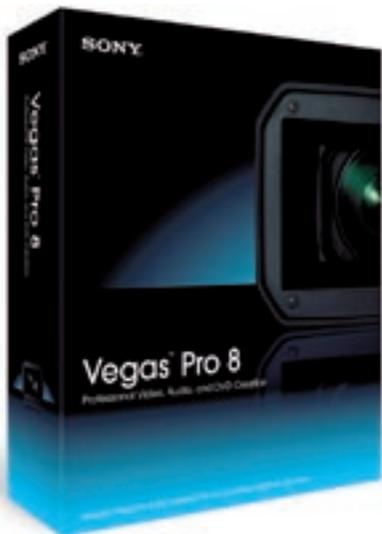


# Sony Vegas Pro 8

**Sony maintains its commitment to the concept of software-based desktop video editing with the release of the latest version of Vegas Pro. ROB JAMES cuts and splices and finds a lot more audio.**



**A** MERE YEAR HAS passed since I last checked out Sony Vegas and DVD Architect, then at versions 7.0 and 4.0 respectively. One year on, we have Vegas Pro Version 8 and DVD Architect Version 4.5. As with the previous release, this is not a huge upgrade in terms of flashy features; the headline set has had a few features added and a couple of extras removed. Instead, it's the inner workings of the package that have received the most attention. The editing model remains attractive to audio people (Vegas was derived from an audio editor) and just as alien as it ever was to anyone brought up on Premiere, Edius, Final Cut or Avid.

Version 7 was bundled with Boris Graffiti LTD titling software, Red Giant Magic Bullet Looks and a sample CD of Sony sound effects. These are no longer supplied but there is a new titler, the Prototype Titler which is intended to make up for one of the losses.

Changes common to both applications include Windows Vista compatibility and support for FLAC audio files. FLAC stands for Free Lossless Audio Codec, an audio format not too dissimilar to MP3, but lossless. This is analogous to zip file compression but is optimised for audio and should mean compression with no loss of quality.

The other changes to DVD Architect are minimal. Version 4.5 adds support for MJPEG files and a number of new 'themes'. These are most welcome and are, at least for my purposes, a lot more useable than most of the previous ones, although of course, if you are serious about DVD authoring, you will want to make your own. Apart from bug-fixes, that's it; there's not a word about Blu-ray Disk (BD) authoring. I can only suppose Sony is keeping its powder dry while the chaos surrounding BD compatibility is resolved.

On the surface, the biggest changes to Vegas are the new titler, multi-camera editing and to the audio user interface. Given its audio-based origins, it is perhaps fitting that Vegas's audio mixer has been the subject of a re-vamp. Before, individual track volume and pans were only shown on the tracks. Now a new Mixing Console window presents a more conventional view of the mixing and effects functions. The beauty is more

than skin deep. Buses can be routed to assignable effects and to multiple sends. Track panning can be linked to apply to bus or assignable effect sends. If plug-ins are 'tempo aware' (like the Amplitude Modulation plug-in), then Measures and Beats tempo information is sent to them.

The video engine has been revamped once again and now works in 32-bit floating point rather than the previous 8-bit. This helps with quality in a number of ways. Compositing can now be undertaken in linear-light gamma and there is support for 10-bit video encoding when previewing or capturing from AJA SDI video cards. 32-bit processing will even help 8-bit originated projects that are destined for 8-bit output formats due to lower losses in the conversion processes inherent in effects, colour conversions and transitions. Some of the supplied effects and transitions and 'media generators' only work in 8-bit so the video is automatically down-converted when these are in use.

Provided the input and output formats match, V8 has a 'no-recompression' option for Long-GOP HDV and XDCAM 'cuts only' editing, reducing render times. Frames including effects, transitions and compositing will, of course, still have to be rendered.

The new Prototype Titler offers a huge amount of control but it is necessarily more complicated than the old titler. There are basic presets to get you going and the online help eases the passage into the mysteries of cascading keyframes for animation and adding text to a path.

Multi-cam is this year's 'me too' must-have feature. While useful for sporting and musical events coverage, this falls into the 'essential if you need it' category — but most users won't (the functionality was, in any case, previously available via add-on scripts). However, this implementation is neat and once you have the material in sync (which can be achieved via timecodes but may be easier manually), it offers a desirable way of working. Once in sync you select all the tracks and choose Tools > Multicamera > Create Multicamera Track. All the selected tracks are then collapsed into a single video and audio track pair.

You can either press number keys to switch between 'cameras' or simply click on the shot you want in the preview screen. As you do this, the edit is built up on the Video and audio track pair. If you use the Ctrl key as well the cuts become dissolves. You can switch freely between multicam and conventional editing.

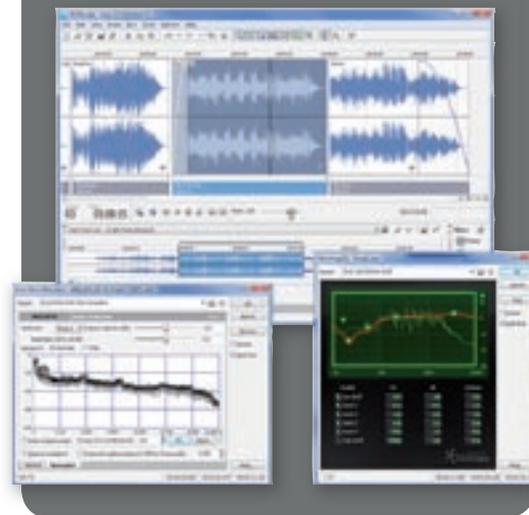
Last of the major items is Blu-ray Disk burning. All this allows you to do is burn a BD-R from the Timeline if you have a suitable burner, somewhat akin to burning a single-movie DVD in DVD Architect.

In addition to all of these goodies, there are many more detailed additions, for example, a single-monitor full-screen video preview, digital signage support (the ability to create rotated projects for viewing on vertical or inverted displays) and the usual workflow improvements.

Vegas has retained its core virtues, not least its low price (UK£425.52 plus VAT for the bundle), and Sony has added to functionality and desirability without compromising its undoubted charm. In a competitive and crowded market area it remains a true alternative. The big disappointment is the lack of full-blown BD authoring in DVD Architect. From the format's chief architect Sony, this was hotly anticipated and its absence is baffling.

Meanwhile DVD Architect remains my DVD authoring software of choice. In the last year I've flirted with a couple of others and found nothing desirable enough to make me want to switch. DVD Architect enables you to make a simple, good-looking DVD or a highly complex one with nested menus and subtitles. It's quick, and although there's a learning curve, it's not an onerous one. There are few changes in this version, but then this isn't a package that needs much fixing. It's just a pity that Architect is not available on its own for users of other editors who don't wish to contemplate switching. ■

- PROS** Fluid multiformat editing; compositing (if your needs are modest, you can save yourself a fortune); DVD Architect.
- CONS** No proper Blu-ray Disk authoring yet; new Titler is complex; DVD Architect not available separately.
- EXTRAS** Sony Creative Software's Version 9 package of Sound Forge includes CD Architect 5, Noise Reduction 2 plug-ins, and a Mastering Effects Bundle.



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