

Gallery mTools

Sound effects libraries usually represent a fairly major investment for any audio post facility, but buying the effects is pointless unless you've a plan for organising them. **ANDY DAY** says it's all in the management.

IN THE COURSE of your work, a client may ask for a different car sound effect from your usual choice. You know you have another 200 spread across 15 different CDs but your assistant's got the day off and you can't face the 'yellow pages' syndrome of the listings. So you rig up the CD player, get to track 99, index 4, and so it goes on. mTools from Gallery software, running on the Apple Mac platform promises to take care of all this by combining database functions with CD digitising software, plus auditioning and spotting into Pro Tools using a few keystrokes.

The package actually consists of several separate applications, for digitising and cataloguing your library, as well as some clever modules for delivery into Pro Tools and converting files to MPEG (layer 1,2 or 3). The steps are: Authoring, which digitises the CDs and compiles a database; Searching, which gives you fast and powerful search capabilities; and Auditioning, which lets you hear the search results. Finally there's Delivery, which allows direct spotting into Pro Tools.

I digitised five CDs from the Digi Effects library using an external Plextor SCSI CD drive, which for a 40x drive takes about 12 minutes per CD. This is improved in the OSX

version of mTools, which will be shipping by the time you read this article. Various options are possible when ripping including file type SDII or AIFF, split files for stereo, and auto detects for mono tracks. The ripped files are all at 44.1kHz and converted only at the delivery stage.

When you make a bulk import like this, you are prompted for a CD link file, this is the clever bit of mTools. Gallery has compiled lists of every major commercial CD effects library available, as well as several major music libraries. This makes digitising a breeze. Once the CD link file is located, mTools prompts the user to insert the disc, then each ripped file is automatically given the correct name as per the library list (including a description), which can be used later for the search functions.

When all the discs are loaded the SFX database

builder application is used to create a file maker database, which is the basis of the mTools databasing facilities. You then open the mTools application, import the file and the authoring process is complete.

It took about an hour and a half to author about 3000 effects, which may seem like a long time but the effort is well worth it, as you will see later. The mTools application is a template for Filemaker Pro and a front end for some of the other applications included in the package. This is good for most users, who just want to use the system without learning about databases or file converters.

There is just one main screen for mTools, with tabs at the top to access the main functions. The detailed layout tab shows a list of the current database, with file name, effect description, file type, creation date, sample rate, bit depth, and drive location. A speaker icon allows auditioning of the effect and a Pro Tools button copies the effect to your Pro Tools session at the correct sample rate and bit depth.

To shortlist effects you can tag files and audition them, then send the best to Pro Tools or a pull list within mTools. The summary layout tab is useful if you have a large number of effects tagged or a



