AVmedia Vmotion

Replacing your tape-based picture with a random access source is a bit of no-brainer. NEIL HILLMAN investigates a clever system from the Fairlight camp and becomes strangely drawn to Corduroy slacks.

TIME WAS WHEN A wheezing and rattling Umatic, locked to two 2-inch, 24-track Ampex's by an Adam Smith synchroniser was cutting edge technology in a TV dubbing suite. Well it was when I were a lad anyway, sitting in a sizeable middle 1980s ITV postproduction studio. Drop-ins needed to be planned carefully and back-timed meticulously, as the mechanics of the various symbiotic systems crashed and banged, hunted and locked. I was never quite sure which was the most frightening prospect: the thought of an unlocked multitrack spool, unlacing at terminal velocity and whistling past my ear, or remaking the edit where the voting viewers at home disagreed with the New Faces theatre audience. Oh, how those long, winter night sessions would fly by.

So while things have moved a long way in audio post – due in no small part to the welcome flexibility that digital working has brought us – a revolution has silently, thankfully, taken place in the way we handle and manage our pictures. The concept of the controllable video-disk is no longer really new, and every dubbing mixer now takes for granted the immediacy of nonlinear auto-location, with the welcome release from the spooling and lock-up time of the old videotape machines. The latest offering from Fairlight-owned AVmedia – the Vmotion – moves forward another stage the capability of an audio suite to manage its picture sources.

In its simplest form, the Vmotion is a random-access hard disk video recorder and player; but up to seven Vmotion units can be easily networked allowing different users instantaneous access to playback from a central RAID array, file-sharing in real-time. Those Vmotion's can all play back and record to the centrally located, high capacity RAID array drives. Once pictures have been recorded to the RAID, they are available to any users on a Gigabit Ethernet network, with re-edits made on individual stations unaffecting any other Vmotions on the system. So all rooms in a facility may access centrally stored versions of a project's pictures, with a touchscreen as the operator's window to the network environment.

Using that touchscreen technology, the Vmotion can provide instant positioning of video playback using 20 locator tiles, shown on-screen, and entered as cue points by the operator; at the bottom of the screen is a frame-by-frame picture strip that can jog the programme by touching. Bi-directional Sony 9-pin control means the device may be master or slave to any DAW, allowing the dubbing mixer to cue to a chosen point by this visual reference rather than using a jog-wheel, timecode or transport keys 'blind', although conventionally configured transport keys are available on the screen too.

It can generate and chase LTC, and records in PAL or NTSC (drop frame and non-drop frame), DV-25 or uncompressed; provides composite, component or SDI video I-O; and analogue, digital (SDI) or professional (SDI, AES, TDIF, analogue) stereo audio I-O.

The Vmotion also includes basic video-editing capabilities for simple picture conforming tasks, such as move, copy, paste and split, that might otherwise require a whole programme to be re-digitised – for example, when shots are removed from a sequence. An ADR and foreign dialogue replacement package – expressly designed to speed up the painstaking process – can import cue lists and timecode positions with an auto cue light and audio beep cues.

Better known perhaps for its indispensable software AVtransfer, AVmedia is setting a new precedent in flexibility and ease of use in picture-for-audio applications, while Vmotion's capability to export AVI and QuickTime files is a bonus for audio facilities integrating DVD authoring into their range of services.

Useful, unique, but more importantly, user-friendly, the Vmotion has set a new level of expectation; not bad for one of the industry's brightest new faces. ■

The AVmedia Pyxis

Announced at the New York AES was a 'lite' version of Vmotion called Pixys. Different mainly by virtue of its construction and presentation, Pixys is a combination of simple kit and sophisticated hardware/software, for installation in a customer's own PC. Like Vmotion, Pyxis enables the direct replacement of current VTRs and video disk systems with a touchscreen interface, Gigabit Ethernet network enabled project management, and Sony 9-pin control.

Pyxis will display, record and play back one video track and two audio tracks in a familiar scrolling timeline with a fixed head playback position, and a filmstrip-style video track that eases individual frame identification. Four audio tracks may be loaded from files carrying that number, and although at present projects carrying more than four tracks have their extra tracks ignored, later software versions are planned to match precisely the track requirements to incoming file configurations.

PAL and NTSC recording and playback is supported, in DV25 and native uncompressed video formats, and audio can be recorded and played back at any sampling rate and word length supported by the installed sound card. Timecode handling is comprehensive: PAL, NTSC (DF & nDF), 23.98, 24, 30 and 60fps; pull-up and pull-down options are also included.

OMF import is possible, as is the import and export of AVI, QuickTime, WAV and AIFF file formats. Track and clip-based editing is available for simple picture and audio conform tasks including cut, copy, paste and trim.

System requirements are Windows XP, Intel P4 or AMD Athlon 2GHz processor, 256Mb DDR RAM, 128Mb Direct-X compatible video capture card, and Direct-X compatible stereo sound card.

PROS The convenience of control from either the touchscreen or the standard DAW transport keys makes for a very easy transition into this way of working; it's robust enough for all-day-and-night sessions.

CONS I began to feel as creative as a picture editor; I even fancied wearing Corduroy trousers at one stage.

Contact

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