

A New Digital Experience

When I started teaching 39 years ago, television studios, which cost millions of dollars and were usually owned by major television networks, were by and large the only facilities that could produce newsroom quality video presentations. Over time, an explosion of technological breakthroughs and new devices made it possible for universities, high schools, and other institutions to purchase relatively inexpensive switcher-faders, video recorders, and video cameras to create an inexpensive environment for the production of video presentations.

At a recent technology conference, I discovered *Visual Communicator Pro* (Photo 1), a software package created by Serious Magic Inc., which brings the technology and concepts of television broadcasting

to you in a single box. It appears to be the first product that turns your computer into a television newsroom and post-production editing facility. When you use the program, you develop your presentation

as if it is going to be a live television broadcast, and you can accomplish this task without all the equipment and technicians that once made this teaching experience difficult to set up. Let's look at the basics of television production and how it is performed using this software.

Every newscast weaves together a set of elements that vary in content but not in format. These ele-

ments include the commentator, the story to be told, and the video or visuals that the commentator shows during the broadcast. The story to be told can easily become a report based on what a student is learning in another school subject. Subject integration is critical to the future of technology education and one of the themes that co-author Dennis Karwatka and I emphasized in our 2005 3rd edition of *Introduction to Technology*.

To turn your computer into a visual communicator television studio, you will need to hook up a small webcam or camcorder and a microphone to your system. A green screen is supplied with the software

to isolate your commentator-recording environment from its surroundings. The virtual control room that now resides in your computer will transform your location, with the simple click of a mouse button, to any digital image location you have on

your computer. This is the same procedure that is used to place actors into digitally created environments.

Your computer screen serves as a teleprompter as you read the script that you prepared for your video production (Photo 2). Eye contact with your audience is never lost because your text scrolls just like the ones used in a real news

studio. The virtual control room helps you develop and place titles, music, background images, and videos so they all come together quickly as a sophisticated video production.

You will probably want to create your first show using the software's wizard, which helps you gather all the elements you'll need and also helps you get familiar with the interface. Your final production, after

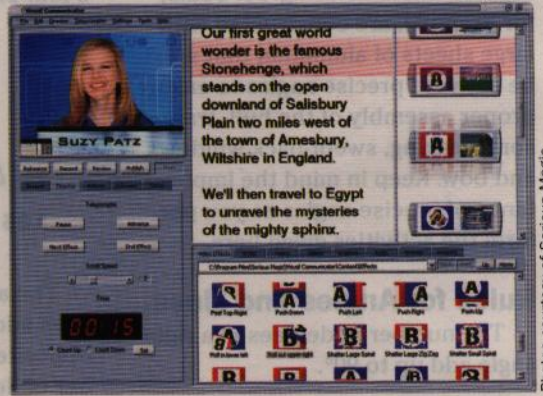


Photo 2—The software turns your computer screen into a teleprompter.

you gather all of the elements, will include what is standard in video production: rehearse, record, review. When you finally get it right, you can publish your production on a VCD, DVD, videotape, or web site.

To see what I just explained in action, go to www.seriousmagic.com/newvcdemo.cfm. You can click on several links that will show this software in action, and you can also download a demo version of the software.

Recalling the Facts

1. Why would the operator of this software hang a green screen to block out his or her surroundings?
2. What elements do you find in an average newscast?
3. Why do news commentators use a teleprompter?
4. Name at least two sources that you could use to acquire video clips for your presentations. ©

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Photo 1—Visual Communicator Pro

Photos courtesy of Serious Magic