eview by Erik J. Barzeski

Title: Electrifier Pro
Version: 1.0.2
Publisher: Electrifier, Inc.
Price: $395
Contact Info: http://www.electrifier.com/
Genre: QuickTime/Multimedia authoring
System Requirements: PowerPC, Mac OS 7.5 or later, QuickTime 3 or later, 4 MB of hard disk space, CD-ROM drive

lectrify The Web...

With QuickTime 3.0, Apple introduced some great new features, but it wasn't until the release of Electrifier Pro, from Electrifier, and LiveStage, from Totally Hip Software, that people had an easy way to create QuickTime media.

Why deal with QuickTime media? Why not just use Flash or Shockwave? Because QT has an installed base greater than any other Web technology — upwards of 70% of home computers have QuickTime installed (both Macs and PCs). QuickTime's wired sprites mean that file size is often minuscule. And, like those other interactive formats, QuickTime lets users navigate nonlinearly, which makes even simple point-and-click games possible. Those are the kinds of reasons webmasters can take to the bank — and their boss.

... But at What Price?

Electrifier Pro presents a somewhat interesting paradox: how heavily does one rate an application's feature set and interface? In the Windows world, where people seem to put up with terrible interfaces if software at least does what they want, Electrifier Pro might rank very highly. However, the typical Macintosh user is a bit pickier...

This product does everything it says it does. In some cases, it does it very well. However, this product suffers horrendously in the interface and "usability" arena. Throughout the many hours (and days) I spent working with this product, I scratched my head countless times, gave up several other times, and actually finished projects only occasionally. Bummer.

A demo is available at the Electrifier Pro website, so I encourage you to get it. After all, you may not mind some of the interface flaws I so vehemently despise.

reat, So What Can I Do With It?

Electrifier Pro isn't right for everyone — rather, it's aimed towards people that create Web content (or otherwise work with digital movies). With Electrifier Pro, you could:
• Add a splash menu screen to music videos
• Create an effect-filled family photo album slide show
• Create navigation buttons, hot spots, rollovers, and more, all with a variety of QuickTime formats (yes, even audio)
• Create multinode VR scenes

In short, you're limited by your imagination. Like the PNG format, however, all browsers don't necessarily support QuickTime, so don't use it to replace all of the GIFs and JPEGs on your website just yet. Right now, these cool features are best suited for a more "standalone" approach.

rank It Up!

Before using any software, it's a good idea to read the documentation. You know, "RTFM" and all that jazz. Well, in this

case, it's no different. Though the documentation isn't of much

help after you've used Electrifier for a few hours, the initial information boost will help you to become productive fast. It's HTML, which is hardly my favorite form of documentation, but it

works.

The first thing you'll notice when you launch Electrifier (other than the startup screen!) are the toolbars and palettes. The toolbar, seen at left, allows you to perform standard image operations, like skew, resize, rotate, as well as create the built-in QuickTime effects: Fire, Clouds, and Ripple (more on these later). The palettes, like those seen below, allow you to perform the more advanced actions. Importing images into Electrifier Pro is fairly straightforward — all drag and drop is my preferred method. Electrifier Pro accepts things QuickTime-compatible media. Unfortunately, it won't accept some other like picture clippings (grrr!!!), Illustrator (EPS) files, and graphics fairly common file formats. I was also unable to paste any able to. into Electrifier Pro, though it seems as though I should be "weak," Image-editing features inside Electrifier are best described as images are so users are well-advised to make sure that all imported exactly as they'd like them to be in the final movie — transparency, color, and so on.

Electrifier's main window is divided into three sections: Layout, Preview, and Structure. This tabbed interface works quite well: place elements and edit their settings in the Layout window, watch your movie in the Preview area, and edit some of the elements and settings in the Structure window. The Preview tab is especially handy — you can instantly check to see how any changes you made will affect the final movie without actually creating the movie or relying on an external player.

In addition to exporting your masterpiece of digital media as a QuickTime 4 movie file, Electrifier supports exporting graphics as animated GIFs and audio as either WAV or AIFF files. Those users interested in working with virtual reality (VR) scenes must stitch VR scenes together in another application, but can then use Electrifier Pro to easily create multinode movies. It's a snap — in less than a few minutes, I created a "virtual tour" of my house.

t's All About the Effects (Oh, and File Size)

The image at right was acked together from the Effects and Actions palettes. Electrifier Pro offers 21 effects and 18 actions, which can be used to control just about every-thing you could think of: spinning, zooming, opening URLs, playing, pausing, slanting, transitioning, sweeping, setting viewing angles, and more.

To add effects to an element in your movie, you simply drag one of the palette items (seen above) onto the element. An icon representing that effect (the same icons as the corresponding palette item) then "sits" on top of your element. Select it by clicking on it and use the Inspector window to make any adjustments. Here you see the Inspector window for the "Zoom" effect.

As you can surmise, the nspector window displays and prompts for different infor-mation depending on which effect or element is selected. In this window, Inspector asks for the starting time (0.0),

duration (10.0), and zoom parameters (zoom from 25% to 100%, horizontally and vertically). Like almost all effects, you can choose to loop the Zoom effect, which can create some interesting effects of its own. Trippy!

The full list of effects is as follows: Ink, Fade, Color Fade, Jump, Move, Circle, Path, Scale, Zoom, Rotate, Spin, Slant, Anim Slant, Perspective, Anim Perspective, Volume, Fade (audio), Balance (audio), Sweep (audio), Special Effect, and Transition. Special Effect contains all QuickTime effects, including Lens Flare, Emboss, Sharpen, and others.

