VoiceQ ADR & Dub

ADR is a necessary evil and if you do it for a living then you'll be interested in any means to lessen the chore. ANDY DAY uncovers an innovative set of tools for streamlining the process and also throws in a foreign language dubbing program from the same manufacturer.

*L*iving on the other side of the world in New Zealand may seem to be last place you'd expect to find innovative specialist software companies, but there are more here than you'd expect. Serato, Virtual Katy and Shiny Box to name a few but I recently came across another such company called Kiwa. Kiwa has developed a suite of software products aimed at revolutionising the way ADR or foreign dubbing is achieved by using VoiceQ ADR, VoiceQ Dub, QML and SIM. These names won't make a lot of sense to you at the moment but by the end of this review, if you're involved in ADR or foreign language dubbing you'll be downloading a demo.

For anyone not familiar with ADR, it's the process of replacing original dialogue with new studio performances from the actor concerned. ADR actually stands for automatic dialogue replacement, but it's far from automatic. In fact it's a time-consuming process that actors generally hate doing. Therefore any tool to make the process more streamlined is very welcome and that's where Voice Q ADR comes in.

VoiceQ isn't just another DAW and, in fact, it doesn't record audio at all. Instead it works alongside your existing DAW as long as it supports MTC and MMC. While other ADR tools on the market have focussed on creating new audio monitoring systems for recording ADR, including count down pips and streamers, VoiceQ concentrates on making the job easier for the actor by superimposing the actual lines of dialogue over a QuickTime movie, in sync with the original lines of dialogue. This makes ADR easier for everyone, the actor can just read the lines, the recording engineer can concentrate on recording the dialogue and the sound supervisor or director can concentrate on the quality of the delivery. Another side benefit is that everyone uses lines of dialogue from the script as a reference, that way no-one gets lost and most importantly nothing gets missed.

To get the script into VoiceQ, Kiwa provides a software tool called SIM. You could type each line of dialogue into VoiceQ but as most scripts are already in file form, an easier way is to just import the text. Any tab delimited file can be used, but given the huge range of different script formats out there, the SIM (Script Import Manager) is the easiest option. It uses some very clever format extraction technology to reformat your script into the correct format for VoiceQ ADR, even timecodes are recognised, formatted and used to spot lines. Then the whole script appears in VoiceQ ADR complete with timecode information for each line.

You can adjust each individual word to match up with the original so it's just a case of going from scene to scene and recording everything. Streamers and pips are commonly used in normal ADR sessions as a visual or audio cue for the actor to get ready to repeat the line and these are also available in VoiceQ where they get superimposed on the QuickTime along with the scrolling text in real-time, giving the actors another tool to get the job done perfectly. VoiceQ is not just limited to ADR though because you can also use it for spotting effects or Foley on a scene-by-scene basis. It's relatively easy to import a spotting list using SIM and then locate your DAW to
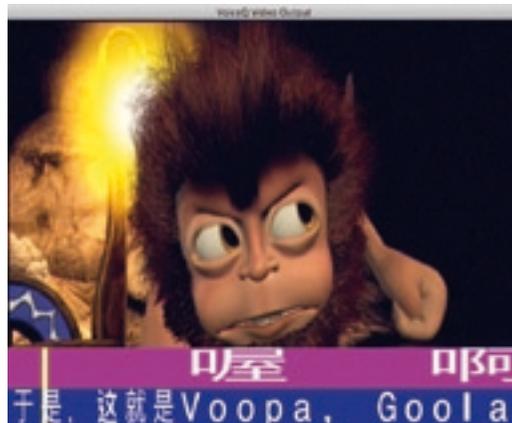
each effect or Foley section.

VoiceQ Dub is similar to VoiceQ ADR but is optimised for foreign language dubbing. In this version, multiple language scripts can be imported and then switched on as overlays onto the QuickTime movie. This will make life so much easier for studios that record groups of foreign language versions for the same title. Each script is input using either of the methods mentioned above, then the operator can switch between the languages and have the lines of dialogue change on the QuickTime and the script layout page. It is therefore easy for operators who are not familiar with the language being recorded to switch back and forth to the English version for reference, for example.

The final part of the puzzle is QML (cue my lips).

This offers a way for translators to collaborate on 'dry' translations, which can be directly imported and used in VoiceQ Dub. While it can be used as a standalone, there are also translation services that Kiwa can provide using a worldwide network of translators that is available via subscription.

The purchased version requires an iLok for authorisation, but if you already have Pro Tools then you can use the same iLok for both. Once you have the script imported correctly, the script interface of VoiceQ is very well laid out with each line of dialogue and columns containing line number, character name and timecode start/end. There's even a summary of the number of words in each line. Each field is completely editable for instances where original script changes are made at the session. Clicking on any line will locate to that line, move Pro Tools to the correct place on the timeline, and thus cue everything ready to record. There are selectors that let you decide what information you want overlaid onto the QuickTime, such as timecode, cue streamers and even a text preview of the line being recorded.

Although you can run VoiceQ on the same machine as your Pro Tools, a second machine is recommended, especially if you're outputting video to an external monitor. Ideally you need an external transport controller for your Pro Tools as well, to streamline the recording of each take. Below the script window is the timeline, which has a guide waveform display and each line of dialogue clearly displayed with each word visible. Individual words can be manipulated to perfect timing and help improve the actor's timing for the translation. A filter allows each character to be isolated to help reduce the number of lines on screen to just the character being recorded.

As with most things, the best way to experience it is to try it yourself. I recommend you download the demo version as it'll give you a great overview of what is possible with VoiceQ. There are plenty of other creative applications for VoiceQ too.

Kiwa has come up with a totally original way to deal with voice-led recording to picture. By concentrating on the basics of the script and pictures it has succeeded in making a necessary 'chore' more enjoyable for all concerned. It's not cheap, but the productivity benefits will soon be recouped and decreasing the likelihood of hissy fits from stroppy actors makes it a worthwhile investment. ∎

PROS Unique approach to ADR/dubbing; clear and easy to use interface; foolproof way to foreign language dubbing.

CONS Only works with MTC and MMC DAWs; best results with a second Mac for VoiceQ.

EXTRAS

VoiceQ ADR US$2,495; VoiceQ Dub US$3,995; Special prices for *Resolution* subscribers only, if purchased before 1 March 2009; VoiceQ ADR US$2,095; VoiceQ DUB US$3,395

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