

**Review** PCI-based analogue and digital video capture and DVD burning kit, **£128**



### CVE Ratings

Features	5
Performance	3
Ease of use	4
Value for money	5

**Overall Rating**  
**85%**



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## SPECIFICATIONS

### How much?

£128 (online price from maker, inc VAT)

### Features

PCI card with two six-pin FireWire ports and one dedicated nine-pin socket to connect the supplied analogue breakout box; analogue sockets on the box, inputs/outputs for S-video, composite video and L/R audio; real-time capture to MPEG1, MPEG-2, DV, WMV and DivX formats; capture from S-video, composite video and DV; still-image capture in five formats; NTSC and PAL compatibility

### Supplied software

Snazzi DV Studio AVIO capture program; WinDVD Creator Plus editing and disc authoring; WinDVD 4 media player; Ulead DVD MovieFactory 2 for disc authoring; muvee autoProducer automated editor; DirectX 9

### Supplied cables

One six-pin-to-four-pin FireWire; one phono video/audio lead; one S-video

### Minimum requirements

Windows 98SE or above; P4 1.8GHz CPU; 256MByte RAM; 7,200rpm HDD

### Special offer!

**Save 15%!** Readers are invited to take up an exclusive special offer for the Snazzi DV.AVIO. Enter the code **Avio1019** in the Promotion Code field of Snazzi's online shopping site – **www.snazzishop.co.uk** – to qualify for the special price of £109 (inc VAT). Offer available until the end of Oct 2004



# Snazzi DV.AVIO

There are plenty of options for getting analogue and digital video onto a PC for editing – some better than others. A couple of years ago, Snazzi came up with a sturdy arrangement in the form of the USB2 Gold Deluxe Edition, but how does the company's latest offering deal with advances in DVD authoring?



Even though most camcorders sold today are DV

models, there are plenty of analogue camcorders still in use, whether Hi8, 8mm, or one of the four VHS variants. Given the wide range of low-cost video editing hardware and software available and the capabilities of modern PCs, it's never been easier for anyone to start video editing, irrespective of what type of footage they have.

One's latest Snazzi-branded editing solution, DV.AVIO, can handle analogue and digital capture and is based around a PCI card – still the only route open to users of desktop PCs without FireWire capability built in – paired with a breakout box for analogue inputs.

## Installation

When our test PC first booted up after the PCI card was installed and connected to the breakout box, Windows initially recognised the card as an OHCI-compliant IEEE 1394 controller, and then, additionally, as a 'Snazzi DV.AVIO multimedia controller'. Next, Windows' found-new-hardware wizard appeared, as foretold in the fold-out quick-start guide – which also says that the required drivers are on the included CD. We inserted the CD and chose to search automatically for the drivers – without success.

Since the drivers couldn't be found automatically, we went back and picked the Advanced option – to choose from a list. We were given two choices of location for the driver, in different folders on the CD. We chose the first, but halfway through the process the installer asked for the CD – which was already loaded. Installation failed to complete.

We restarted the PC – with the CD still in its drive – and were greeted again on boot up by the found-new-hardware wizard. This time, we navigated to the file name asked for by the wizard by choosing a folder on the CD called 'drivers'. The installation then seemed to complete, but when the found-new-hardware wizard appeared once more, we thought things had gone wrong again. However, seemingly, drivers for video and audio have to be installed separately; the first install had dealt only with video drivers – this one was for audio drivers. Once these were in place, we were able to continue with the installation of the software.

## Software suite

With the CD loaded, a screen came up with options for installing six pieces of software – Snazzi DV Studio AVIO; WinDVD 4; WinDVD Creator Plus; Ulead DVD MovieFactory 2; muvee autoProducer; and DirectX 9. The guide points out that it's important to install InterVideo's WinDVD Creator Plus software before the Snazzi DV Studio capture program. WinDVD Creator Plus went on without problems, but required the supplied serial number to be keyed in.

After restarting, we installed the Snazzi capture program, followed by DirectX 9.0 and another restart. Two more restarts were

needed, one after the WinDVD 4 player went on, and another after installing muvee autoProducer. Last on was DVD MovieFactory 2, which also installs QuickTime 5 – rather than the latest version, QT6.

