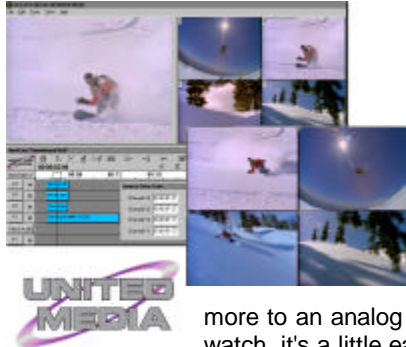


On-line express

By Charlie White
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January / February 2001

Are You a Seasoned On-line Linear Tape Editor? You'll Feel Comfortable With On-Line Express.

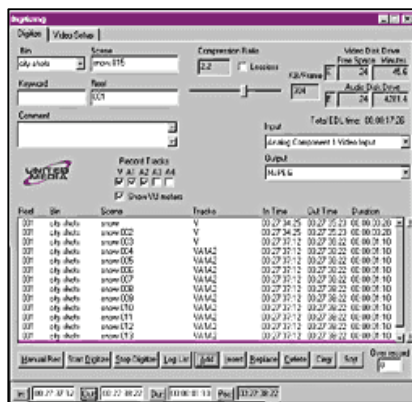


more to an analog watch with a quartz movement -- while it can still do its job as accurately as a digital watch, it's a little easier to deal with, especially for those who grew up in the analog world. The result is a solid cutter, and best of all, it's able to get the most out of its up-to-date underbelly, the highly capable Matrox DigiSuite hardware.

While On-Line Express's impressive pixel-pushing power under the hood is unmistakable, on the outside its human interface is a model of simplicity. In its nearly mode-free interface, menus are almost not needed. For instance, to switch from insert editing to ripple editing, it's not necessary to go and select a ripple tool. Just click the clip to select it and drag and drop it wherever you want. Click on an unselected clip and it drags all the shots in the timeline along with it, giving you ripple editing. That's a straightforward approach that's hard not to like. It's especially favored by tape editors because of United Media's own edit controller, which the company calls its remote shuttle knob (pictured at right). Active on clip windows and on the timeline itself, this familiar-feeling widget is particularly welcome when it's time to shuttle tapes around at capture time, where you can digitize and operate the deck with a jog/shuttle control.



It's obvious that when this software was designed, the goal was to create an editor that was fast, user friendly, and organized everything with innovative media management tools. According to United Media, the designers of On-Line Express set out to solve four basic problems of media management: How are you inputting clips?, Where are you putting them?, How will you find them?, and how will you assemble them on the timeline? Let's take a closer look at this system and see how these questions have been successfully addressed.



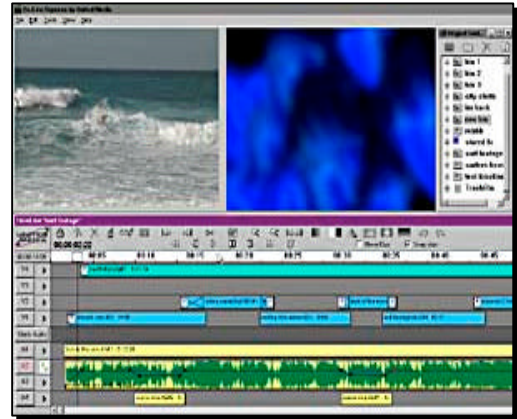
Digitizer

Starting with the digitize interface, here's a great feature that I haven't seen in other systems: you can be creating new bins as you go, directly from the digitize interface (pictured at left). Some systems allow you to pre-create your bins, and then capture, but you don't always know which bins you'll need. And the capturing process feels like a linear suite, where you mark in and out points on the jog shuttle controller. Adding to the convenience is the ability to call up this digitize window on any computer, even if it doesn't have the DigiSuite hardware installed, allowing you to edit your batch list EDL without tying up a system. This would come in handy if, say, you have a VHS dub of your footage with time code burned into a window superimposed over the video. You can simply write a time code batch list for capturing later. Working in concert with this is the ability to rout scenes to bins you've created offline. And, once you have your shots captured into bins, the Bin View lets you play clips as they sit in the bin, and then find a meaningful index frame with a button click. And by the way, you may wonder where the file/save button is. Well, there isn't one, because every move you make is written into an open database. Every thing you do, such as keystrokes, dragging with the mouse, or anything else, is saved. If you want to undo, you can then make unlimited steps back through that database.

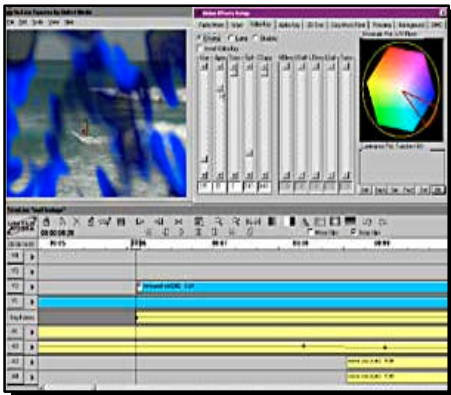
There are three ways of moving clips around:

- ? Drag a clip, and all clips move with it.
- ? Select a clip, then drag it and only that clip moves.
- ? Highlight slide keeps it on the track it's already on.

