



graphics

MACROMEDIA DIRECTOR 8 SHOCKWAVE STUDIO

A new version of the top multimedia package

Director is already pretty well established as the top tool for multimedia production. Release 8 builds on and simplifies production, but leaves much of what made the package a leader in its field intact.

The first thing you'll notice is that the interface has been altered. Instead of having to explore a range of different dialogs and menus to set and alter the various properties of your animation and the elements that combine to create them, you can now access all the relevant information from one place – the properties window. This streamlines a lot of what you do in Director, enabling you to work on parts of your production more quickly. It also takes some of the untidiness away from the score window and puts details such as a sprite's ink type in a more sensible place.

You can also zoom into and out of the Stage in version 8. It's now easier to line objects up on the screen and you can position them with much greater accuracy by zooming in for a closer view. This also means that you don't need to work on your production using a monitor the size of Norfolk. You can work on full screen presentations on a monitor the same size as that of your audience.

Of course, the big focus for Director is the Internet – and that means Shockwave. Shockwave file sizes are now even smaller, and the number of installed viewers is growing all the time. It's

Minimum requirements Pentium 200 with 64MB RAM, Win95/98 or NT 4.0

Tested on Pentium III 733 with 128MB RAM

Extra information Upgrade from versions 5/6: £410. Upgrade from version 7: £327

■ **PRICE** £938 ■ **EX VAT** £799 ■ **SUPPLIER** Computers Unlimited ■ **PHONE** 0208 358 5857 ■ **WWW** www.macromedia.com/uk

becoming a really viable way to put high-quality multimedia on-line. You can produce Shockwave animation that often uses up little more bandwidth than the media they contain and, because animation can be intelligently streamed while it's played, it often gives the impression of being even smaller than it is. To the viewer, a well-written piece of Shockwave can appear almost instantly and take a Web page to a completely different level.

Scalable animations

One of the top new features in Director 8 is the ability to produce scalable animation. Now you can have your Shockwave productions fill the browser window, or grow to a defined proportion of it. Your designs will look the same whatever size your audience's monitor or browser window, which will make a huge difference to designers.

Another feature that's sure to get creative juices flowing is the ability to use, create and manipulate images and transitions at run-time. In other words, you can combine simple graphics in real-time to

Director's interface has been simplified, but there's still a lot going on.



produce much more complex designs and animations which would otherwise require larger bandwidths. The example provided with the package shows a 3D cube on which one image is wrapped around the surface, while another is used as a reflection. Because the reflection is combined with the surface image in real-time, the two can move and distort independently without the need for multiple images to be stored. The same features can be used to enable users to create images themselves using drawing tools.

You can also use transitions – written in Lingo – to move between one sprite and another while leaving the rest of the stage unchanged. In previous Director versions, transitions could only be used to affect the whole stage. They were also written in C rather than Lingo, so you couldn't alter them yourself. The new method allows for a lot more flexibility.

Web site designers will also be impressed by the increased support for multi-user environments. Macromedia claims that you can set up an

DIRECTOR IN ACTION

Three ways to better movies

Adding effects to Director movies is easy thanks to its streamlined interface



1 Assembling the elements of your production is accomplished by dragging and dropping them on to the stage.



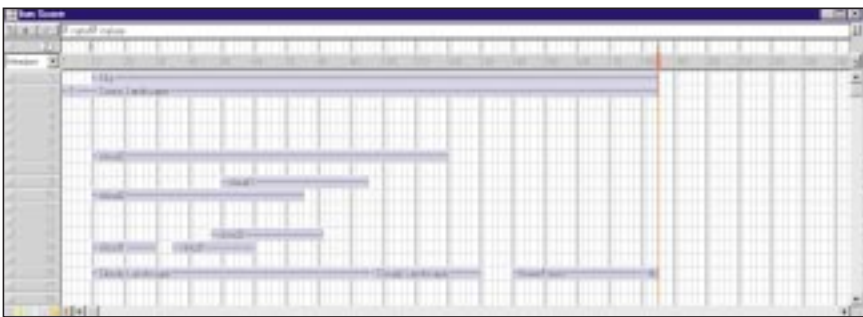
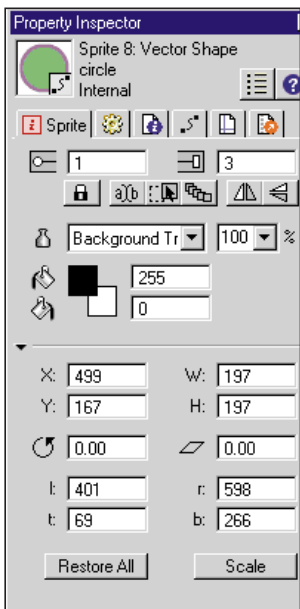
2 You can alter and distort an image while a movie is running.



