OHCI compliant FireWire (IEEE1394) card for use with DV camcorder
- Windows Driver Model (WDM) or Video for Windows (VFW) compliant Video Devices
- CD-R/RW writer recommended

Pricing

Suggested list US\$495

Ulead

Web www.ulead.com