Trimming clips is equally intuitive - trim by dragging edges, or position the "needle" where you want to trim and hit a hot key, type in the time code numbers of the ins and outs, or use the trim window. In the Trim Window, there's a unique ability to trim clips without ever leaving the trim window. After you're done trimming a clip, when you click the Next Clip button your next clip in the bin is placed into the trim window, ready for your ministrations. Then, hit Control and the number of the track you'd like for it occupy, and the software places that clip on the timeline at the point where you have your needle parked. Not only is this a quick and easy way to place clips on the timeline -- it's also a great way to visually back-time a shot. Just trim your clip, park the needle on the timeline where you'd like the out point of the shot, hit Control and the track number and there it is -- the shot is placed on the timeline with its outpoint at the spot where your needle was parked.



The timeline is a bit different from what we usually see in NLE software, too. United Media likes to refer to this as a "modeless" interface. For example, drag the right edge of a clip, and you edge view it in the right window. Drag the left edge of a clip, shows up in the left monitor window.



Effects

Until Matrox releases its Max upgrade to DigiSuite, there are no real time 3D effects for On-line Express. But there's still software-based 3D, with Boris FX included with the DigiSuite hardware. Making matters easier is the fact that all the effects in On-line Express work the same way. You have the ability to set as many keyframes as there are frames in the clip. And, you can save effects and easily apply these same ones to a clip with just a drag and drop. Also easing your effects waiting time is that all the power of the full version DigiSuite is available. For example, place two DVE moves on the screen, generate a background (a unique feature that no others on this board use) and you can still do a credit roll over all this in real time. Depending on what you need to do, all the various DigiSuite models such as DTV, LX, LE or the full, uncompressed version are available and work with On-line Express.

For 2D effects you have all the real time power of Matrox DigiSuite at your disposal. Real time 3D effects are on the way.

Multicam

Here's a feature that's not available in this under \$30K price range: Multicam. You can sync up four cameras, and the software allows you to select which camera is on line, much like directing a live, multicamera shoot. This is useful if you've shot a production with multiple cameras and want to cut it together in post. Adding to the convenience is the ability to sync up the shots with time code, an audio cue or a visual cue.

You're able to do all this syncing on the timeline, a feature that works a bit differently from the way Discreet edit* does this, because here you avoid having to be in a special mode and can perform the sync in a familiar setting. Although our 400 MHz test machine could only play back the quad split at a disappointing 3 fps, the frame rate of the four sources depends on CPU speed. So, with a 1.2 GHz chip, expect much better frame rates than that. If you're going to do lots of Multicam editing with On-line Express, I'd definitely recommend using two monitors. Put the quad split in a separate monitor, and it's a nice big view, not available on any other Multicam setup I've seen.



Sync up to four cameras with the Multicam feature. But it's not in real time.

Archiving



The last step in United Media's "complete media management" goal is archiving footage. The software gives you a wide range of ways to archive project files and the media associated with them. The good news is, you never have to go to Windows file manager to delete clips - instead of going into the Windows recycle bin, deleted clips go into On-line Express's internal trash bin. It's nice to accomplish all your file management duties without ever having to go out of the program. And, it's set up in such a user-friendly way, there's virtually no way to get rid of media that you want to keep.

Finally, here are a few odds and ends I noticed in my testing: The on screen monitor is bigger than any I've seen in other editing software packages. Even though it's frame-based, it's still easier than constantly looking back and forth between your computer screen and NTSC monitor. And here's a new feature for the upcoming version 3.0 that I've often wished for: an easy way to narrate video while you're watching it. Hook up a microphone, and you're able to insert audio directly to the timeline while video is playing back. That's a nice innovation. And a final note - unlike lots of editing packages, On-line Express makes it easy to execute an L-cut. If you edit lots of documentaries, you'll agree that the audio-leading-the-

video cut is commonplace, and lots of editing packages make it too inconvenient to make it happen. Here, all you need to do is hold down the Shift key and then you can drag the video track independently.

Last Word

This is a fine editing package. It's made even more useful by the mighty DigiSuite hardware lurking underneath. Too bad there are no real time 3D effects. But that problem will be solved quickly - Matrox is due to release its new real time Max 3D effects package by mid-April, and United Media promises it will be implemented in On-line Express soon thereafter. If you're a seasoned editor who's accustomed to working with a hands-on controller, or if you're often perplexed by too many modes, menus and on-screen widgets, this powerful editing system is certainly worth a close look.

Score (Out of a possible 10):

9.5

Test System:

United Media On-line Express Version 2.8 (version 3.0 available early February)

256 MB Ram

26 GB Medea Array

Full DigiSuite (not LE)

Dual 21" Monitors

Betacam PVW-2800

Windows NT, (currently the full DigiSuite doesn't support Win2K, but LX, LE and DTV do)

Minimum system: See Web site www.unitedmediainc.com.

Price as tested (turnkey): \$12,990. Would rather sell through a re-seller as a turnkey.

Software: \$2,995.

Optional: Shuttle knob \$1,000, no software upgrade needed.

Charlie White has been writing about new media and digital video since it was the laughing stock 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. Talk back -- Send Chazz a note at cwhite@digitalmedianet.com.