UserReport
Photographic

Ulead Digital Slide Shows

by Jack and Sue Drafahl

Until recently, the most popular method for presenting color transparencies was the venerable slide projector. Options ranged from a simple, single-projector approach to sophisticated computer-programmed shows using multiple projectors. The process of creating complex, multi-image presentations was expensive, time consuming, and often frustrating.

As slide projectors followed typewriters down the path of obsolence, a new method of presenting photographic images emerged; namely, digital slide shows. In a nutshell, the new approach involves a combination of software and hardware that enables you to import scanned film and print images, video, music, narration, and digital camera files all into one professional-looking presentation. This can then be displayed on your home television via VHS, CD, DVD, or your computer.

Another option for presenting your shows is the modern video projector, which has become significantly more affordable.

One of the widest selections of consumer-level digital slide presentation programs comes from Ulead Systems. Ulead offers a variety of software choices to acommodate the varying shooting styles and levels of expertise of different photographers. To help you decide which application best suits your needs, we tested six of Ulead's most popular programs. All are PC compatible for Windows 98SE/ME/2000/XP.

DVD PictureShow 2

This program is designed for those who shoot film or digital still images, and enables you to organize your images and create multimedia slide shows easily and affordably. You have the option of burning the final project to a CD or DVD which can be viewed on your home television system.

DVD PictureShow 2 includes Photo Explorer 8 to help you organize your images before building your show. This thumbnail file manager allows you to drag and drop still images on a timeline at the bottom of the screen. You then have your choice of 42 transitional effects like dissolves and wipes to progress from one image to the next. Although the program's primary function is to arrange consecutive still images, it enables you to add video as well.

The next step is to add narration and even multiple music files. When your presentation is complete, the program guides you through the process of burning either

DVD MovieFactory 2

This program is similar to DVD PictureShow 2, except that it is primarily designed for those who shoot video. With easy step-by-step instructions, you are guided through the process of collecting and organizing video files and burning them to CD or DVD.

This versatile package enables you to capture video from your camera, or import video files and drop them on the video timeline at the bottom of the screen. You can also import files from finalized disks and add them to your project (be aware that you can't import video files from copyrighted DVD movies).

The program's Disc-Direct capture enables you to burn video directly from the camcorder to a DVD. The menu editor provides a wide choice of background templates. Simply make your selection, choose your settings and the DVD MovieFactory does the rest. You also have the option of collecting still images and creating a video segment with transitional effects, music, or narration.

A retail boxed version of DVD MovieFactory 2 is priced at $49.95; an electronic download is $44.95.
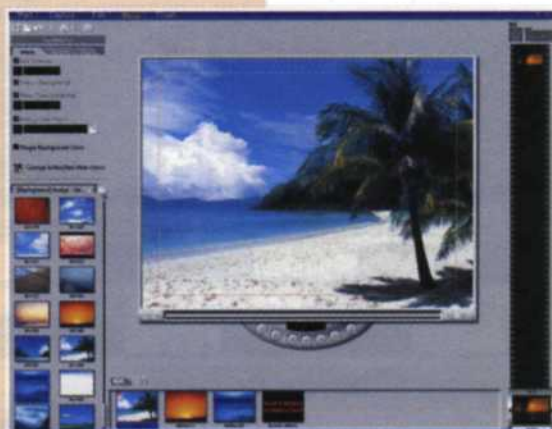
DVD Workshop

For those who work with both still and video files and want maximum control over the final CD or DVD project, DVD Workshop may be your best bet. This advanced program enables you to grab videos from digital or analog sources and save them as files in a library which also serves as the storage house for your audio, still images and other video sources.
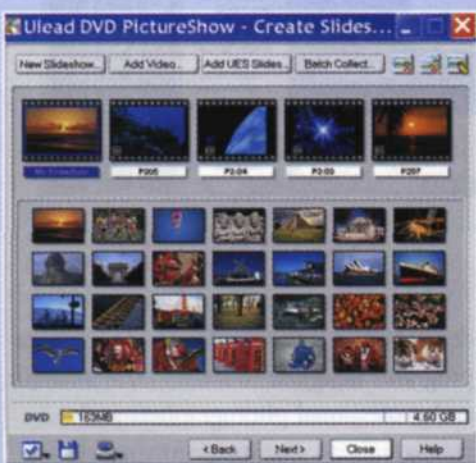
Assembling your presentation is as easy as dragging and dropping video and still images from the library onto the video timeline at the bottom of the screen. During the process you can preview any portion of your project on the large video monitor above the timeline editor. Editing of chapters and scenes is a cinch thanks to a handy time code editor located at the top of the screen.

The final step is to burn your completed presentation to DVD or CD. The DVD menu gives you the choice of a blank screen, a selection of preset DVD menu templates, or a menu wizard that easily walks you through the process. DVD Workshop takes it one step further by allowing you to create impressive motion backgrounds. When you have created your navigation menu, you can then drag and drop chapters on each of the thumbnail areas and then preview the project before burning it to DVD or CD.

