

# DIGITAL DIRECTIONS

## DVDs in the PHOTO LAB

Jack and Sue Drafahl

More than 10 years ago the compact disk storage format took the world by storm. It had a storage capacity of 650–700 megabytes of data and required just a simple, inexpensive disk burner. It was quickly accepted, and before long most computers had CD readers or writers as standard equipment.

SOFTWARE manufacturers were quick to convert all their programs to this larger capacity CD format, and soon floppies were gathering dust. Technicians in the photo lab quickly found uses for this increased circular data storage. Higher resolution scanners made it easy to quickly fill up CDs with stored images. New inkjet

printers allowed larger poster projects and these CDs were a perfect way to archive accounting data.

As projects increased in size and scope, believe it or not, the CD soon provided inadequate storage. So now what do you do? Enter the DVD with a whopping 4.7 gigabytes of storage data. It looked just like

a CD, so you would think it would be easily accepted, right? Well, the DVD had a lot going against it right from the get go. A burner price tag of \$20,000+ is hard to justify, even for the most successful lab, and then the blanks were about \$40 apiece.

But wait—there's more. The industry couldn't settle on a standard format, and



The DVD Movie Factory edit screen allows you to drag and drop an mpeg movie into the DVD menu screen.



Ulead PhotoImpact Album is an example of programs used to gather images for slide show production on DVD.





The Ulead MediaStudioPro can be used to mix sound, still and motion on one DVD disk. A timeline is at the bottom of the edit screen.



The Ulead PictureShow menu screen. Thumbnails are created from each slide show and placed on one of the many menu templates



Once your DVD slide show menu is completed in PictureShow, you can test it with a simulated DVD player in your computer.

Hollywood held up the process with copyright concerns. No wonder DVD had so many problems getting its start. In the second half of 2001, all that changed with the introduction of the Pioneer AO3 DVD burner. The initial price was hovering around \$1000, but was below \$500 by the turn of 2002. General use 4.7 gigabyte

DVDs started at \$25 and quickly dropped to an affordable price of \$5-10.

In mid 2002, the AO3 burner was updated to the AO4. Its price was still below \$500 and DVD media were now in the \$2-3 dollar range.

Besides, being affordable, the Pioneer unit was easy to use. The burner installed easily

in the computer just like a CD drive, and could read and write both CDs and DVDs. We were so impressed with how well the unit worked that we started looking at some of the storage problems and projects we could assign to the DVD writer.

The first and most useful application was its ability to archive files larger than 650





DVDIt authoring program. Movies can be dragged and dropped onto the main DVD menu screen. Specific frames can be used from each.



Prassi DVD writer software program



Above, SlideShowCreation creates a slide show menu. It gathers thumbnails of images and sorts them at the bottom of the screen.

megabytes. We do major backups of our systems every so often and find that most compressed backups are between 3-4 gigabytes. Previously, we had to spread the backup over several CDs, and if one failed, the others were useless.

The second application was storage of large groups of batch film scans. We are in the process of converting several thousand slides to digital files, and have had to split large groups over as many as 4-5 CDs. Since the DVD can hold 7 CDs of data, this problem was eliminated. We still used the CD for smaller groups, but when the files exceeded CD capacity, we opted for the DVD.

We have always had a problem archiving our AV video files, which were between 2-3 gigabytes. Now they can be saved on just one DVD disk. Even the huge projects used to create the video files require extensive storage, so DVD is the solution here, too.

One point we had not considered in all our excitement was that we needed a DVD reader in our other computers in order to read the archived data. The rest of our workstations just had CD writers. No problem since we found the price of the DVD readers was between \$50-100. They read data much faster than the CD Rom drives,

so it was just a matter of slowly replacing each of the CD Rom drives.

Avoid buying the cheapest DVD reader you can find, as our testing indicated that often the cheaper units did not reliably read the DVDs. If your lab offers video or slide presentation services, the DVD writer can help you expand those services by using some new innovative software.

We researched this part of the DVD world, and found that Ulead Systems had released several software programs that directly support the DVD writer. The first is Media Studio Pro 6.5. This video editing program allows you to import video files



from tape or camera and combine them with stills and sound. The final output file is then burned on the DVD, and can be played on standard DVD home players. The program is designed for professional users, and includes a wide variety of special effects, transitions, titles, and other features.

If your lab is just getting into video projects, you might consider two less expensive programs that are still perfect for the digital photo lab. Picture Show is designed so you can collect groups of still images, add menus and sound. Then you can burn them to DVD or CD and the digital slide show can be played on any home DVD player. This could be a great addition to your scanning services.

Photos from anniversaries, wedding packages, or vacations can all be professionally organized into a digital show and burned onto DVD. It's as easy as dragging the files into each show, giving them a title, and pressing the burn DVD button. The program resizes all the images, both vertical and horizontal, and creates a special DVD video file.

Movie Factory is the motion version of Picture Show. It works in a very similar manner, except that you can drag and drop MPEG video files instead of stills. You can then add additional sounds and titles.

Both programs are very user friendly, and once all the data are collected, the programs will create all the necessary files and directories for using on DVD players. You might consider adding a small DVD home player and TV in your lab. This way you can use it a sales tool to show your clients some samples of DVDs you have created. You can also use the system to test your DVD projects.

Another valuable software program is called DVDit from Sonic Systems. This is a full-blown DVD authoring program that allows you to create various levels of menus and chapters, just like the Hollywood movies. You can even take single frames from the movie to use as the start button for that DVD segment. The program also has the ability to import both AVI and MPEG movies and convert them to the correct DVD format.

We tested this program extensively with the Pioneer A03 and A04 and found it to work flawlessly.

It won't be long before the DVD will be as popular as the CD. There are even other manufacturers who are introducing DVD models that are comparable to the Pioneer line. There will always be a new model around the corner, so don't wait! With these low prices, the DVD is a great lab

investment. For further information contact: [www.ulead.com](http://www.ulead.com); [www.pioneerelectronics.com](http://www.pioneerelectronics.com) and [www.dvdit.com](http://www.dvdit.com).

*Jack and Sue Drafa are freelance writers and professional photographers living on the Oregon Coast.*

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