

PRODUCT reviews

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Camtasia Studio 4

By Camilla Gagliolo

Camtasia Studio 4 presents a terrific way for educators to reach out to their students and provide them with multimedia-rich learning resources. This \$149 (educational price) screen capture software allows educators to quickly and easily record lectures, presentations, and tutorials, and then translate these into multimedia presentations for online courses, distance learning, professional development courses, and student video tutorials.

One of the new, exciting features of Camtasia Studio 4 is its ability to distribute tutorials and recorded lectures through a variety of multimedia formats simultaneously, including video podcast format and streaming video. With the rise of portable MP3/video players and the popularity of podcasts, Camtasia provides another way for teachers to deliver content in a compelling, convenient manner. With Camtasia Studio, you can easily record all the activity on a computer screen along with voice narration and integrated video to create life-like, engaging instruction. The recorded screencasts can be edited and shared with students online in all the popular streaming formats, including Flash, and portable media formats such as iPod video and Windows media portable formats.

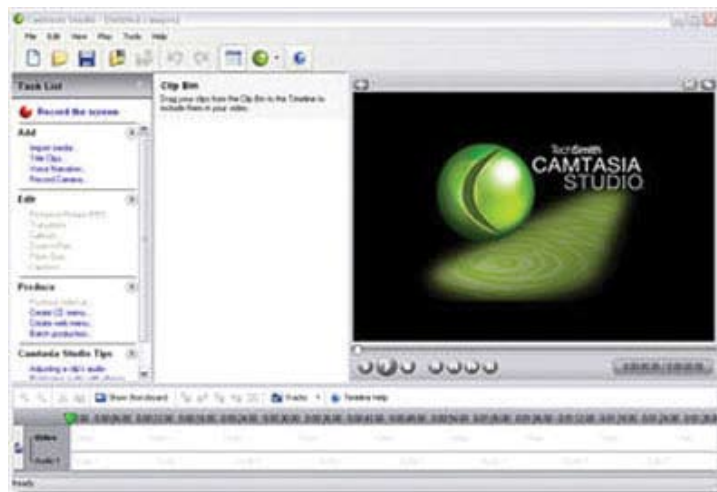
For those of you who regularly deliver speeches and presentations at conferences, imagine recording your presentation with sound and slides and then posting it on your blog or podcast site for easy access by par-

ticipants at a later time. As a technology coordinator, you have the ability to deliver your technology integration ideas and technology training in a portable format for teachers and administrators to access in classrooms and computer labs

while teaching. Teachers, consider preparing your lesson in advance and sharing it with your students so you are free to work with the students instead of demonstrating in front of the class or maybe even preparing your lesson for a substitute teacher. Imagine if you record your freshman chemistry lecture with sound and slides and then save it into a video podcast format for your students to access on their own time.

Now your screencast, lecture, or training video can reach your audience anywhere, anytime, and on demand—in the classroom, computer lab, library, a coffee shop, or while exercising.

Even new users will find the interface easy to navigate and the built-in tutorials are terrific aids for anyone new to Camtasia Studio. It is well designed and achieves the difficult task of providing great depth of functionality while remaining easy to use. Camtasia Studio 4 can help you record and edit videos of screen activity in all



Camtasia Studio 4 is an excellent tool for educators looking to incorporate rich multimedia content into their teaching and support activities.

multimedia formats and enhance the captured material with special effects, narration, and a variety of multimedia features. With Camtasia Studio, you can teach and demonstrate complex ideas and subtle points in a visual format using video rendering of desktop activities and presentations.

Among the many features in Camtasia is the capability to record PowerPoint presentations live, and the ability to add voice narration, titles, and music to enhance your presentation. Plug a microphone into your computer while you make your presentation and you can record your comments in real time, even adding a video feed of the presenter if desired using a webcam. The movie and the recorded presentation gets integrated using Camtasia's new picture-in-picture feature. You may also record a PowerPoint presentation directly within Camtasia Studio. Camtasia includes built-in tools for creating custom Web and CD-ROM menus; you can also

add a layer of music to the narration of a presentation. You have the ability to produce the video in various digital formats immediately or edit the presentation for sound quality or add callouts to point viewers to particular details within the presentation.

Another excellent new feature in Camtasia 4 is the possibility to create shared production profiles that allow individuals to share their screencast settings with others, much like a template. With this, organizations can standardize the look and feel of all video files and get new users up and running quickly. The profiles can be shared, even through e-mail.

Camtasia Studio 4 adds voice editing options to eliminate differences in audio volume and quality. The audio enhancement toolset is easy to use and surprisingly sophisticated. The difference in sound strength and quality is a recurring challenge with multimedia and podcast production. I found this to be a wonderful feature and simple to apply. I am considering using this for student podcast recording and editing.

I recommend that any new user take a look at the movie tutorials to discover the level of sophistication in

media creation that Camtasia Studio 4 offers and to understand the range of tools provided. An excellent online help system, balloon help, and access to Web-based video tutorials provide assistance with any questions that arise. The tutorials are clearly made with Camtasia Studio, providing models for the use of the software along with training materials for the new and repeat user. I learned all the basics on how to use Camtasia Studio 4 through the video clips showing various features of the program posted online at <http://www.techsmith.com> and accessible within the program environment. In addition, TechSmith offers a 30-day free trial period with full functionality of the software.