With the software finally installed, we started out by testing the three capture modes available from within DV Studio, using as the source a Canon MV650i camcorder. This is a MiniDV model, but also outputs S-video and composite video. The Snazzi package has analogue connections on its breakout box, plus two six-pin FireWire ports on the PCI card. As we were going to >

## Fast facts

- Analogue and digital capture and output
- Encodes to six video formats and five still image formats
- Includes software for capturing, editing, authoring and burning
- PCI card with analogue breakout box



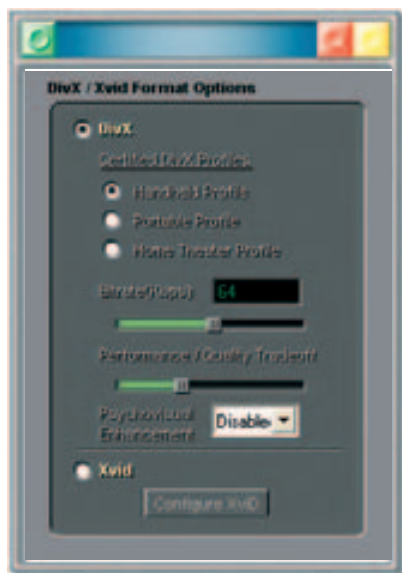
▲ The DV Studio capture program is pretty straightforward if a little quirky, and worked well enough



▲ The setup screen gives options for the format to encode to, input source, output signal and still image capture format

## TEST SYSTEM

Windows XP Home (with SP1); 1.5GHz Athlon 1800XP CPU; MSI KT3 Ultra2 Series MS6380E ATX motherboard with USB 2.0 and on-board sound; 512MByte RAM; 20GByte system hard drive; 120GByte media hard drive; Nvidia GeForce4 MX graphics card; NEC ND-1100A DVD+RW burner; generic DVD-ROM drive; Keyspan FCPi-3 OHCI-standard PCI FireWire card (IEEE 1394a); DirectX 9; Sony Multiscan E400 flat-screen monitor



▲ Setup also gives choices for encoding options – these are the parameters for DivX

➤ press, Snazzi announced that it was introducing a new breakout box for the DV.AVIO that also carries a six-pin FireWire port in addition to those on the card.

## Capture

Snazzi's own program DV Studio Avio looks attractive and well laid-out, even though it doesn't conform to Windows conventions. The controls aren't dauntingly numerous and the main preview screen is large, with simple playback buttons, plus a big, red record button

There are five buttons down the right side of the interface, to pick capture mode, playback mode or transmit mode, and to adjust the setup and colours. The preview window in capture mode only works if the correct input source is selected but, annoyingly, this choice has to be made beforehand using the Setup button.

Playback mode offers an open-media-file dialogue for accessing and playing clips on hard disk, as does transmit mode – the options for the choice of output signal and encoding formats have to be pre-selected via the Setup button. The Color button gives control over the hue, brightness and colour of incoming analogue footage. At the bottom of the right side are the tape-transport buttons for controlling a DV camcorder or DV VCR.

Assuming we selected the correct input source in Setup, we were able to bring in footage through any of the three input connections – composite video, S-video and DV. Tape-transport control of our camcorder worked faultlessly when capturing DV footage via FireWire. However, as with analogue capture – and unlike virtually every DV capture program we've ever used – capture of DV footage required the tape to be playing before the record button was pressed, even when the tape was set to pause first – otherwise, all that gets captured is a continuous still frame. The option to name captured clips is offered once recording has been stopped.

The Setup button in DV Studio gives access to an extensive range of encoding options for capturing clips. The encode file types include MPEG-1, MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DV AVI, WMV and DivX (XviD) – and each can be tweaked for quality, file size and speed of encoding. Encoding of DVD-compliant MPEG-2 uses

MainConcept's well-respected encoder with options for variable or constant bit-rate and different quality/data-rates. We had no trouble encoding to DVD-compliant MPEG-2 or any other format – irrespective of quality and speed settings – even though the processor on our PC was a 1.5GHz AMD Athlon, rather than a 1.8GHz Intel P4 stated to be the minimum required. MPEG-2 footage encoded from all three input sources looked good, and didn't seem to require any extra encoding time after the tape had been stopped – so clearly was taking place in real-time.

The DivX section offers three preset encoding profiles – Handheld, Portable and Home Theater. The bit-rate for each can be altered with a choice of four levels of quality. There is also an option called Psychovisual Enhancement, which is disabled by default. Rather like MP3 with audio, this is reckoned to filter out video information that the brain won't miss, enabling the data-rate and final file size to be reduced. With the clips we tried, there was no noticeable quality loss using this option even at its highest setting, which reduced file size by about 20 per cent.

WMV support covers 27 presets for the Windows Video 8 Codec, ranging from those for handheld devices up to high-quality broadband delivery – plus, apparently, the ability to stream directly from within the program, although we weren't able to test this.

One thing to note about encoding to MPEG-4 is that this is not possible from DV sources – only analogue.

