ights, Camera, Action

Mac key strengths: education, graphics, multimedia. For now, we'll ignore the fact that the Mac is actually stronger than Wintel machines at a lot of other things. The point: graphics and multimedia are key Mac strengths, yet few Mac users actually spend time creating their own original multimedia.

Desktop Video (DTV) is where it's at. It's hot, it's cool, it's hip and rad, yet most people haven't done a thing with it. Why is that? They lack the tools? The patience? The knowledge? Well, we hope to get over that in this month's feature article, where I'll look at what you can do with DTV and what you need to do it.

Come with me into the world of your very own desktop video. I'll hold your hand — I promise, but at the end the choice will be yours: do you want to do something that is really wicked cool, or do you want to sit back and just know that you can do it? The answer seems clear...

o You Want Some Reasons?

There are a lot of reasons why any individual may wish to begin working with DTV on their Mac. We've attempted to list a few major ones below. Some may matter to you, some may not. All possibilities aren't listed, and creative readers will no doubt be able to think of many other ideas.

1. Edit and Archive Home Videos
Imagine taking your four-hour video called "Family at Amusement Park" and cutting it into a single "best of" hour-long video. Imagine blending the scenes together with some descriptive text, a voice-over here and there,

cool transitional effects, and some theme music. Burn your movie onto a CD for posterity, or record it back onto a VHS tape for viewing in your living room. Grandmas always like home videos, so indulge her without also boring her!

2. Amuse Yourself (and Your Kids)
Create some clay figures and do some simple claymations. You remember the California Raisins, don't you? Well, do your own! You could be the next, uh, dried grape star. Film your children acting out scenes from their favorite cartoon, then edit the film with them. DTV can be great fun even if your final movie isn't destined to be, well, anything at all. The fun can be in the process.

3. Use Your Mac as a TV?
If you're going to own a Mac capable of video-in (and you'll need one if you're going to get into DTV), you may as well have some extra fun with it. Hook up a VCR, your cable, a Nintendo or Playstation, or even a DVD player. Watch the evening news in a little window while you type email. Play a little more Zelda 64 while you take a break from doing your taxes.

4. Create Presentations for Work or Organizations
Blow your clients (or your boss) away at the next meeting by firing up a full-screen movie-based presentation. Need to sell your product to a client on the road? Build a movie showing your production methods, assembly line, and quality testing. It doesn't even need to be fancy — but it may be something that gets the job done.

5. Use QuickTime VR
Though it's a bit of a stretch to consider VR as DTV, panorama and object movies are pretty nifty. I have a few panoramas of my home, and nothing eases the home sickness I can get on a long trip than whipping a couple of those up on the ol' PowerBook. VR movies add spice to science projects or web-based product lineups.

Desktop video has millions more uses. For example, a chemistry software package that I own allows users to rotate molecules and save the resulting animationg as a movie file — I've previously imported such movies into larger presentations. Want to record part of a football game? Do it. Want to record yourself playing Nintendo? Do that too. There are a ton of things to do — do you have use for any of them? Most likely...

et It Through Your Hardware

To work with video, you need to get the video into your computer — you need to record it to a MooV (movie) file somehow. This article ignores advanced (and expensive) methods, such as Firewire transfer from a digital video camera, and focuses on simple, cost-effective, and often relatively inexpensive methods. You may not be able to produce broadcast-quality stuff, but anything listed here will get you good results without a large outlay of cash.

Aside from the actual audio/video equipment, there are a few things you may need to get your hands on. I've edited video on a lowly PowerMac 6100/60, but it wasn't pleasurable. Approximate (very approximate) costs are listed below each item.

A. Speedy Hard Drives
If you're going to record your own video, you need a speedy hard
drive. Any of the ultra-wide SCSI drives, which almost always
require a PCI card, will work. IDE drives are too slow. Zip drives are too slow. If you simply want to edit video, and not record it from a source (such as a camcorder or your cable signal), you can get by with a slower drive, but recording requires a speedy drive.
Approximate Cost: $600 for a 6 GB drive and PCI card

B. Video RAM and Plain Old RAM
It's no secret that editing videos in 256 colors is not considered
"optimal conditions." Get some video RAM — you can edit in
thousands or millions of colors and with higher resolutions. After all, video-editing software takes up a lot of screen real-estate. Plain old RAM (have at least 64 MB) is always good to have around, and Navigator and your other software certainly won't complain.
http://www.thechipmerchant.com/ or elsewhere
Approximate Cost: $50 for VRAM and $165 for 128 MB RAM DIMM

Once you're comfortable with your "base" equipment, you'll need some way to get video into your Mac. There are a variety of options, of course, and none is the "best" overall. Evaluate your options and choose wisely.

1. G3 Audio/Video In/Out Card
If you plan to buy a new G3 desktop or minitower soon, spend a
little extra cash to get the audio/video in/out card. For that matter,
spend even a little more to get the DVD equipment. With Apple's personality card solution, you're limited to capturing video at 320 x

240, but that's large enough for most. Editing videos at 640 x 480 requires quite a good deal of horsepower.

