Movie Making Guide (Games)
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Making movies of your games can be a fun experience, but it can also be difficult and time-consuming. This guide is intended to give you some pointers, and get you started on making your own movies. It may also help those of you who are already proficient.

The Basics

Storyboarding your movie:

The best way to achieve what you want from a movie, is to 'storyboard' everything first. This is an age-old technique whereby you put everything on paper first. It allows you to choose your scenes, music, credits, and where necessary, your transitions (wipes/fades etc.).

Once everything is laid out in your storyboard, you can see how it will look, without putting hours of time into capturing, only to find that it doesn't work after all. That can still happen of course, but at least you will have a start-point for your movie, and it may just need a little extra capturing, or some editing to achieve 'that perfect scene'.

Some editing programs have a storyboard function built into them, but it's always a good idea to plan this before you get to the editing stage.

Storyboarding can really help you to set the scene, and bring your movie to life. You want the perfect movie? Then use the tools at your disposal, you won't be sorry.

Capturing your movie:

There are some useful programs available for capturing your game footage, but the most popular is FRAPS. There is a free version of this available, but it's worth investing in the full version, this will allow you to perform unrestricted capturing. You can get the restricted and full versions from the official website:

www.fraps.com

One of the other popular capturing programs is listed below:

Growler GunCam – www.growlersoftware.com

Once you've setup your capture software, it's time to 'get filming'. Use your storyboard, and capture your specific scenes. If necessary, set them all up in advance, then start capturing, you will find things much easier if you plan everything. You will also save time, and space on your hard drive.
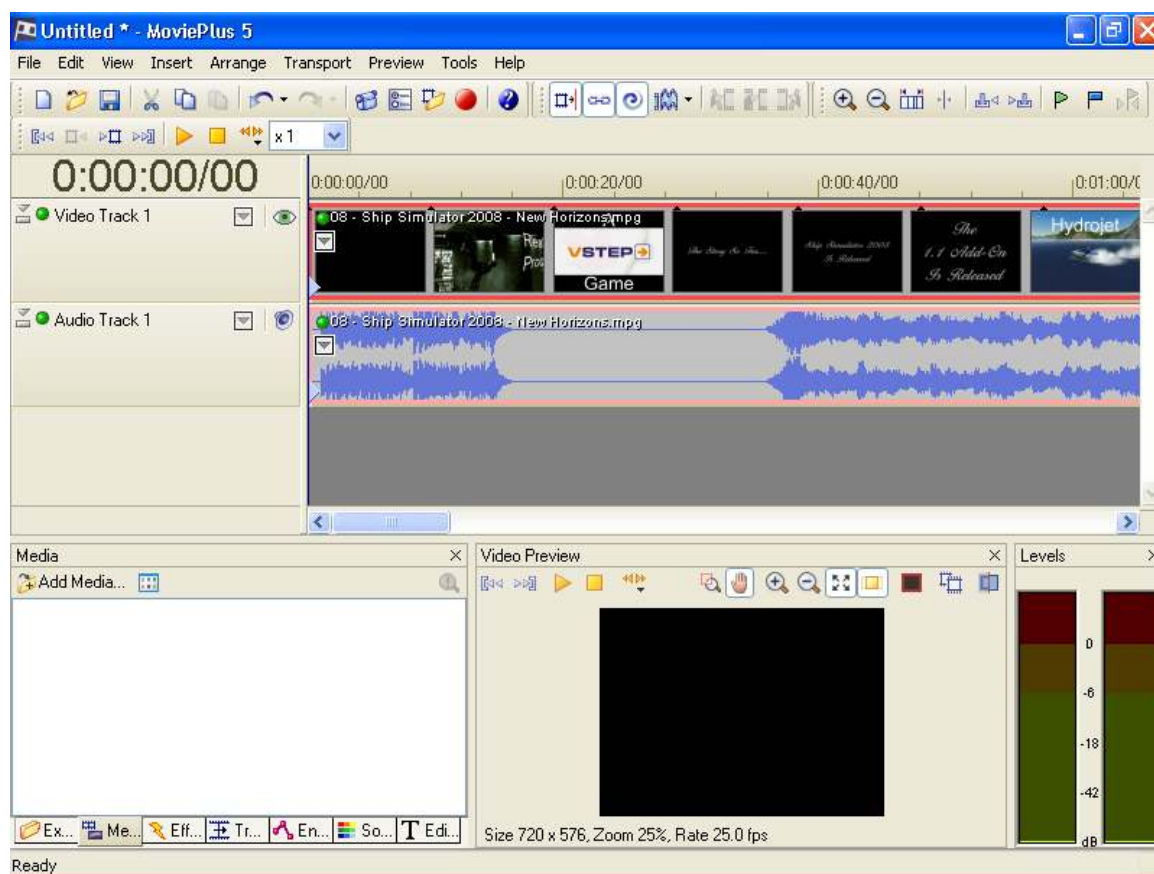

Editing 'Raw Footage'

'Raw Footage' is the captured files stored on your hard drive. For a movie to really impress, you need to edit this footage, and create something that's really worth watching. There are some very useful, and easy-to-use software packages out there, but you may find that only one 'hits the right note' for you, so try the demo's of them to see if they are suitable for you.

