

## MAKING HOME DVDs: DELL'S MOVIE STUDIO BUNDLE

By L. Alan Kraft

**W**HEN YOU BROWSE THE OFFERINGS AT YOUR LOCAL COMPUTER STORE, YOU'LL FIND A WIDE VARIETY OF VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE POPULATING THE SHELVES. COUPLED WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF READ-WRITE DVD DRIVES, SUCH

software is opening new areas of PC applications to armchair directors like me. Software from companies like Roxio ([www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)) and myDVD ([www.mydvd.com](http://www.mydvd.com)) gives PC users the ability to edit and produce high-quality videos. Of course, a complete system also requires a capture card and perhaps an interface box like the one by Dazzle ([www.dazzle.com](http://www.dazzle.com)).

With these components, the video enthusiast can capture clips from VCRs as well as analog and digital camcorders. The captured clips can then be edited in many ways: most of the software integrates simple options such as custom transitions between scenes as well as various complicated visual and audio effects. After editing is complete, the user can format the finished scenes and output them in almost any desired format, whether for use on the Web or DVD.

In this issue's Technology News & Reviews, I will discuss some of the good and bad points I observed using one complete system: the Dell Movie Studio bundle (US\$234; [www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)).

### Capturing Clips

I film my home movies with a Panasonic camcorder that records to digital videocassettes (DVC). I transfer these movies to my PC using the Dell Movie

Studio bundle that came installed on my Dell Dimension 8200, 2.4-GHz, Pentium-4 machine, running Windows XP Home Edition. A large-capacity hard drive is clearly critical when working with the amount of data involved in video formats; my system is configured with 512 Mbytes of memory and an 80-Gbyte, 7,200-rpm hard drive. To get high-quality video playback, DVDs require MPEG-2 format, which uses substantial disk space to store enough frames for seamless display on a TV. As defined in International Standard 13818, MPEG-2 uses 24-bit RGB video images and is designed to compress video into a 4- to 6-Mbps stream.

The Dell Movie Studio bundle consists of a Dazzle connection box (see Figure 1), a Texas Instruments video-capture card, and MGI's VideoWave4 software. I connect my camcorder to the Dazzle box with an IEEE-1392 (Firewire) cable and then use VideoWave4 to capture the video clips I want to my hard drive.

The digital camcorder's Firewire feature makes the capturing process exceptionally easy. Another nice feature is that, unlike analog camcorders and VCRs, which must be controlled from the video source, I can control the dig-

ital camcorder's playback functions through the VideoWave4 software.

Capturing a video clip is a very user-friendly process: while the source is in play mode, I simply click a button to start the capture and click it again to end. I did experience a problem early on with the computer locking up during the capturing of video clips from my camcorder, but I soon discovered by contacting Roxio that this was because Windows XP's hardware-acceleration feature was turned on. This problem has never reoccurred since I went to the PC's control panel and moved the slide bar from **full** to **none**.

### Video Editing

After the capture process is complete, VideoWave4 lets me edit my clips in an incredible number of ways. This is the one step where you can let the creative juices flow. For example, I can add titles, mix new audio with the current audio and video, create custom transi-



**Figure 1.** The Dazzle connection box. To transfer video clips to the PC, I connect the camcorder via Firewire cable to the Dazzle box that comes with Dell's Movie Studio bundle.

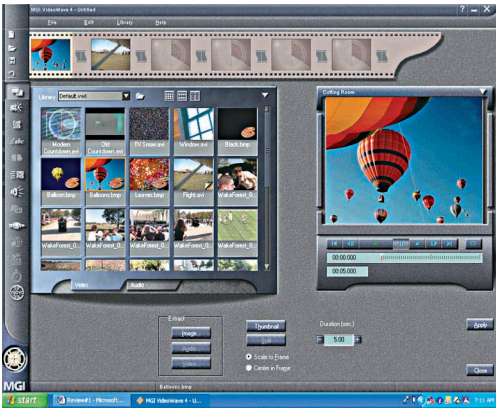


Figure 2. Editing in VideoWave4. The user can add special effects to individual clips in the storyline through this window.

