

Sony Vegas 7+ DVD Architect 4

Sony's Media Production Toolset has matured nicely and while the headline feature set hasn't changed that much, the all important 'oily bits' have dramatically changed for the better. **ROB JAMES** rolls up his sleeves.

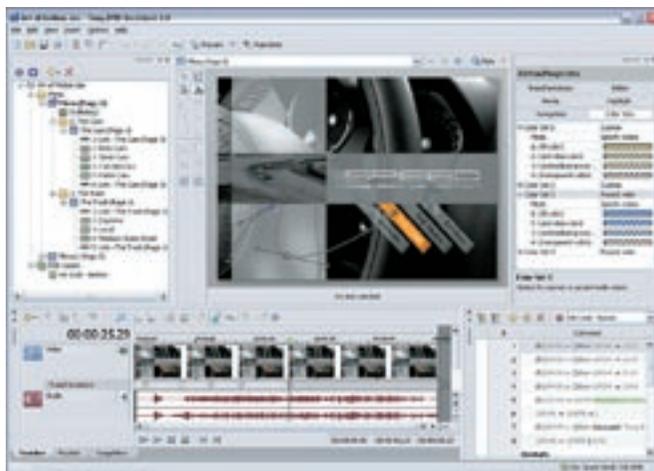
THE LAST TIME I took a look at Sony's Vegas 'Media Production Toolset' it was at version 5.0 and now on a fast machine with plenty of memory Vegas is a lot slicker. The editing model has always been attractive to audio people but, by the same token, it has always seemed a little alien to anyone brought up on Premiere, Edius, Final Cut or Media Composer. More good news comes with the price, thanks to the exchange rate and fierce competition the Vegas 7/DVD Architect 4 bundle is now just UK£424 (+ VAT). Boris Graffiti LTD tiling software, and Red Giant Magic Bullet Movie Looks 65HD video effects are included along with a sample CD of Sony sound effects.

The last major upgrade to V6 brought a comprehensive re-write of the rendering engine and changed the feel of Vegas almost beyond recognition. Version 7 is not a flashy upgrade with a raft of new whizzy features. Rather it is a consolidation with further performance improvements, tweaks that make life easier and improve workflow, and support for new formats.

Unsurprisingly, given that this is a Sony product, there is now extensive support for Sony HD and SD XDCAM MXF files in both native and proxy formats. All HD and SD XDCAM compression types (MPEG HD, IMX 30, 40, 50 and DVCAM) at all frame rates in all aspect ratios; multichannel audio and essence markers can be used. For input there are options of i.LINK (FireWire) or Ethernet. Extensive conform options are provided for proxy files and output can be mastered to disk.

Native HDV performance has also been improved. You can edit native transport streams or transcode to a variety of intermediate codecs. Import from DVD camcorder has been added along with export to Sony PSP (PlayStation Portable). On the audio front, the multichannel BWF files generated by location recorders, such as Sound Devices and Nagra, are now supported. Vegas 7 recognises the time-stamps and automatically synchronises multichannel files across the timeline.

Window docking is more flexible with less restriction on which windows can be placed where. Window layouts can be quickly saved and recalled, which will improve workflow since there are a large number of tabbed windows in the Vegas interface and it is all too easy to inadvertently hide things. Now the user can design screen layouts suitable for specific tasks and



recall them at the touch of a key.

Timeline previews can now be simultaneously viewed in both preview window and external monitor. There are new scaling options including Auto-Fit, which makes the best use of the available preview window real-estate.

Integration with Cinescore is a real sign of the times. Whatever we might think about semi-automatically generated music it is undeniably useful when you need a quick link and Sony's new Cinescore appears to be one of the easiest music generators to use. If you have Cinescore, Vegas detects this and enables music to be generated to fit the picture without leaving the Vegas environment.

CD Audio Extraction uses Gracenote Music ID to obtain information about CD tracks including title, artist, and song name.