A retail boxed version of DVD Workshop is priced at $299, while an electronic download is $279.

This sophisticated program offers a variety of advanced presentation features for working with both still photographs and video files, but it is very easy to use.

Ulead's DVD PictureShow 2 is an affordable program designed for those who want to incorporate their still images into multimedia slide shows. It includes 42 transitional effects to help you make your presentations more interesting.

VideoStudio 7

This sophisticated video editor is one of Ulead's most recent presentation programs. VideoStudio 7 is designed for both beginning and advanced amateur video editors, and it incorporates a new user-friendly interface. A large preview screen makes it easy to view the progress of your project, and a library of images, video, and effects are always accessible. Drop-down menus provide access to an advanced text editor, a voice recorder, music transfer system, and image overlay features.

You can view your project in a variety of ways. The storyboard mode displays a timeline with the consecutive images and transitional effects. The advanced storyboard mode enables you to view and edit imported images, video, and audio tracks at the same time. There is also a frame-accurate timeline for

a CD or DVD for final viewing. A retail boxed version of DVD PictureShow 2 is $49.95. An electronic download is $44.95.
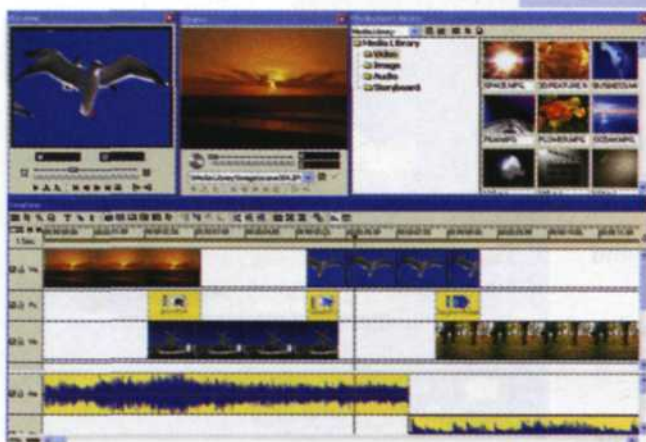
precise placement of titles and voice overlay. With the press of a button, the storyboard expands to a full-screen, full-resolution preview of your entire project. You can add chapters and customize the menu before rendering the project and writing a DVD or CD.

A retail boxed version of VideoStudio 7 costs $99.95; the electronic download is $89.95.

VideoStudio 7 features a user-friendly interface. It enables both beginners and advanced video editors to create presentations with a variety of effects, titles, and voice overlays before burning the project to DVD or CD.

MediaStudio Pro 7

With its broad array of features, Ulead's MediaStudio Pro 7 is designed for advanced amateur and professional video editors. Offering real-time MPEG capture, preview and output, the program features all the tools you need to create, edit and export sophisticated video presentations.

MediaStudio Pro 7 is designed to satisfy professional and advanced amateur video editors who want a full assortment of all the latest bells and whistles. This complete package includes a series of programs that enable you to capture and edit video, introduce audio, create animated titles, and paint and retouch your images before finally authoring the project.

Best of all, it offers real-time MPEG capture, real-time preview and even real-time output. This video program can import just about every type of still, audio, and video format into a video source library. This library also includes hundreds of video filters, transitions, and motion special effects that can help enhance any project.

In addition to the image and audio timeline at the bottom of the screen, source and playback monitors keep you on track while you assemble your project. As you add images and video to the timeline, you can preview your progress in real time. MediaStudio Pro 7 has all the authoring tools necessary for finalizing your project. Once the prresentation is completed, you have the option of exporting it to DVD, VideoCD or to a varierty of other video formats.

This powerful editing solution is available in a boxed version for $495.

Cool 3D Studio is designed to help novices create professional-looking presentations with 2D and 3D animation. An easy-to-use timeline makes it easy to keep track of the various elements in your project. A variety of demo files help you get started.

Cool 3D Studio

If you really enjoy creating special effects with objects and text, then Cool 3D Studio is a must. This program enables you to import both 2D and 3D objects and rotate, move or zoom them into the scene. A special timeline at the bottom of the screen makes it easy to keep track of each object.

The program includes several demo files that really help you get started in the animated world of 3D. A huge library of objects, materials, lighting effects, text effects, backgrounds, and image warping can be dragged and dropped directly on the preview screen. These time-saving options provide your video productions with both creativity and efficiency.

A large preview monitor in the middle of the screen can be set for viewing in wireframe or full-render mode. The final project can be rendered to several types of video formats, and can be fully integrated with all Ulead video editing software products.

Cool 3D Studio and its arsenal of tools for producing professional animation can be ordered in a boxed version for $129 or as an electronic download for $119.

Final Thoughts

As you can see, Ulead Systems has developed an extensive library of software programs designed to satisfy both amateur and professional photographers and videographers. The program you select will depend on your budget, level of expertise and project specifications. Ulead makes the selection process a little easier by offering trial downloads of many of their programs at www.ulead.com. ■