## WinDVD Creator Plus

Once footage has been captured, InterVideo's WinDVD Creator Plus can be used to edit clips and author the project to DVD. On opening the program, a wizard takes the user through the initial set-up of the project – choosing between PAL/NTSC modes and picking the quality/play-time of the final DVD disc (60mins at highest quality, up to 240mins at lowest – both using single-layer discs). The wizard can be recalled from the Tools menu to make changes at any time during editing. Project creation is a four-stage process – Capture, Edit, Author and Make Disc – and, by default, the program will be in Edit mode.

The Edit pane opens with a storyboard to hold clips, but timeline mode can be called up

with a click of a button. The preview window is at top left and the media bin – giving access to video, images, audio, transitions and titles – is at top right. The title generator is one of the program's better features. It can use any True Type font installed on the PC, and in any colour, but doesn't allow text to be justified or for fonts of different sizes to be mixed. Thumbnails of transitions can be previewed in real-time from the media bin, and a fair number are genuinely useful.

A narration track is also available for recording voice-overs in real-time to footage using a microphone connected to the computer, and there's a music track to supplement the audio captured with footage. However, audio and video from camcorder recordings can't be cut at different places to easily create split edits. A clumsy workaround for this is to mute the audio from camcorder footage and then mess around with audio files made from the camcorder and brought in onto the music track.

WinDVD Creator was able to capture from the

## *The Setup button in DV Studio gives access to an extensive range of encoding options for capturing clips*

Canon MV650i camcorder via DV device control. It also recognised the analogue side of the Snazzi card and could capture analogue S-video and composite video, but with a much reduced level of control than that available from the DV Studio software. Note that, when capturing analogue footage from within WinDVD Creator, analogue preview is not available unless recording has already been started.

Files can be imported into WinDVD Creator directly from the system's hard drive, too. We brought in some files we'd prepared using DV



▲ Some of the backgrounds and button layouts in WinDVD Creator aren't half bad

Studio, arranged them on the timeline, added a title and a few transitions between scenes and continued to the Author stage.

### **Authoring**

The Author pane gives a selection of menu designs in the Theme Editor. Any background image or video clip can be used, and buttons can be repositioned. There's a selection of button styles – some of them not too bad – and the font editor for the menu title gives a preview of the system's fonts.

At the top right corner of WinDVD Creator's screen – and available at all times – is the Disc Manger button. Oddly though, Disc Manager failed to recognise our Verbatim DVD+R discs, instead warning that the disc in use was not a rewritable. It turns out that that Disc Manager only works with rewritable discs, and is intended to allow quick or full formatting and other rewritable operations.

Continuing on to the Make Disc stage, we specified the type of DVD (1hr, PAL), to burn direct to disc without storing an image, and

the burn speed (optimal). When we pressed the final button to burn the disc, a window came up asking us to select files, which we'd thought the program would assume was the project sat on its timeline. Well, we were wrong and couldn't find any way of getting the program to use the project.

Fortunately, after contacting InterVideo, we were able to get hold of an update to V2 and this did the trick. We couldn't find this update by browsing InterVideo's site, so reckon that users with a similar problem should email InterVideo's tech support. Our project was only 2mins 30secs in length, and this recorded to DVD+RW disc in 8min 45secs.

The software bundle is rounded off by V2 of Ulead's DVD MovieFactory and muvee autoProducer. Ulead's program is genuinely useful, offering DVD authoring and other disc-burning operations (V3 review, Jul 04, p34). AutoProducer, in contrast, is an automated editor that throws together selected clips in a fairly arbitrary way with a view to saving time and effort, and didn't produce anything we were happy with.



### **Conclusion**

This package has lots going for it. The analogue/DV hardware worked fine, likewise the (rather quirky) capture program, and the choice of InterVideo WinDVD Creator Plus for editing seems fairly sound, though we were slightly concerned at the program's initial failings. In fairness, though, the Snazzi's biggest rival – Pinnacle's MovieBox USB – comes with Pinnacle Studio, an editing program with its own well-documented problems, though support for Pinnacle is, at least, a one-stop shop.

The promised addition of a FireWire port to the breakout box is welcome, but what's most likely to swing votes is the huge range of formats that DV Studio can capture to. There are few products available at this lowly price point that offer such a wealth of options for encoding analogue footage along with full DV editing and DVD authoring capability.

As a further incentive on the price front, a discount is on offer to CVE readers for the Snazzi DV.AVIO. See the Specifications box on p78 for info on how to claim.

#### **Hugo Frazer**

#### **ALSO USED IN THIS REVIEW**

Canon MV650i MiniDV camcorder; Verbatim DVD media; Goodmans VN9800S VHS recorder

#### **CONTACTS**

DVD blank media supplied by Verbatim, 01784 439 781; www.verbatim-europe.com  
V One Multimedia, 01903 236 612; www.snazzi.com

▲ Our original incarnation of WinDVD Creator failed to recognise the current project when at the Make Movie stage, but was fixed by an update