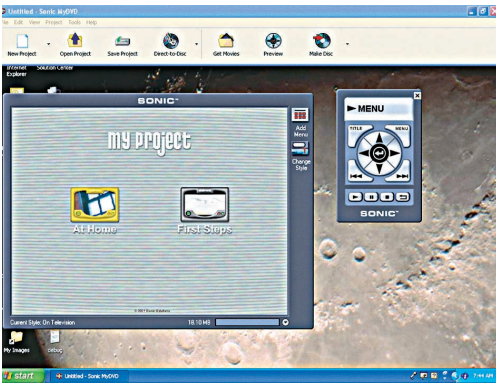


Figure 3. Sample myDVD project. The left window shows the menu that will start the DVD; the right window is the control panel for previewing the project before burning it to DVD.

tions between clips, and create visual effects like fading colors to grayscale or changing a portion of a scene to slow-motion. As Figure 2 shows, the software also lets me custom trim the clips to clean up any miscues introduced at the beginning or end during the capture step. Once the editing is complete, it's on to producing the video.

### Production

In the production step, we simply format the edited scenes to use in our chosen destination. MPEG-2 is the highly recommended format for DVD, but VideoMaker4 can output video in several other formats—from audio video interleave (AVI) and MPEG-1 to Windows media video (WMV) and Real

video. I found that the default values do an excellent job of formatting the video properly, but more advanced enthusiasts can also customize frame speeds and other features.

VideoWave4 is not capable of transferring the production to a digital medium such as CD or DVD. Instead, you must save the clip to an MPEG-2 file that you can transfer later to the disc via other software.

To put the production on videotape, you can connect a VCR to the Dazzle box and output the video as an AVI file. To record in analog format, connect the VCR to record the Dazzle box's output in real time as it is being produced. Note that the VCR must start recording before VideoWave4 begins production. This is a great way to add special effects like titles to old videotapes and leave them in the VCR format when finished.

### Uploading the Movie

To put the movie on a CD or DVD, we must use a software package other than VideoWave4 to write the production. For example, I use myDVD software to write to my DVD+RW drive. I purchased both separately, as neither is part of the Movie Studio bundle.

myDVD includes numerous options for menu backgrounds to accent the theme in the DVD's main menu. After selecting a suitable background, we can add as many movie clips from VideoWave4 as we like to a menu. Moreover, the package allows us to make several different menus on the same DVD.

As Figure 3 shows, the software lets you preview the final work on the com-

puter before downloading it to DVD. An indicator on the myDVD window shows how much space the present project will fill on the disc. myDVD also has its own editing features. For example, I can trim the clips to clean up any undesired frames in the final project. The software also lets me select the "thumbnail"—the frame that appears on the menu—from any frame within the scene the link takes you to.

Once the project is finally complete, we can select whether to transfer it to CD or DVD. The myDVD software automatically checks the media, organizes the files, and writes the project.

The Dell Movie Studio bundle does a great job of converting home movies to DVD, but I found during a conversation with people at Roxio that this particular package is not upgradeable. To be specific, I discovered that the recently released VideoWave 5 software is incompatible with the Dazzle box and capture card that came bundled with my system. I can't upgrade the VideoWave4 software that came in the bundle to VideoWave5 because the system will not function with the new version. The avid video enthusiast who needs the most up-to-date software on the market should therefore avoid this package in favor of buying individual components. However, the Dell Movie Studio bundle package is a very nice solution for the rest of us casual users who enjoy spicing up our everyday home movies with some titles and a few special effects.

**L. Alan Kraft** is a professor of electrical engineering at Valparaiso University. His research interests focus on computer networking. Kraft received a PhD from Purdue University. He is a senior member of the IEEE. Contact him at Alan.Kraft@valpo.edu.