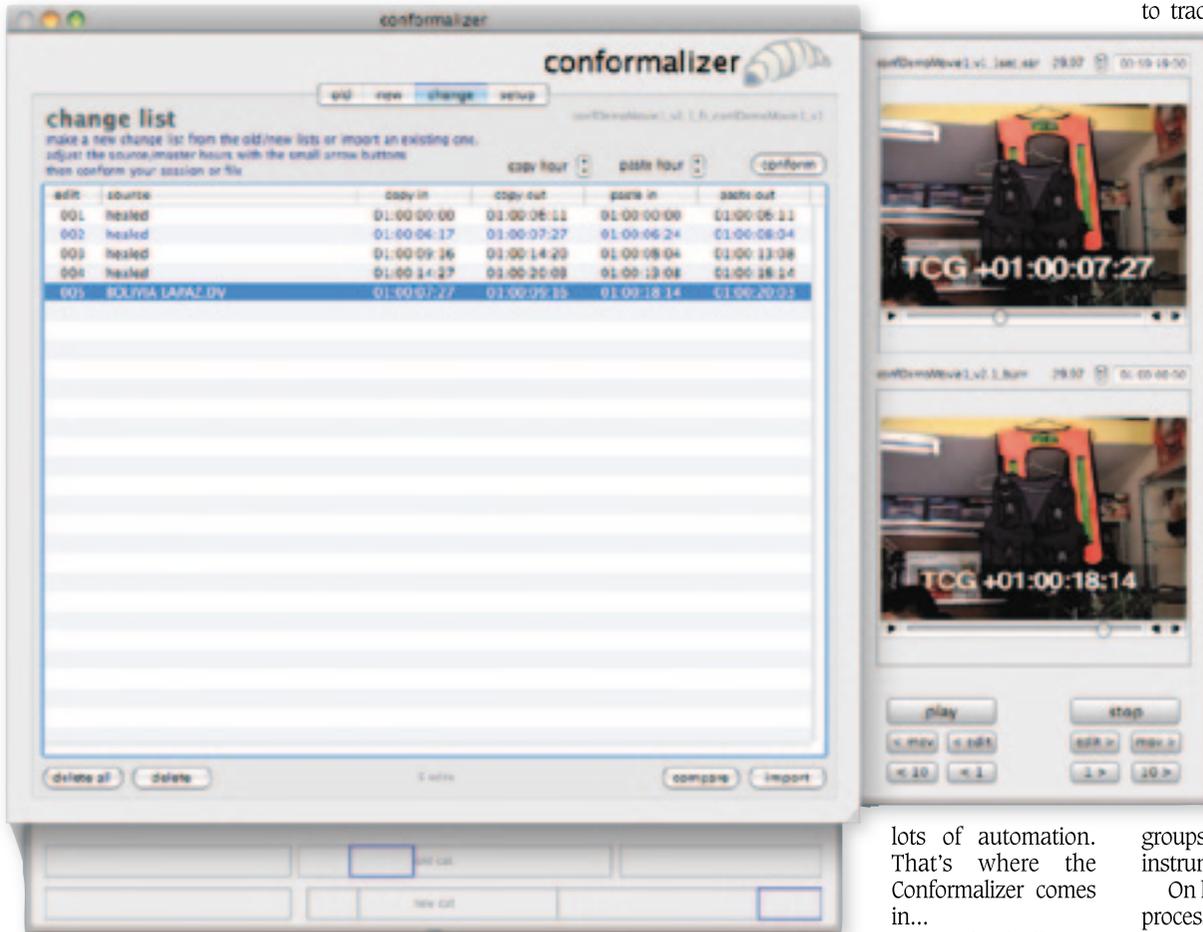# Maggot Conformalizer

Despite sounding like yet another Terminator movie spin-off, the Conformalizer is actually a niche, but very useful, software package from New Zealand-based developer Maggot software. ANDY DAY dips into his chum bucket…

*C*onforming is probably one of the most tedious tasks a dubbing mixer has to endure. In an ideal world we would be working with the final cut of the pictures, we mix the audio and lay it back to the master. However, in reality there are always last minute changes; whether that is actual shot changes or VFX inserts, at some point you are going to have to move stuff around.