The 'snap' function has been enhanced with new object options making it easier to precisely place objects in complex projects. You can snap to objects on any track and colour-codes now denote snap object type, marker, region, event, cursor and grid. It is also worth noting that Vegas has a very neat method of indicating and repairing loss of sync between audio and video clips. Automation curves can now be drawn with a brush and there is an 'auto-thinning' function to reduce the number of points to a minimum.

With the full package installed (absolutely no dramas), I imported the rushes from a project recently completed on another machine using a rival editor. Without recourse to the manual the first three minutes

or so were back together again in very short order. No small feat since the material was acquired using a different codec (also present on the Vegas PC) in another manufacturer's editor — compatibility indeed. Previews were good and on this Intel Core2 Duo extreme-based machine the transport dynamics are as fluid and fast as you could wish. Hitherto I've not been using Vegas regularly but this might now change. I'm certainly going to use it on a project or two to get the 'in anger' feel of it. I'm especially impressed by its compositing abilities.

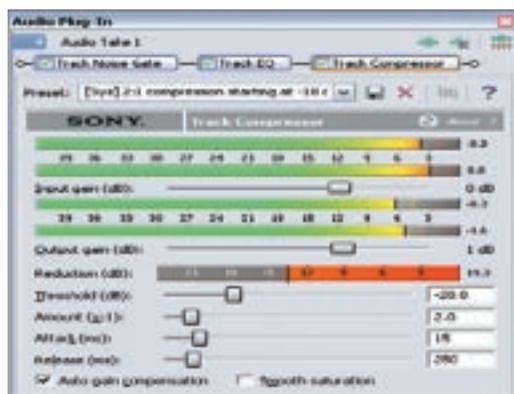
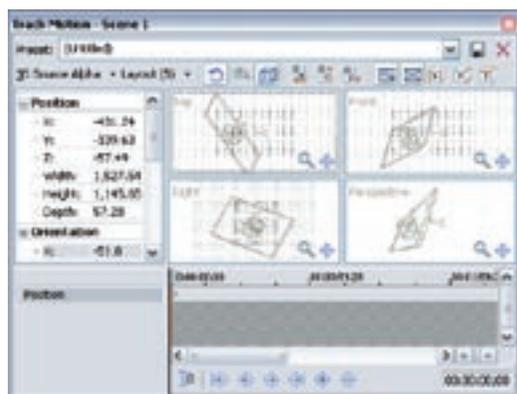
DVD Architect is now at Version 4 and includes 5.1 Dolby AC-3 encoding. The first major new feature is the ability to create and run scripts integral to the DVD design. This will allow interactivity to be built into projects for games and kiosk automation with pass-code protection.

The timeline can be panned and cropped. Objects, such as buttons and graphics can be animated with keyframe control in menus. Scene/Chapter buttons and button markers can be added to the timeline and button 'hot-spots' can be added over video with control over position, duration and link. This allows conditional branching, for example so that the viewer can access more detailed information about a subject of interest. DVD-R dual-layer discs are now supported for increased playing times.

I have been using DVD Architect almost exclusively for at least three years. Once you get your head around it, it is perfectly possible to knock out a quick DVD, say for giving to a composer, in less time than the supposedly more user-friendly and simple authoring packages. On the other hand, highly sophisticated results can be obtained with a bit of patience and ingenuity. The themes and button designs supplied leave a lot to be desired but you can do much better with a bit of effort and without getting into the complexities of XML scripting.

Vegas is the only application I can think of in this class that is easily accessible by newcomers while offering the scope required for professional use. From a relatively slow start back in the days when it was owned by Sonic Foundry, Vegas has steadily gained adherents across the spectrum of users and applications from casual amateur to broadcast professional.

DVD Architect is simply a great program and Vegas is certainly close. At this price it is a bit of a no-brainer. ■



PROS

Easy, fluid editing; strong media management; compositing; if your needs are modest, save yourself a fortune; DVD Architect.

CONS

Strange UI if you are familiar with other video editors; more effects and nested effects would be nice; DVD Architect themes and buttons need a makeover; DVD Architect not available separately.

Contact

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