For the next section, I will be using screenshots from my favourite movie editing suite, **Serif: MoviePlus 5**. This package has some great editing tools, and is simple to use too.
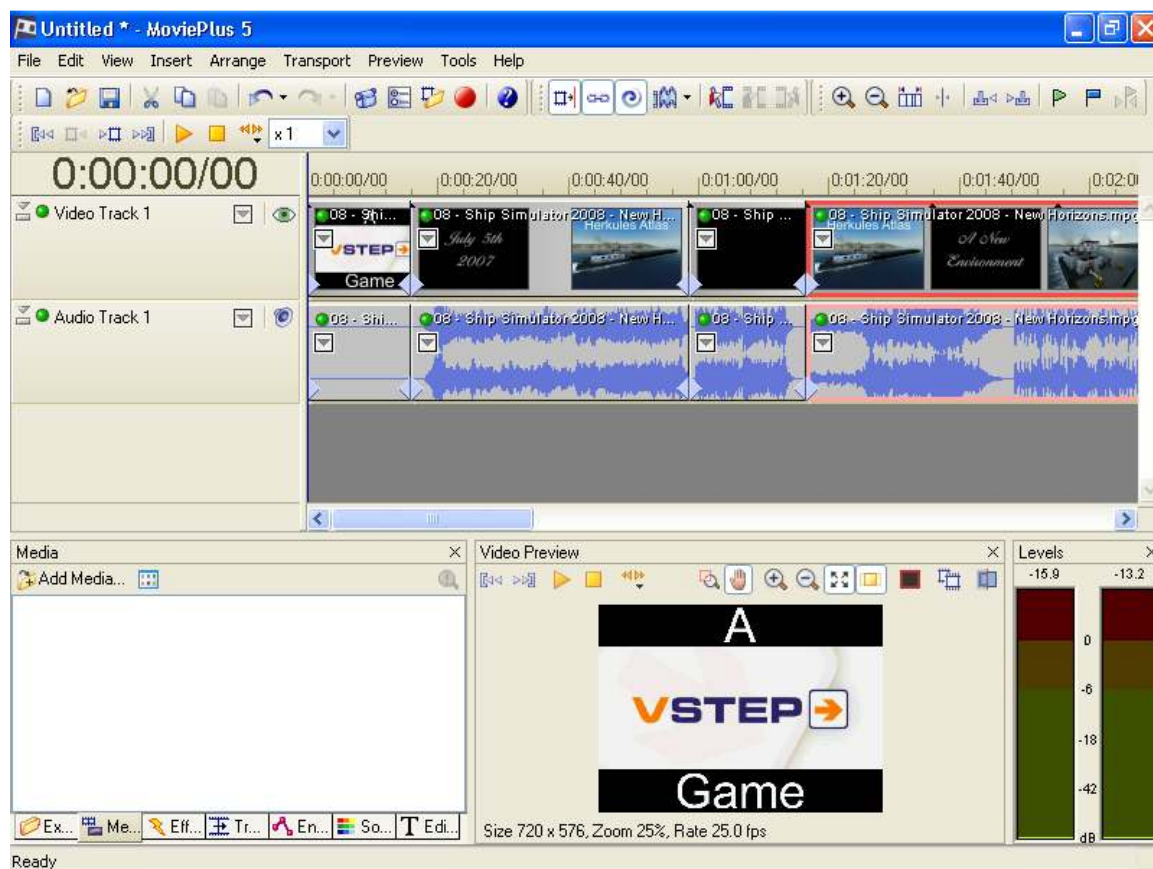
The Timeline

To put it simply, this is a line along which your movie progresses. You can use the timeline to edit your movie, and then preview it in 'real-time'. You are able to move sections of your movie, and your music/sound around the timeline, to completely change the way it looks/sounds. Some packages are limited in this regard, so you may not be able to fully manipulate your raw footage. You'll never know unless you try though!

