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Electrifier Pro

By Sean Wagstaff
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Rating:

Platform: Macintosh, Windows 95/98, NT 4.0 (in third quarter)

Verdict: Electrifier Pro makes the QuickTime 3 toolbox accessible, but there are rough edges and a lack of needed controls.

List Price: \$595

Contact: Electrifier, 919-968-0701, 800-933-7303, or www.electrifier.com

Apple's QuickTime 3 offers Web and interactive producers the most comprehensive set of cross-platform multimedia features available in one system-software addition. But a shortage of tools has hindered authors' ability to tap into much of QuickTime's power. Electrifier's Electrifier Pro is the first noteworthy attempt to address that problem.



I created this QuickTime movie in Electrifier Pro. Viewers can drag on the TV



screen (originally vector artwork) to pan through the VR movie and use Shift and Control to zoom. The clouds are built-in QuickTime 3 zero-bandwidth effects. To see the movie (132k), [click here](#). Notice: This movie requires Apple's Quicktime extension.

Electrifier Pro is an authoring tool, not a content-creation application. You use it to combine the content, such as pictures and sounds, created in other applications and add interactivity to the content. It's regrettable that Electrifier Pro has no content-creation tools of its own. But the program supports almost all types of QuickTime media, so it can import an astounding array of media types, including bitmap images, animation, video, vector graphics, audio (including WAV, AU, MPEG, and MIDI formats), and QuickTime VR panorama and object movies. The one notable media type supported by QuickTime but not by Electrifier Pro is the 3D MetaFile format.



Like many other authoring packages, Electrifier Pro can add actors (media files) and sprites (objects with their own layers) to a stage (the performance area of the screen). You can animate actors and sprites using a timeline and apply interactive effects. A unique capability of Electrifier Pro is that it saves all the media layers -- including still graphics, animation, audio, text, interactivity, and

special effects -- as a QuickTime movie. This is a boon to Web multimedia developers in particular because QuickTime is now a standard plug-in to the major Web browsers. Bandwidth issues are minimal because you can optimize QuickTime movies for Web delivery by streaming the playback and by saving and delivering multiple versions customized for various Internet connection speeds.

One of the most interesting features of Electrifier Pro is its ability to combine multiple media types. I brought in a vector graphic of a television created in Adobe Illustrator (vector art remains in that highly efficient format even after import). I then dropped in two QuickTime movies, changed their 3D perspectives to match that of the TV's screen, and set them to play at different times. Because all these elements are stored in a single movie, the production is no harder to place on a Web page than a standard GIF image.

In addition to interactive actions, Electrifier Pro offers effects such as transitions, fades, and animation. One of my major complaints about the program is that the animation tools lack slow-in and slow-out controls, which are mandatory for creating engaging animations. In general, the program's animation and timing tools are primitive compared with those in programs like Adobe After Effects and PaceWorks' ObjectDancer. Given Electrifier Pro's

professional-level price, I'd like to see much finer control.



Of course, you can create your QuickTime animations in After Effects or elsewhere, then import the animations into Electrifier Pro, but you're limited by After Effects' lack of QuickTime sprite support. The performance advantage of sprites can be enormous -- a small sprite animated across the entire Web-browser window adds no more to a file's size than the sprite animated in a tiny space. In Electrifier Pro, you can control sprites with interactive actions -- up to a point. It's great to layer sprites and vector objects over a QuickTime VR movie, but I'm disappointed that I can't trigger an action based on the pan and zoom positions of the VR movie, nor can I attach a sprite to a particular position of a VR scene.

Electrifier Pro supports some of the built-in special effects in QuickTime 3, including fire, ripple, and clouds. Because QuickTime renders these effects on the fly on the viewer's computer, they don't bulk up the file size, but the novelty of adding flames and oscillating clouds to movies wears off quickly.

When you deal with multilayered movies and rendered effects, masking becomes crucial. For example, you may want a movie to play through an irregularly shaped frame. Although Electrifier Pro lets

you use actors, such as an imported vector object, to obscure parts of other actors, it can't draw masks directly or import an object as an invisible mask. The Pen tool in the lower corner of the toolbar, which looks tantalizingly like a masking pen, works in conjunction with the Path action only. (It allows you to draw a Bizer curve as an animation path when you apply the Path action to an object.) On the bright side, Electrifier Pro does support alpha channels in existing artwork.

Electrifier Pro is a compelling tool for multimedia authors who need to add multiple layer effects, incorporate disparate data types, and add interactivity to QuickTime movies. Web developers in particular will be delighted by the tiny and efficient QuickTime movies that can fill a screen with interactive animation. The program is a mixed bag, however. Many of the actions and events need improvement in terms of features and depth of control, and the price is high for a program with so many rough edges.

Sean Wagstaff, the author of *Animation on the Web* (Peachpit Press), is a freelance digital artist and Web animator.

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