



United Media Multicam

Take a few cameras and make it look like you had a production truck

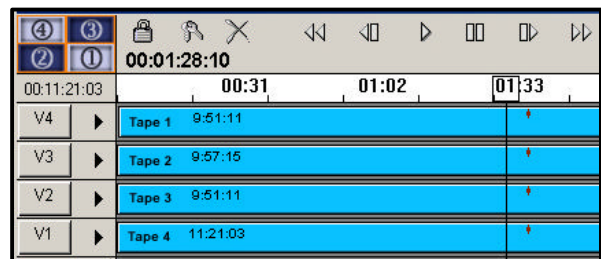
By Charlie White



Here's a software add-on for Adobe Premiere that lets you direct a production after the fact -- it's Multicam by United Media (\$599), software that can give you a timeline-based editing environment with up to four cameras synched together. Then, as you work your way through the production, you pick which camera is "on line" at any given time. The software works only with Premiere on Matrox products, including RT2000, RT2500 and all the DigiSuite iterations.

Multicam allows you to synchronize two, three or four cameras on a timeline, and the lower-priced Multicam 2-camera (\$299), allows two cameras. To use it, first you need to videotape multiple cameras shooting the same subject at the same time (for this review, we used four sources). Or, you could use four different scenes shot with one camera, where each one was synched to a music track, for example, in a music video production. Using Premiere, you capture each of your cameras' video and place the four clips onto four separate video tracks. No need to synch them up; that will be done in Multicam. You save the Premiere project and name it something you'll remember; placing it in a location on your computer you can get to easily.

The next step is to open that Premiere project you just saved in the Multicam application. Then you'll see all four clips lined up on a timeline. Now it's time to synch the shots, which is a fairly simple process. It's especially painless if you've jam-synched the cameras on location, that is, placed identical time code on all four, because all you have to do is tell the software to synch the clips by clicking on Synch by Time Code and it's done. If you haven't recorded the shots with identical time code, not to worry. Find a spot in the clips, perhaps where you had someone clap or where your talent started talking, and place a marker on each clip at that point. As soon as you choose Synch by Clip Marker, all the clips are synchronized.



Then the fun starts. As you play the footage, you select which camera is on line by using the number keys 1 through 4 on your keyboard. The video from all in your choice of a square, lined up in a row. Hey, this is live multicamera shoot without to see the video playing back second for all four cameras at that's especially significant with a common EIDE drive.



four cameras is arranged quad-box configuration, or fun! It feels like directing a all the pressure. It's great at a full 30 frames per the same time, a feat because it can be done Those of us old timers are

amazed whenever see something like this, a feature that just a few years ago would have been a multi-thousand option on an Avid Media Composer.

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Even so, I still have a small bone to pick with this setup -- there's another monitor window that, as you're doing this, inexplicably shows only the clip that's at the top of the timeline. I'd really like to see the "program video" in this extra window, that is, the shot that was just taken. But it's only after you're done with your "after the fact" directing that this monitor shows you the result of your choices. I expected it to change as the different cameras were selected, just as a program monitor would while directing a live multicamera shoot. United Media does not recommend having this monitor window open during your "live cutting" at all -- they recommend that you use the four smaller monitors only and open the main viewer only to do your final changes. Sure, after you're done with your camera selection, it will play back the sequence as you selected the shots, but not during. But hey, maybe it's just me -- as a live TV director, because I'm accustomed to having a monitor for each camera and a Line monitor, I see this as a shortcoming.

But still, the thing works, and after you've picked the camera sequence you want, if you select "condense," it places the clips in an A/B arrangement, while also giving you the choice of adding handles on each side of the clips if you'd like to add dissolves or tweak the shots further later. If you don't select Condense, the clips stay on all four lines as you placed them, but each shot is cut to the length you specified. This way, you're able to edge-drag each shot in Premiere if you want to lengthen or shorten one of your takes.

If the United Media developers could make it so it would be easier to change your mind later, when, for example, a finicky client wants to know if camera three would have looked better there instead of camera two, it would make it much easier to revise your camera choices.

Finally, even though I think its \$599 price tag is a bit high, Multicam's price is quite low considering what you would have paid for this capability in the past. But considering that the full version of Premiere itself can be had for around \$500, I think a quasi-plugin like Multicam, that needs Premiere in order to run, shouldn't cost more than its host application. But as is the case with most software, expect this price to come down eventually.

It's a nice effort, though, and one that, up until now, has only been available in all its glory on edit systems costing tens of thousands more like Avid Media Composer, and to a lesser extent, Discreet Edit. If you've considered getting into multicamera shoots, this might be the application that makes it possible for you.



Charlie White has been writing about new media and digital video since it was the laughingstock of the television industry. A technology journalist and columnist for the past eight years, White is also an Emmy-winning producer, video editor and shot-calling PBS TV director with 27 years broadcast experience. Talk back -- Send Chazz a note at cwhite@digitalmedianet.com.