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QTVR studio creates scene.

By: Sean Wagstaff

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MacWEEK

Abstract

Clariss' \$395 QuickTime VR Authoring Studio multimedia authoring software proves itself an outstanding program that makes QuickTime VR authoring as simple as possible, thanks to a very intuitive interface. The software accepts images from a scanner, digital camera or video camera, then can link the images to make a panorama. Panoramas and object movies may be connected to make virtual reality environments. The interface for linking images to make a panorama is outstanding. Even when handling skewed or other poor quality images, users have many options for fixing problems. The Stitcher functions operates automatically unless users choose to make modifications. One of the program's greatest benefits it that is does not require that images from digital cameras first be processed in Photoshop. The Panorama and Object Makers also operate automatically unless users choose otherwise. The software supports external media only as programming hooks and does not support URLs, functions due with QuickTime 3.0.

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Full Text

QuickTime VR Authoring Studio 1.0 4 1/2

QuickTime VR is great multimedia technology. Up until now, though, it has been painful for the average multimedia author to use Apple's QuickTime VR authoring tools, which were previously based on the Macintosh Programmer's Workshop.

Clariss Corp.'s \$395 QuickTime VR Authoring Studio is a huge improvement and

gives competitors a run for their money. This release replaces Apple's QuickTime VR 2.0 Authoring Tools Suite.



QuickTime VR is actually two different types of media that complement each other: panoramas and object movies. QuickTime VR panoramas are immersive 3-D scenes, while object movies let you view and rotate objects as if you're holding them in your hand. Both can be created from digital photographs or 3-D renderings, but artwork from your scanner or digital camera needs massaging to become virtual reality.

The QuickTime VR Authoring Studio handily performs every step of the process, including downloading images from a digital camera, video camera or scanner; stitching images together into a seamless panorama; and linking object movies and panoramas into multinode virtual-reality environments.

You begin by opening a Project Manager file, a container that lets you add scripting objects such as a Panorama Stitcher, Panorama Maker, Object Maker and Scene Maker. Each of these is a container that lets you add media and construct one of the components of a multinode virtual-reality project.

A stitch in time

Stitching single images into a panorama is the hardest part of creating virtual-reality content. The stitching interface in the QuickTime VR Authoring Studio is very intuitive, especially when dealing with artwork created exactly according to Apple's directions. On the other hand, dealing with photos shot on film in a slightly off-level camera and manually scanned and cropped requires a lot of intervention and tweaking. But even with difficult, badly skewed image sets, the software provides ample tools for correcting errors.

The best part of the Stitcher is that it runs automatically until you intervene to make adjustments. In the best case, you simply add all your images and the software produces a final panoramic movie. Users with digital cameras will appreciate being able to load the images directly into the Stitcher without having to make a pit stop in Adobe Photoshop.

Like the Stitcher, the Panorama Maker, which turns a panoramic image into a panoramic movie, runs automatically but provides full access to variables that affect a virtual-reality movie, including compression, sharpening, viewing angles and distortion correction.

The Object Maker is similarly automatic until you intervene with custom settings, such as pan angles for objects shot at less than 360 degrees. The Object Maker also downloads images directly from an imaging device, and it can interface with motion-control applications that drive automatic QTVR object rigs. Considering that object movies are typically made up of 144 images or more, this can save vast amounts of time and effort.

A drag-and-drop converter changes existing QuickTime VR movies into the Version 2.0 format required for projects in QuickTime VR Authoring Studio.

The Scene Maker acts as a simplified authoring tool. You can add panoramas and objects, then link the movies together quickly by dragging one-way or two-way arrows from one movie to the next. You can then easily paint hot spots into the movies using the supplied tools (which look just like image-map tools in HTML editors). When you click the Build Project button, the scene is saved as a multinode QuickTime VR movie, so that clicking a hot spot in one movie

jumps you to another movie. This very intuitive interface makes it easy to add numerous hot spots to a single movie (although each hot spot is a chore in object movies, since you have to draw on each of the many frames).

Our one disappointment is that Blobs - external media such as standard QuickTime movies, audio and programming objects - are supported only as programming hooks. This is partly because of the delay of QuickTime 3.0, which will natively support better media integration; it's now expected to ship in January. Also dependent on QuickTime 3 is support for URLs and Windows' support of QuickTime VR multinode scenes created with the tool.

Conclusions

QuickTime VR Authoring Studio gives a long-awaited heave-ho to MPW and makes QuickTime VR authoring as fast and painless as possible. Only the missing features promised to ship with QuickTime 3 prevent the program from fully mastering its environment.

Claris Corp. of Santa Clara, Calif., is at (408) 987-7000 or (800) 544-8554; <http://www.claris.com>.

Score card

QuickTime VR Authoring Studio 1.0 4 1/2 Claris Corp. List price: \$395*

Hits: Intuitive tool for creating single- and multinode QuickTime VR panoramas and objects; Scene Maker very intuitive.

Misses: Support for external media requires programming; cross-platform and URL support dependent on QuickTime 3.0

*Upgrades from Apple's QuickTime VR 2.0 Authoring Tools Suite, \$199.

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