## Adobe Encore
Reviewed by Stuart Little M.M.Inst.V.

There have been a lot of 'format wars' over the years but one of the most uneven of battles has surely been that between VHS and DVD. Now that DVD is mopping up the last remnants of the VHS battalions, corporate video producers finally have a distribution tool that does justice to the high production values that typify even the more modestly-budgeted productions.

However DVD is a much more demanding format in that even when you have produced a sophisticated video programme it is not acceptable simply to bung it onto a DVD with a one line menu saying "Play Movie". Customers expect the DVD front end itself to be a 'production'. Enter various DVD authoring programs amongst the most recent of which is Adobe Encore DVD.

You need a Plan
When setting up a DVD authoring project a full project plan is essential. This will include consideration of the number of scenes to be included on the DVD and what happens when each scene finishes (e.g. return to main or sub menu, go to next scene,
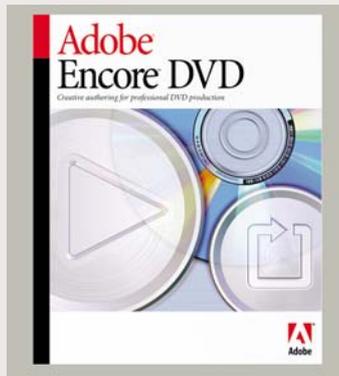
etc.) and Encore caters for a good range of choices.

Another early consideration is the overall look of the various menu screens to be employed. Encore offers a number of customisable templates for both main and sub menus and in practice I have stuck with these for all of the DVDs that I have authored so far.

This 'customisability' includes the replacement of backgrounds with a graphic or moving image, the placing of buttons and altering of button text, and the addition or deletion of buttons and their routing. Additionally, a button can consist of a graphic, a poster frame from the video programme or a moving image.

Adobe Family Traits
Encore follows the familiar Adobe practice of having a series of work areas set within palettes. With Encore the principal work areas are: **Project** (in which all assets, menus and timelines are listed); **Menus** (in which menus and sub menu content are created and edited); **Timelines** (in which video and audio clips are entered and, e.g. chapter points added); and **Disc** (in which final DVD building is initiated).

For each of these a 'Properties' palette is available in which various parameters are set. For example, one can set how long a menu should remain on screen before reverting to another menu or to the playing of a clip. Additionally, the functionality of the end user's DVD player handset buttons can be determined.

Importing
Movie clips can be imported in either their native format, subject to certain restrictions such as frame size and file type (e.g. QuickTime is not supported), or as MPEG2 encoded files (preferably non-multiplexed, otherwise Encore will have to re-encode so as to untangle the video and audio).

Two views of two DVD Authoring packages

Ulead DVD Workshop 2
Reviewed by Brett Allen F.Inst.V.

When I first started authoring DVDs I couldn't get the darn things to work! I tried various programs (at the cheap end of the market) but none of them produced a DVD that would work. Another IOV member recommended Ulead DVD Factory, which was a basic authoring program and, all of a sudden, I had a DVD that worked.

On this basis and due to the fact that you couldn't do much with DVD factory I tried DVD Workshop and it was great - it worked. OK, it was a bit limited, but it didn't really matter because I was able to produce DVDs that worked.

Well now, Ulead have upgraded Workshop to Version 2 and proclaim its greatness by claiming lots of new features
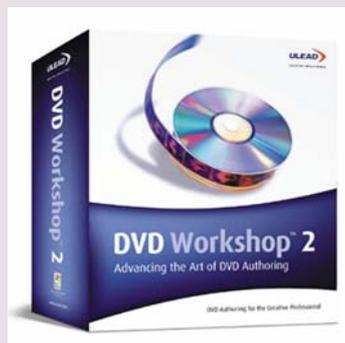
with "enhanced creativity" "enhanced input options" "enhanced output options" and designed for the "creative professional" with a "design centric workflow". Wow! Design centric workflow! If only I knew what that meant!