Here is a screenshot of a basic timeline, with audio and video footage pre-loaded to show you how it looks:

On the left, you will see Video Track 1 and Audio Track 1. To the right of those is your timeline. With the package here, you can split your movie into sections, and then move these sections around. This gives you great flexibility with your footage, and allows you full control over how your movie will look once complete.

To show you an example of this, I will split the movie in the timeline above, and then move things around a little. Each movie package has different features, so I can only suggest that you either experiment with it, or check the manual. Here is the new-look timeline (I've zoomed out a little to allow you to see more of the timeline):

Now the movie has taken on a whole new look, and it's completely different to how it started. This kind of manipulation can be done in fine detail too, usually frame-by-frame. Editing the timeline like this can create real impact in your movie, and if you do it right, it keeps your target audience interested in what's coming next. With most packages now, you can manipulate the music/video separately too ;-)

Music/Sound

Adding music and/or sound to your movie is a very big part of the production. If you choose the wrong music, or your footage looks out-of-place with the music, it can drastically affect how others see it. Think carefully about the music you choose, and test it with some basic footage first (using preview from your timeline). If it looks and sounds good, you could be onto a real winner.

As any good comedian will tell you, "timing is crucial", it's the same with music/video. Get your timing wrong, and it can look awful, so work on this very carefully. Get this right and you will have something that people will look at and say "WOW!!" That's the idea behind making a movie after all ;-)

The Advanced Stuff

Now we get all technical, but even this can be easy to understand if you take your time, and practice. Some of the advanced movie making features in today's packages, are used by Hollywood movie studios, granted on a much smaller scale, but you still have the tools available, so 'dive in' and use them wisely. I won't cover everything here, because that would take far too long, but I will cover the basics of what these features are.

Transitions

Transitions, also called wipes/fades, can be very effective in showing-off your movie making skills, but don't over-use them. Some basic transitions are listed below (with a brief description of each):

Crossfade – Fading between two pieces of footage, one fades out as the other fades in.
Blinds – Just like it seems, a set of window blinds to allow two pieces of footage to merge
Checkerboard – Again, just as it sounds, a checkerboard pattern between sections of footage
Clock Wipe – Like a clock hand, rotating around the footage, very effective
Linear Wipe – A straight wipe across/up/down the screen, much like those used in the Star Wars films
Push – One piece of footage, pushing the other off-screen
Slide – A piece of footage, sliding over another to cover it up
Squeeze – A piece of footage, squashing another until it's covered

There are other more advanced transitions, but each package is different, so it's best to experiment.

Adding Text

Text in your movie can be used for different purposes. To emphasise something on-screen, to add credits, for subtitles, or just to explain what's happening on-screen. Used correctly, it can add a touch of flair to your movie, and keep your audience interested. Be careful which font you use though, a static image preview, won't always show how the font will look when it's on a moving image. They can sometimes be illegible, and you don't want that.

Each package has many different options for adding text, so experimenting will open-up the possibilities for you.

 More Advanced Features

There are other features that can be used effectively, and they can give your movie the "WOW Factor". Trying to explain these is not so easy though, because again each package is different, and not all packages will have these features. A brief description is below:

Envelopes – Adding an Envelope to your video, allows you to manipulate your footage in many different ways, including transforming its shape……if you want to be really adventurous ;-)
Chroma-Key – Also known as matte (as in blue-screen matte). A technique used by movie studios to add special effects to movies. It can be used to remove a certain colour from one video to allow another video to show through it (the colour you choose becomes transparent)
Overlays – These can be added in many ways. I've used multiple video overlays, and manipulated them to create many different effects, including four-stage split-screen. Excellent stuff when used properly ;-)

Authoring your movie to disk

Another technical bit and this can vary from PC-to-PC, depending on the plug-ins/codec's you have installed. The main movie formats are listed below:

MPEG – Motion Picture Experts Group - MPEG 1 (lower quality Video CD format) ; MPEG 2 (High quality DVD format)
WMV – Windows Media Video (quality can vary depending on template used)

MOV – QuickTime Movie (quality can vary - as above)
AVI – Audio Video Interleave (high quality, but can depend on bitrate used)

There are other formats of course, each with varying degrees of quality. The only thing I can suggest is to experiment with each format, and choose the one which gives you the best output.

Each movie package can be different with authoring too, some describe it as "Exporting", and others describe it as "Saving to Disk". Check your editing package manual for this.

A word of warning: Movie editing takes a lot of resources, save your work regularly. There's nothing worse than putting 12 hours into a project, to lose most of it due to a system crash…….believe me I know ;-)

If you have any specific questions, please feel free to ask me in the "Movie Making Guide" topic, I will be happy to help you as much as I can :-)