



Reviews

QuickTime 3.0 Pro for Windows 95

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EMedia Professional, September 1998

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First released in 1991, Apple Computer, Inc.'s QuickTime is a key standard for cross-platform digital media creation and publishing. In fact, if you've loaded the full Acrobat product suite from Adobe Systems, or even Acrobat Reader from a CD-ROM, you've already loaded an earlier version of QuickTime. The latest version, QuickTime 3.0 Pro, combines advanced digital video streaming technologies with major breakthroughs in user-friendliness.

Particularly impressive is QuickTime's enduring market presence as the only digital media technology platform integrating 3D animation, real-time special effects, virtual reality, and streaming video and audio across all major operating systems. The product currently supports more than 35 popular media file formats, including most major video, still image, audio, animation, and MIDI formats. Multimedia producers in particular should heed the fact that QuickTime's file format has been chosen as the starting point for the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) MPEG-4 Intermedia Format.

THE LATEST PLETHORA OF POSSIBILITIES

To get QuickTime 3.0 Pro into as many hands as possible, Apple has been giving away a downsized version of the product on its Web site--<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download>. To further reduce its distribution costs, and for the sake of convenience, the company allows the user to download upgrades as well. For \$29.99, you'll receive an access key that activates version 3.0's capabilities. You may also purchase a Macintosh, Windows 95, or Windows NT 4.0 CD-ROM of the product for an additional \$10 media and shipping fee. Aside from avoiding the download time of the 6.8MB QuickTime installer, though, there seems little reason to do this, especially since the contents of the CD-ROM mirror the downloadable product.

What you *don't* get with the product--and what would have been intensely helpful--is a manual or integrated

Product in Brief

Synopsis: QuickTime 3.0 Pro is a cross-platform application for viewing or editing high-quality audio and video files. Geared towards consumers, digital video artists, software developers, and Webmasters, 3.0 supports a variety of file and media formats, including most major video, still image, audio, animation, and MIDI files. Its full-featured Picture Viewer and Movie Player capabilities are central to the product, making it a rich, low-cost entry point for users interested in exploring all that the Web--and multimedia in general--can offer.

Price: \$29.99 to download; \$39.99 if shipped

System Requirements:

Macintosh: Macintosh or Power Macintosh running System 7.0 or later. Apple recommends at least 2MB over what is required to run your selected browser.

Windows: A 486 or 586/Pentium Pro running Windows 95 or Windows NT.

All platforms require a Web browser that supports plug-ins.

For more information, contact:

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<http://www.apple.com>

HELP. I found this omission to be a significant roadblock, especially for the first-time Windows QuickTime user, since there is such an overwhelming number of features to assimilate and learn. Apple does provide a comprehensive primer on the Web, but it doesn't take the place of online HELP or a PDF rendition of the manual.

PUTTING QUICKTIME 3.0 PRO'S MAIN FEATURES TO THE TEST

What gives QuickTime real value is the sheer number of file types and compressor-decompressors (codecs) that are built-in and supported. Specifically, version 3.0 handles AVI, DV, and OpenDML video formats; AIFF/AIFC, DV, Sound Designer II, System 7 sound, AU, and WAV audio files; animated GIF, FLC, FLI, and PICS files; Karaoke, standard, and general MIDI formats; and a host of still image file formats, including BMP, GIF, JPEG/JFIF, MacPaint, PhotoShop, PICT, SGI, Targa, and TIFF.

Once downloaded, QuickTime 3.0 Pro--tested here on a 200MHz Pentium running Windows 95--provides three applications: Picture Viewer, Movie Player, and a browser plug-in.

Picture Viewer

QuickTime 3.0 Pro's Picture Viewer warrants a position in your arsenal of Web and multimedia-delivery tools because it handles major Web graphic file formats. Designed to accept multiple graphics formats, the viewer also exports a variety of file types. Viewer even lets you perform minor graphics editing, such as sizing and rotating.

In testing, I easily read a bi-tonal TIF image of an ink sketch into the Viewer and exported it to JPEG--a feat even higher-end tools such as Photoshop LE and Painter cannot achieve. The Viewer also allows you to specify quality settings for JPEG to achieve the best file size for the image clarity you want. Adding GIF and transparent GIF would make the tool even more useful for Web graphics editing.

Movie Player

Strictly speaking, the name "Movie Player" is a misnomer. The player delivers video--plus sound, graphics, text, and any media type the movie contains--as single components or in a variety of configurations. Movie Player currently supports two types of movies: serial time-based and Virtual Reality (VR), a heuristic exploratory medium mimicking three dimensions.