Back in the dark ages before OMFI, conforming was more commonplace *(Many might argue that at least you knew what you were dealing with. Ed)*. Often the Avid captured audio was of inferior quality, so it either had to be recaptured from the master tapes or from an alternative source such as DAT. But with the stabilisation of the OMF standard and improved DAW support all this went away and for a whole new generation conforming was a thing of the past. However, there are still many uses for conforming in today's postproduction environment. Examples include feature films (where virtually everything is rebuilt audio-wise) and live music shows, where the audio may be provided in a separate multitrack format for further remixing. Also for licensed TV shows there are usually several deliverables, including cut downs, extended versions, international versions, etc.

While it is possible to chop up your DAW audio and move it around manually, it can be tricky to manage on large sessions where you have multiple tracks and lots of automation. That's where the Conformalizer comes in…

It's basically a standalone piece of software (Mac OSX only) that can automatically conform Pro Tools sessions, FX lists and ADR databases to match a changed picture cut. The main benefits are for Pro Tools users but it can work on file-based workflows too by using tab or comma delimited text files.

The process compares two picture EDLs, XML, cut lists or Avid change notes and creates a new 'change EDL' that reflects the difference between two versions of the picture. The cool bit for Pro Tools users is that it can then make all the changes to your source Pro Tools session (including whichever tracks you want to include) at the click of a button.

Installation is as simple as it gets using the self running installer. As a bonus you can even download a demo version, which runs without limitation for six days, after which it is limited to five edits only. This gives you the perfect opportunity to try it on real-world projects before you purchase — that's a rarity for demo versions these days.

There is just a single window with a couple of panels that contain Movies and a timeline/block display of the two EDLs. There are four tabs within the main window titled Old, New, Change and Setup.

These are pretty self explanatory when you know the basic workflow through Conformalizer — which is to import the old list, import the new list, check the changes, and finally conform your Pro Tools session. So here goes…

I started by just using a few clips from Final Cut Pro, exported an EDL (and OMF to get the source audio), then I made several 'tricky' changes to the edit by chopping up the clips and moving them around. Over in Pro Tools I loaded the original OMF from the first cut and added some SFX, music, plus a few audiosuite adjustments on the sync audio. Then I did a rough mix.

Now the clever stuff. In order to get all my changes to track the new cut, all I had to do was load the old and new EDLs into Conformalizer and by clicking on the Change tab I got a list of all the changes. Plus by clicking on each change in the list, the corresponding clips are highlighted in the block panel to give an overview of both timelines. An added bonus is the Movie panel, which allows QuickTime movies of each cut to be imported and compared shot by shot. You can even play both movies in perfect sync to watch the changes in real-time.

Before hitting the magic conform button, it's important to make sure you target the new conformed version to another place on the timeline. In my case the edit was at 1hr, so by setting the paste hour to 2hrs in Conformalizer, I created a new version starting at 2hrs in my Pro Tools timeline. You also have the option to select which tracks in Pro Tools you want to conform, using the ibeam tool. Then press Conform and bingo — you can actually watch the changes happen step by step in Pro Tools, while sipping a Gin and Tonic (at least I did).

A couple of sips later everything was done. Just import the new cut QuickTime, spot it to 2hrs and as I had selected my newly added Fx tracks, even the Fx moved with the changes. It works. This could save you hours of messing about shifting large groups of tracks around on a full dub or multitracked instruments in a concert remix session.

On long-form material or large sessions the conform process can take a while. The developer recommends you actually set the conform speed to slow, meaning a longish wait, but a more accurate conform result *(And half a bottle of gin. Ed)*

As you can probably guess, the resultant changes still need tweaking with crossfades and level matches, but that is to be expected in any reconform process. I've only given you a basic overview here of Conformalizer's capabilities, but I thoroughly recommend you check out the website and download a demo version. Check out the demo movies too for other file-based applications of Conformalizer. Priced at just US$799 it's significantly cheaper than the competition and may even make your life a little easier (Gin and Tonic not included). ■

PROS Easy to use (useful demo videos on website); very reasonable demo version; good price point.

CONS Will be slower on large projects; still needs usual audio tweaks to new Pro Tools session (not really a con, but I couldn't fault anything else).

EXTRAS Version 3.1.2 of Conformalizer, which has just been released, includes support for Pro Tools 8.

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