In the small image seen here, I've applied the Move and Rotate effects to this element as well as a third: Open URL. Open URL is an action, and the other actions include: Play/Stop Movie, Go to Time, Set Loop, Set Movie Volume, Set Location, Play Selection Only, Set Active, Set Ink, Set Transform, Set Layer, Set Volume, Set Balance, Set Pan Angle, Set Tilt Angle, Set Field of View, Show Default View, Go to Node. The last few are for use with VR movies, of course. Using these tools, it's very simple to create a movie with embedded Play, Pause, Stop, and Go to URL functions. Just imagine: now you can compile all of your Shania Twain videos into a single file, complete with hot-links to good websites and a menu system to navigate to the correct movie! Now that's the ticket!

But wait, we're not done yet! Electrifier Pro enables you to "draw in" QuickTime effects Fire, Clouds, and Ripple, which, quite simply, do just what they say. Fire creates a field of fire — find a picture of a motorcycle and you can relive the stunts of Evel Knievel. Then slap some clouds in the scene to make it more realistic. Ripples? Well, use your imagination for how that might be used! Ripples even allow use of a mask to mark "non-ripply" areas — great if there's a boat in the middle of your lake.

File Size Matters
What good would a great movie be if it were 3 MB? Included with the DOCMaker version of this issue, I've included two movies: Example 1 and

Example 2. Open them and watch what they do. Click on the BMW. Guess how large the file size is, then check. I dare you. An interesting note: the image you see sliding, rotating, fading, and doing other things in the second movie is larger (24k) than the movie (10k).

These movies are also available on our website:
Example 1 - http://applewizards.net/xyz/ex1.mov
Example 2 - http://applewizards.net/xyz/ex2.mov

t's Time to Complain

Simply put, this product should still be in development — it lacks a few features and the interface seems far from being final or even usable. I won't list all of my complaints — we have to keep this review a reasonable length — but I will list enough to give users the general idea.

Simple Stuff that Matters
I can't press D or command-D in the "File Not Saved" dialog box for "Don't Save." This keyboard shortcut exists in almost every other Mac application. Luckily, at least the escape key works for "Cancel."

The Text Tool
Don't even bother to use it. You can't set text color, font, size. Nothing. It's utterly and completely useless.

Resizing, Moving Not Standard
ac applications typically offer "handles" to resize objects.
Grab a corner handle to resize in two directions, or a side
handle to resize in one direction. Electrifier Pro doesn't do
this, and it irks the bejeezus out of me. Furthermore, you can
not hold down shift to resize proportionately or retain a horizontal or
vertical measurement. Oh, and arrow keys mean nothing — you can't use
them to position or resize elements.

Send to Back. No, Not Back There!
Electrifier Pro uses an AppleWorks-like "Send to Back," "Bring Forward" etc. scheme to position elements in virtual layers. Why? A layers palette, similar to the one in Adobe's venerable Photoshop, would greatly ease the pain users will encounter with the current method. Add more than 3 elements and you'll have trouble keeping track of which "layer" they're on.

Layering lends
itself to other problems.

As you can see in this screenshot, an effect is hidden behind an element. The only way I can select, delete, or otherwise work with this effect is to move its element in front of whatever element is hiding it, then put it back in the proper "layer" when finished. I can hide elements in the Layout view, but there's no way to get them back (unless you immediately undo). A Layers palette could solve this by at least letting me hide certain layers.

I Hope You Like Numbers
If you don't like numbers, you won't like Electrifier Pro. Just about everything is controlled by the Inspector, which only takes in numbers. To align 46 x 23 pixel image in the top-right corner of a 100 x 100 window, you'll have to set the horizontal and vertical values to 77 and 11.5 — 77 pixels left to the middle of the image, 11.5 pixels from the top. It's even more fun if you want to zoom that image while keeping it aligned in the top-right corner…

Just Go to the Dang End
Electrifier Pro needs an "End" and "Start" option in its Inspector. As it currently stands, you need to tell your Fire to start at 4.82 seconds and last for a duration of 123.65 seconds. Set it to 123.55 seconds accidentally, and the fire won't remain at the end of the movie. Don't even bother using the Structure tab to set all of the elements to end or start at the same time. It won't work.

Palettes Don't Drag or Save
The Effects and Actions tabs are forever stuck together in the one palette, and don't bother moving or resizing your palette windows — their positions and sizes are reset to the default when you launch Electrifier Pro the next time.

Grid, Where For Art Thou?
Electrifier Pro allows you to snap objects to a grid, the size of which you can set yourself, but you can't actually see the grid, nor can you create your own guidelines as in Photoshop.

General Flaws

If someone can tell me what I'm supposed to do with this double-pop-up menu, please let me know, okay? Thanks.

What's the Web?
Electrifier Pro is geared towards professionals who wish to create content which will be placed on websites, yet it can't even create the HTML necessary to embed the resulting movie. A single programmer could add this feature in a day, yet it's not to be found in Electrifier Pro.

he Jury Has Reached Its Verdict

If you need to create QuickTime 4 content, Electrifier will fit the bill. If you need to lose more hair in the process, I strongly recommend this product. However, if you're hesitant to get into creating QuickTime media, stick with the tools you've got now and wait for version 2.0, which I sincerely hope will fix the flaws found in 1.02. Hey, at $395, I want a product that works, and

works correctly. Don't you?

URLs From this Article:
http://www.electrifier.com/

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