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Desktop Products Advance at NAB

By Sean Wagstaff, special to eWEEK

LAS VEGAS—On the show floor at the [National Association of Broadcasters annual confab](#) here this week, video professionals got a chance to see the latest desktop technologies in action.

According to NAB, the show drew 89,000 attendees to the Las Vegas Convention Center for six days of presentations from broadcast-industry heavyweights and a showcase of wares ranging from lighting rigs to miniature airplanes outfitted with remote-control video cameras.

Apple Computer Inc. can always draw a crowd, and its [latest raft of video application announcements](#) earned the notice of many showgoers. At the company's booth, users packed Apple's demo theater to get a look at the forthcoming Version 4 of Final Cut Pro, Apple's video-editing package. During the demo, Apple showed its Soundtrack module, which offers thousands of ready-to-use musical loops that can be cycled and stretched to change their tempos without affecting the pitch of loop's musical notes.

Some users, such as Jason Siles, an independent video editor from Boston, were unsure about creating their own musical scores out of such building blocks. "I like the interface. It seemed really intuitive, and I'm curious about it," Siles said, "but I'm not sure about doing my own music. I'm an editor, not a musician. It would probably end up sounding like bad house music."

Apple also showed Final Cut Pro 4's new title generator, LiveType, which allows users to combine various preset styles of animated effects into an unlimited number of variations. LiveType uses a new kind of font, called LiveFonts, which include animated characters, such as flaming letters, for use with the title module.

"I'm really excited about the new type features," Siles said. "Titling in Final Cut was really kind of crappy before—it really couldn't do very interesting stuff—and so I do my titles in other programs, After Effects, and the like. It will be great to actually have some decent tools for titles right in Final Cut, and the animated type is cool. I'm already imagining there will be a zillion people coming out with their own flaming-banana fonts."

Elsewhere on the title-generator beat, Zaxwerks showed Invigorator Pro Animator, a new \$895 3D animation system for generating broadcast- and film-quality motion graphics based on 2D vector artwork. The software converts any art saved in Adobe Illustrator format into elaborate beveled 3D versions, and automatically generates 3D animations in many preset, customizable styles. Users can choose to render animations with Invigorator Pro Animator's built-in renderer or export animations to popular 3D animation packages, such as Maya, 3DS Max, SoftImage or LightWave. The Mac OS X version will ship in May, with the Windows edition shipping in Q3.

Ulead introduced the Studio Quartet video suite, which includes image editing, graphics creation, 3D text and object animation, and real-time video editing that features rotoscoping and other CG effects. Studio Quartet is expected to ship June 1 for \$895, with discounts for early purchases. The suite includes PhotoImpact 8, an image editor; COOL 3D Studio, which lets users animate 3D text and object within videos; MediaStudio Pro 7, a video editor with software-only, real-time, preview and output; and DVD Workshop AC3, a DVD authoring system.

On the advanced effects front, Imagineer Systems introduced MoKey 3, including the first version of MoKey for Mac OS X. The company also introduced a free, downloadable version, called MoKey Learning Edition. Version 3.0 of the motion effects and traveling matte-generation software includes support for Quantel generationQ and QuickTime (on both Mac and Windows) as well as support for several optional modules, including: MoKey Stabilize for image tracking and stabilization; MoKey Grainsurgery for grain processing and effects; and MoKey Track 2D, which allows tracking information to be exported to other applications, such as After Effects or Shake. The MoKey Learning Edition (LE) is a fully functional version that leaves watermarks on resulting images.

Pinnacle Systems announced Cinewave 4, a hardware board and software to provide advanced real-time effects to Final Cut Pro 4. Key features of Cinewave 4 include support for real-time capture from both SD and HD sources at industry-standard frame rates (23.976, 24, 25, 29.97 and 30) into popular high-quality offline formats, such as PhotoJPEG and DV. It also provides real-time effects for DV; PhotoJPEG; and 8-, 10- and 16-bit uncompressed sources in the same timeline while maintaining video out.

Pinnacle said the system also offers real-time, keyframeable time remap for creating slow- and fast-motion effects, as well as Keyframeable real-time embedded moving alpha. Pinnacle added that Cinewave 4 will compliment Final Cut Pro 4's new multistream real-time effects and other new features.

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Kaydara announced Motion Builder ONLINE 4.0, software that integrates real-time 3D animation with live video footage. For example, it can be used to control an animated 3D puppet in front of a live news feed. The company's demo featuring a talking 3D chicken, driven by a backstage puppeteer, drew laughs as the on-screen chicken talked to (and poked fun at) passing showgoers.

An artist showed off some of the new capabilities of Alias|Wavefront's Maya 5 in ATI Technologies' booth, where the animation software ran on a computer equipped with ATI's latest Radeon FireGL X1 card. Maya's new hardware renderer, combined with the high-speed 3D hardware, was able to generate broadcast-ready particle effects at impressive speeds.

ATI also showed the ALL-IN-WONDER 9800 PRO, which combines the company's fastest 3D rendering engine with new TV-on-the-PC video-editing features for home theaters. The \$449 card includes PVR features for recording television programs; multiple picture-in-picture capabilities; Thruview, for translucent video-file playback; and stereo audio. It uses Gemstar's GuidePlus+ for a searchable directory of programming and offers analog video editing and capture at DV frame rates and resolutions, as well as component video output for connection to HDTV hardware and other high-end home theater systems.

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