Camtasia Studio 4 includes a one-month subscription to Screencast, a hosting solution for professionals who want to share multimedia files. You can publish videos directly from Camtasia Studio 4 and then send viewers to the site for the presentation. If you prefer, you can automatically deliver content using Screencast's built-in RSS and iTunes capability.

TechSmith has clearly invested development time and energy in Camtasia Studio 4 to make it easy to pro-

duce engaging multimedia demos and presentations for a wide audience. It enables educators the flexibility in recording lectures and presentations and supports a variety of industry-standard file formats for online publishing. The end result is an application that is powerful and capable of serving the educational community with tools to create and share high-quality instructional media for a world of mobile learners.

Camtasia Studio 4 for Windows requires Windows XP/2000 or newer and a multimedia-capable system. For an up-to-date listing of system requirements, visit the TechSmith Web site.

Camtasia Studio 4

Techsmith, Inc.
<http://www.techsmith.com>
1.800.517.3001



Camilla Gagliolo is instructional technology coordinator in Arlington County Public Schools in Virginia, facilitating and leading technology integration to enhance teaching and learning for students. Her passion for innovation in education has made her one of the leaders in implementing new technologies in all curriculum areas internationally.

Finale Songwriter 2007

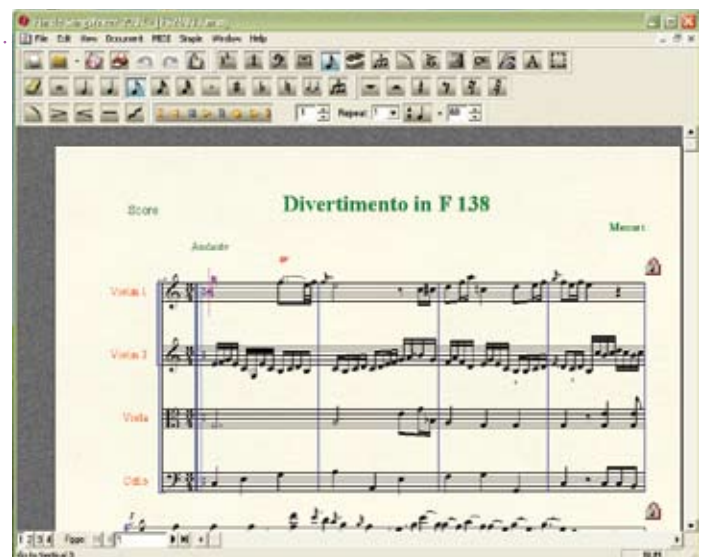
By Paul Wurster

Thanks to added functionality, even entry-level music notation programs can serve as powerful K-12 learning tools in the band room.

MakeMusic, Inc., a company best known for its professional-grade notation software, also offers Finale Songwriter, a simple, yet versatile sheet music program that may be just the thing for a music teacher on a budget.

Songwriter's primary use is for the creation of sheet music, but its notation window doubles as a place for

students to experiment with melodies—and they don't have to be piano virtuosos. Notes are displayed instantly when played on a MIDI keyboard, but anyone able to use a mouse can create music with the program. Simply click on the screen and a



Finale's Songwriter 2007 is an inexpensive music notation program that serves as a platform for students to experiment with melody and harmony.

pitch will sound. Drag the mouse up and down the staff to hear pitches before choosing one.

Installation and MIDI setup is relatively painless, in part because no hardware is needed. Songwriter comes with a software synthesizer in case you don't have an outboard synth, or the quality of your computer's sound card leaves something to be desired. In any case, it's worth auditioning the more than 128 instruments Songwriter provides.

I loaded a MIDI file of Mozart's Divertimento in F to compare the program's synth with the Microsoft GS wave table and a SoundMax wave table synth installed on my machine. Songwriter's software sounded noticeably better than Microsoft's and slightly better than the SoundMax when comparing violins, violas, and cellos. Not surprisingly, all of the synthesized violins sounded harsh in the upper register, but Songwriter's strings

overall—nylon guitar included—sounded better to my ears. Songwriter's piano, trumpet, flute, and vibraphone also sounded good considering the program's \$50 price tag.

Songwriter wasn't designed to produce scores for 100-piece orchestras, but it is well suited for writing music for small combos and choral groups. It can produce scores with up to eight staves, it makes room for six verses and gives composers the option to add chord symbols and fretboard diagrams.

Guitar and bass players who can't read music will also appreciate the tablature feature, which generates tab automatically by dragging standard notation onto a tab staff. Students can also create tab from scratch by typing numbers directly into the tab.

A feature called MicNotator allows brass and woodwind players to enter notation using a microphone, and the SmartScore option makes it possible to import a song by scanning sheet music.

The challenge for both of these features is accuracy, so plan to make minor corrections to the notation if you use them.

MIDI files can be imported, exported, and e-mailed, and songs can be saved as MP3 files and later burned to a CD.

It should be mentioned that installation is limited to one operating system at a time, so if you want to load the program on a different computer, you will have to "deauthorize" it first. Songwriter runs on Windows machines with 2000/XP or a Macintosh G4 running OS 10.3.9 or higher.

Finale Songwriter 2007

MakeMusic, Inc.
<http://www.finalemusic.com>



Paul Wurster is the assistant editor of L&L and ISTE's journals—the Journal of Research on Technology in Education (JRTE) and the Journal of Computing in Teacher Education (JCTE). He has seven years of experience in journalism and 18 as a professional musician.

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