3 Fireworks helps you compress image files for the Internet, and has been integrated more fully with Director 8.



PC Plus



The score is the timeline where you work out how your movie will play.

The new property inspector brings together all the information about your media in a manageable way.

Another feature that's sure to get **creative juices flowing** is the ability to manipulate images and transitions at run-time

Internet chat facility in Shockwave in five minutes. Indeed, all the required programming can be dragged and dropped into your animation from the Library Browser. The Library Browser contains a range of drag and drop behaviours which automate commonly used programming functions. It includes animation, chat, text, navigation and Internet behaviours, which can be easily applied to objects on the stage without the user having to write any code.

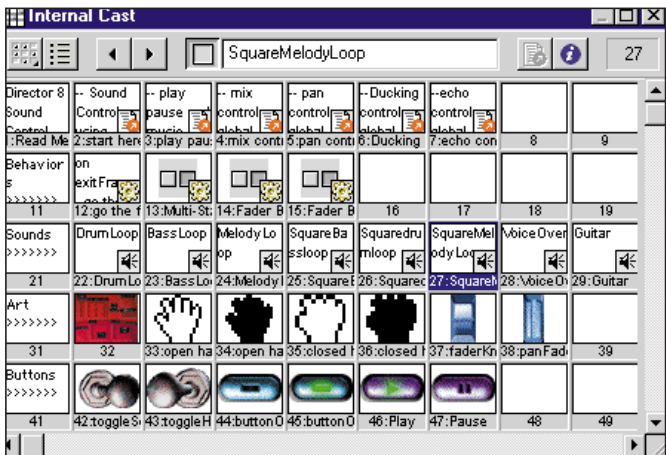
Lures of Lingo

It's possible to produce some complex projects while avoiding Director's programming language entirely. However, you'd be missing out. The power of Lingo is responsible for a lot of what raises Director above its competitors. The language has been added to in version 8, and now has better control of sound. This enables you to dynamically adjust sound files while they're playing, and start and stop them with greater accuracy. You can play sections of a sound file and work with multiple sounds at once.

Vector shapes can be created using more than one drawing element. This is a useful addition which means that you can make complex shapes and illustrations within Director (and they won't use up a huge amount of bandwidth).

To non-Shockwave productions, the new Director will still be a major force. The design process is the same when creating Kiosk or CD-ROM

The cast window can now be switched to a list view which enables you to locate your media much faster.



productions and when designing for the Internet (although, of course, there are different constraints on the size and quality of your media).

It's a little disappointing to anyone trying to produce small standalone productions that Director's projectors just seem to keep getting bigger. 3.5MB is about as small as they come – although you can usually compress a file to around half its size. There is an option to use a compressed projector, but this is less successful at reducing the file size than Winzip.

Despite the Internet focus, Director remains one of the best ways – probably the best – to produce CD-ROM and Kiosk productions. You get flexible access to a large range of media and you can manipulate it in some very interesting ways.

In addition to Director, Shockwave Studio comes bundled with Fireworks 3 – a significant program in its own right. Fireworks enables you to import bitmaps and tune, edit and compress them for the Internet. There are limited drawing and image adjustment tools within Fireworks but, to be honest, its real strength is its ability to assign behaviours to images (like rollovers, animations and so on) and its facilities for compressing them. You can import any image and use Fireworks to dynamically adjust it so you can find the best

compromise between image quality, scale and file size. As you change the various settings, you can see the result of (for example) scaling the image, reducing the number of colours in a .gif file, or increasing the compression of a .jpg. You can use batch processing to convert a string of files at once.

The new Director integrates a lot more closely with Fireworks. Instead of having to output all your image files and compress them in Fireworks before importing them into your Director movie, you can get Director to use Fireworks to compress images, and set the options for each one. The practical upshot of this is that you can quickly produce different versions of your Shockwave movie optimised for different speeds of Web connection.

Overall, Director 8 Shockwave Studio contains enough new features and updates to make it worth considering an upgrade. Scalable productions are a big plus point, as are the new compression methods, and the runtime transitions and image manipulation. The new multi-user features will impress those trying to create communities around their Web sites, and the simplified interface will go some way to abating those who claim that Director is difficult to navigate.

Christian Darkin

PC Plus

VERDICT

DIRECTOR 8 SHOCKWAVE STUDIO

For Scalable animation, unrivalled features. Low bandwidth Internet multimedia

Against Still a little tough to learn, some documentation only available on-line

Table with 2 columns: Feature, Rating. Rows: Range of features (9), Ease of use (7), Documentation (7), Performance (9), Value for money (8).

8/10