Movie Player stores media types in separate tracks, which can be manipulated individually and played back synchronized. The major QuickTime tracks include video (digitized or computer-generated images, or both), sound, music (MIDI), text, 3D, tween (used with 3D to define object motions), and Sprite (graphic objects you can move and resize for integration with video). QuickTime's VR movies must contain at least a video track; VR panorama movies also contain a Panorama track.

QuickTime 3.0 provides very efficient and high-quality delivery of sound and video via its built-in codecs in both the Macintosh and Windows versions. Video codecs include Photo-JPEG, Sorenson, and Cinepak; music includes the QDesign Music Codec, which gives Web publishers a means to publish streaming sound at higher quality than available via other streaming formats. One built-in speech codec is QUALCOMM's PureVoice, which allows Web content providers to deliver high-quality, voice-based content to Internet users at any modem connection speed.

As a test of QuickTime 3.0 Pro's compression capabilities, I imported and played back a Windows WAV file. I found that the product does a fine job of converting and compressing Windows WAV files to cross-platform MOV files. One sample audio clip, 12.3 seconds in length and recorded as a 22.05Hz 16-bit stereo

file, shrank from 1.065MB as a WAV file to 534KB as a QuickTime MOV file. Serving sound as a sound stream from a Web site makes this application valuable indeed, since it preserves audio quality while reducing the size of the sound file.

Once you've upgraded to QuickTime 3.0 Pro, the Movie Player becomes even more powerful. The functions you use depend on the category you select. Among the more notable categories: Create QuickTime Movie Tracks, which allows you to import text, music, still images, and video from other movies or video types; Export QuickTime Movie Tracks, which lets you export sound, music, images, DV, and text tracks to text files; Playing Movies, which presents movies in full-screen formats, searches text tracks within movies, and plays any number of movies simultaneously; Editing Movies, which provides a host of copy and paste operations, as well as editing of non-movie data; and Editing Tracks, which lets you combine and extract tracks of various types and alter video and audio files.

Track information can easily be extracted in QuickTime 3.0 Pro, with fine results. I tested this feature using the soundtrack from the standard QuickTime test movie that accompanies the product. Additional samples are available, without upgrading to version 3.0, at <http://www.apple.com/quicktime/samples/index.html>.

I found that QuickTime 3.0 Pro provided higher quality sound than I've experienced with alternative streaming technologies, due to its ability to store the same music track at different quality levels (all compressed by the QDesign Music Codec). Simply choose a QuickTime selection, and the QuickTime plug-in chooses the appropriate version of the track to play based on your connection speed.

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF A MINOR LIMITATION

One obvious use for QuickTime 3.0 Pro is to deliver Windows-only screen videos to non-Windows platforms. In attempting this, I discovered how quickly you can bump into one of the product's basic limitations. This limitation is based on Pro, though--not on the underlying QuickTime architecture itself.

Since QuickTime has never been a product that will record screen video directly, I used two alternative Windows-based recorders and tried importing them into QuickTime Pro. First, I used Lotus's ScreenCam 97 to record a screen video sequence and exported the result to AVI (QuickTime 3.0 doesn't support ScreenCam's proprietary format). I then imported the result to QuickTime 3.0. A smooth 946KB ScreenCam file exported from ScreenCam became a jerky 7,505KB AVI file (due to the frame rate at which I exported the AVI), which QuickTime 3.0 delivered as a 71KB MOV file.

While the QuickTime 3.0 compression was impressive, the side trip taken with this version of AVI created extremely large intermediate files. I then tried--and failed--to export a smooth AVI screen sequence from Microsoft's Camcorder 97 to QuickTime 3.0. Apparently, QuickTime 3.0 doesn't support some compression formats, often because they are proprietary and unpublished--as is the case with Camcorder 97.

GETTING TO THE POINT ... QUICKLY

While truly robust QuickTime authoring will require QuickTime-aware applications such as Adobe's Premiere 5.0, QuickTime 3.0 Pro nonetheless delivers real value for its low, get-acquainted price-point. Its many tools--available through one sleek umbrella product-- offer a great entry point for exploring all the multimedia and Web potential that QuickTime clearly delivers.

Companies Mentioned

Adobe Systems, Inc.

345 Park Avenue, San Jose, CA 95110-2704; 408/536-6000; Fax 408/537-6000;
<http://www.adobe.com>

Lotus Development Corporation

55 Cambridge Parkway, Cambridge, MA 02142; 800/343-5414, 617/577-8500; Fax 617/693-8500; <http://www.lotus.com>

Microsoft Corporation

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