A Familiar Feel
If you already use Workshop you will feel quite at home with the new version. The layout and method of working is basically the same as before but it looks a bit prettier. For those of you who haven't used it before - it is very easy.

Installation
Installation was easy apart from the fact it didn't work first time. When I tried to start the installed program it told me there was a file missing and I should reinstall, which I duly did, but with the same result. I tried it on my other PC and the install was fine (Ulead Support tell me that maybe my XP isn't up to the latest level! Perhaps there should be something in the install procedure that checks for this then, Mr Ulead!).

Anyway I copied the missing file from one PC to the other and everything was OK on both PCs.

When Workshop starts you are presented with a monitor window and a toolbar with 5 options – Start, Capture, Edit, Menu, Finish. They are all self-explanatory.

Start
Here you set up your project details like name, where you want to save it, etc. You also open saved projects from this window.

Capture
Here you capture your video from your camcorder or VCR, or if you wish you can import already captured video or MPEG2 files. You can capture straight into MPEG, AVI or WMV.

Here was where I came across my first problem. I use a Canopus DVStorm2 for capture and although Workshop recognised the capture card it wouldn't let me capture DV. Composite and S-video, Yes - DV, No.

Ulead Support said they know this and that I should capture DV using the Storm2 software and then import the files into Workshop – which worked fine (it does actually say on the Ulead website that it is not compatible with Canopus capture cards).

I generally encode in Adobe Premiere prior to import but this does reduce the accuracy of chapter point placement, as the chapter point has to be at an I-frame and these are typically around half a second apart.

For DVDs generally if the final programme is going to run for more than an hour and the highest bit rate is required, then only the full movie can be imported (assuming that the DVD is of the standard 4.7GB type) and the playing of individual scenes has to be achieved by the setting of a chapter point at the beginning of the desired scene and the chopping off of any remaining video beyond the end point of the scene.

In Encore, as each scene has to have its own timeline this is, in theory, easily achievable. However in practice I have found that it has sometimes been difficult to ensure that the scene does not run on beyond the desired point (e.g. where the audio is required slightly to extend beyond the last frame of video).

Accordingly where I am authoring short programmes (i.e. less than 30 minutes duration) I have tended to import not only the full movie but also a series of edited scenes extracted from, but in addition to, the full movie.

One advantage of this is that

So I went out and bought a FireWire card and installed it into the PC and capture worked with no problems at all. I captured into MPEG2 and also AVI. On the final DVD the footage captured in AVI seemed a bit better than when captured as MPEG2. When capturing as MPEG2 you can customise your capture settings to capture at different data rates with a constant bit rate or variable.

You can also ask Workshop to automatically scan the captured video and insert chapter points whenever the scene changes. I am sure this works fine with a bit of fine tuning, but I ended up very frustrated by it as it seemed to make a chapter point every couple of frames!

Edit
Once you have captured or imported your video you go onto the Edit button. Here you can add the captured files to your timeline. There is the option of adding a 'firstplay' video as well.

Also here you can import more video if you wish, files from a non-commercial DVD or still images to make a slideshow. Everything here is very obvious.

It is easy to add chapters which then appear on the right hand side of the screen. I particularly liked the slideshow feature. I assumed this was a new feature but in fact it is also available on the original Workshop. However, it has been updated on this version. More later.

You can also add subtitles here which worked very well. You can add them as you go or import a text file and just set the start and finish points as you go. It's a bit complicated to explain here, but it is quite intuitive and I didn't have to look at the

instructions to work out how to do it. I did, however, have a couple of crashes while working in this area (the only crashes I had in some intensive testing). Perhaps it needs a little tweaking.

Another thing you can do under this tab is add up to 8 alternative audio tracks and adjust their levels, fade in and fade out.

Menu
Here you can design a menu for your DVD using a wizard or a template or just design one from scratch. Or you can skip this step altogether and the DVD will just play the videos one after another.

The wizard and the templates give you a good starting point, which you can edit to your own liking. Adding buttons and linking video to the buttons is also very intuitive – you can just drag a chapter from the list on the right hand side of the screen onto your button and the link is made.