2. ATI XClaim VR/TV Card/Box Combo

The XClaim VR is a PCI card, and the XClaim TV is a purple box
that simply hooks into the VR card. The XClaim TV box also works
with G3s, and so many users may wish to add this inexpensive ($80) option if they own a G3 with an a/v personality card. However, the XClaim VR card is stunning (see Daria's review in Aug/98) in that it does much more than standard audio/video in/out. In fact, with the XClaim VR card, you've got an extra monitor port — buy another monitor and you've got a spectacular system for game-playing, graphic design, or desktop video!

3. Iomega Buz Box

The "Buz" is a PCI card/external box similar to the XClaim VR/TV
combo. However, there are tradeoffs. The Buz PCI card doubles as a
SCSI-3 controller for external hard drives, the XClaim VR does not. The Buz PCI card does not provide another monitor port, the XClaim VR does. And finally, the Buz package comes equipped with Adobe Premiere LE (a limited version of an expensive video-editing software package), and XClaim VR/TV comes only with viewing/recording software. The tradeoffs are yours to make: if you need a fast SCSI controller, and don't care about another monitor, the Buz is a good choice. Currently, you need a G3 to use the Buz, but we've all got those laying around, right?

Personally, after experimenting with a great deal of the equipment, I recommend going the ATI way. 8 MB of Rage Pro-accelerated graphics surely speed up any system, and with the extra monitor port you can do a whole heckuva lot!

However, different situations dictate the use of different equipment, so explore your options thoroughly before you make a decision. The three options above cover only a few of the many available choices, so leaf through magazines and visit some websites. Look around and you may find something that better suits your needs than any of these.

a Gotta Have the Software, Too

Next in line: software. After all, you may have the hardware, but what's that gonna getcha? Well, you'll be able to play some movies on your computer, but as far as editing you'll be shucks out of luck. Presented below are a few options for trimming, editing, saving, and otherwise messing with your video.

1. XClaim VR/TV Software
                In addition to allowing you to view video, the software bundled
                with the XClaim VR/TV package allows you to save audio and
                video at multiple resolutions. Approach 320 x 240 and you
need a fast, fast computer, but at least the software gives you the option. This software is bundled with the XClaim VR and TV for free, so if you've got those hardware items, you've got the software.
http://www.atitech.com
Approximate Cost: Free

2. QuickTime 3.x Pro
                Here's a tip: fork out $30 and buy QuickTime Pro. Instead of just
                viewing movies, you can edit them. Though MoviePlayer isn't the
                best video-editing software available, I've found that it
comes in handy for two things: viewing your movies and working with MIDI files. I like to add MIDI files to my movies, as theme music, and MoviePlayer allows me to edit the instruments used in MIDI files. Imagine creating a copy of your theme music, modifying the instruments to resemble a tropical band (marimbas, castanets, etc.), and cross-fading between the normal and tropical tracks throughout the movie. Done right, this can produce some great texture. There are hundreds of other reasons to get QuickTime Pro, so just do it!
http://quicktime.apple.com/
Approximate Cost: $30

3. Toast
                If you want to burn CDs with movies on them, there's no better
                software than Toast, by Adaptec. Not only can you burn (or rip)
                audio CDs, but you can burn cross-platform CDs as well.
Toast supports a wide variety of CD-R drives and a wide variety of formats. Its interface is clean and easy to use. Better yet, I've never made a coaster

(a bad CD) with Toast. Simply put: if you want to burn your own CDs, you need Toast.

4. Strata VideoShop

VideoShop, recently updated to version 4.5, is the best video-editing software I've seen. Its combination of ease-of-use and power make it a perfect fit for many home users. VideoShop supports HDTV (high-definition TV), Firewire, and other advanced features without using an interface that frightens people. Furthermore, VideoShop ships with TuneBuilder support and a few samples, so adding a professional-sounding audio track to your movies is a breeze. Erik reviewed VideoShop 4.01 in the Feb/98 issue, so check it out.

5. Adobe Premiere
Adobe Premiere has a great feature list. Many professional studios use Premiere. Though it will set you back a little more than VideoShop, and though it does possess a slightly more quixotic interface, Premiere will do just about everything you could ever want to do. If you've got Iomega's Buz, pay the $199 to upgrade to the full version. Otherwise, whip out the checkbook and prepare to pay a little more than you would for VideoShop.

There are other solutions available. However, I'm personally equipped with QuickTime Pro and VideoShop (as well as the ATI software) and I do not find myself wanting or needing more. I've digitized video from Nintendo 64 games, cable TVs, DVD movies, and home videos. As always, look around and make a good decision. Ask around, get input, and then buy. Don't let this opportunity pass because you're indecisive!

ut! That's a Wrap!

Over the past three months, an admitted DTV-phobe (me) has made presentations for work, helped with science fair projects, and even burnt that CD for grandma.

Though saying "desktop video is the future of home computing" may be a little strong, it certainly isn't totally off the mark. As Firewire and advanced digital video camcorders become prevalent (and inexpensive), DTV will be

both easily affordable and easily created and edited. Why not hop on the bandwagon before it gets going? Go ahead, I dare you. You'll never have as much fun with your Mac.

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