There are many ways to customise your buttons once you have them on the screen by applying custom frames and shapes.

Motion Menus
Motion menus and buttons are a lot easier on Workshop2 when compared to version 1. A new feature here is the playlist, which defines what happens to an individual button when it is pressed. Instead of just playing the video to which it is linked, it can play other videos as well depending on what you put in the list. ☞

At any point while all these various parameters are being selected the project can be previewed. This is useful for ensuring, e.g. that each button is linked correctly, the end action set correctly and that the right actions are associated with the end user's remote buttons.

Encore offers various options for output. These are: burn straight to disc; create a folder in which the Video_TS and Audio_TS files are compiled and can be played using suitable DVD playback software; create a DVD Image for burning to disc; or write to a Digital Linear Tape (DLT) for professional third-party replication. If using the latter option Encore offers various copy protection methods and regional encoding.

At KLA I have been using Adobe Encore DVD commercially since October 2003 and overall I am very pleased with it. Once one has mastered a few basic concepts it is really very straightforward and I am able to produce professional-looking results in a relatively short time. However, unlike Adobe programs like Photoshop, After Effects and Premiere, this is a completely new program and lacks

For example, you have created a menu with lots of selections on it. The user views the first item and, when that finishes, they can be taken automatically onto the second item and then onto the third, etc.

However, if they start off by selecting just, say, item 3 then at the end of item 3 you can have the viewer returned to the menu instead of going onto item 4.

Sound complicated? Maybe it is until you actually want to use it - then it all becomes blindingly obvious. You can create some very professional looking menus with a little imagination coupled with the tools available - or if you don't have any imagination the templates are adequate.

With the Finish button you can preview your project and burn it to a DVD, create DVD folders on a hard disk, or copy to a DLT recorder.

Before burning you have to select a template which determines the bitrate of the converted video. You can choose a Ulead setting or make your own. If you are using pre-made MPEG2 files it is best here to choose the rate of the original file, as the file will then not be re-encoded if it is the same.

The quality of the encoded files was very good but, as mentioned earlier, the footage captured as AVI seemed a bit better than the footage captured as MPEG2.

You can also apply copy protection to your project or regionalise it. Ulead make a big thing about the copy protection, but what they don't tell you (before you buy) is that to use Macrovision copy protection you need a licence from Macrovision - and CSS protection only works when writing to a DLT tape ready for mass duplication by a replication house.

So, for anyone who is going to buy this just for the copy protection – think twice.

DVD Workshop 2, like its predecessor, is very easy to use and if you are not too ambitious you can produce a DVD within minutes of starting it up. Unlike, say, Adobe Encore which presents you with a blank desktop with no clue as to what to do next.

Ulead pronounce quite loudly that it is a professional authoring system, but due to the interface it does give the feel of something for the hobbyist rather than the professional, which is a shame. Again comparing it to Adobe Encore which has a Pro interface once you understand how to get past the blank desktop.

However you can produce very professional looking DVDs using Workshop. Most of the operations are very easy to pick up and it has some very useful features. If you are into subtitles you couldn't get an easier system for applying them to your video.

I was particularly impressed with the slideshow feature which enables you to create a DVD from loads of still images. You can categorise the images into different slideshows, choose a transition between each slide and add music and subtitles.

You have to be careful regarding some of Ulead's claims about the software, especially the copy protection which, although it can add copy protection, has some caveats. There is also an implication that you can import Photoshop multi-layered files. You can but it does flatten the image first so it's no good creating buttons on layers in Photoshop and expecting them to be buttons in Workshop.

If you want to produce DVDs efficiently and quickly, DVD Workshop 2 does this for you very well and because of this I would recommend it without hesitation. If you are a Workshop 1 user thinking about upgrading, I also think it would be a good move especially if you want subtitles, alternative audio tracks, 16:9 support and slideshows. Don't bother if you are only upgrading for copy protection.

So if you are hankering after some design centric workflow, this is probably the program for you. b