

MediaStage

Supplier: Immersive Education

Price: £350+VAT; five user licence £1400+VAT; 10 user licence £2750+VAT; Heinemann GCSE Media Studies student books (to accompany MediaStage) £14.99; additional MediaStage teacher's guides (one copy included free of charge) £25

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WHY am I so enthusiastic about this program? I was as underwhelmed by Kartouche as I am overwhelmed with this. One, it

is remarkable software. Two, it brings sophistication to educational software that will please the most blasé students. Three, it is almost better than the reality it mimics.

Let's start at the beginning. Computer. Blank screen. Fire up the program. You can build a set, say a chat show – there are others. Just drag the objects in, walls, windows, carpets, desk, chairs, etc. Once the set is furnished you can bring in the TV cameras, up to four of them. Place them strategically around the set. Then you need the lights. You can place those around, brighten and dim them.

Now the host. You can select from a whole range of characters. With a few simple moves you can ensure that the host walks on and sits down on one of the chairs. You can even choose the character's mood and that will affect the walk. If you want the character to speak, you can either type in the text and it will be read or you can record your own voice. Whichever you choose, you will see the host's lips move as the words are spoken.

Now you can move the lights around and go through all the lighting effects until you create the right ambience. Choose your first guest and they too will walk onto the set and sit down. They too can speak. Time to look at the cameras. They are all showing, depending on their position, a different picture. At the editing desk you can cut from camera to camera, and mix the results. You can play it all back, even edit the material. All the actions that you create are incorporated into a script that you could lock away and shoot for real.

There you have it: A TV studio in a box where you can hone your creative skills, play director, editor, lighting expert. The implications of this software are massive. You will find sophistication like this in games software, but games software does not give you this level of control or exploit your creativity in the way that this does. You can even put a TV monitor on the wall of the studio and play a video through it. You could see an enlightened exam board accepting some finished products from the software as final pieces in coursework. The BBC is already using versions of the program to train directors and camera people. Perhaps the biggest effect will be that the other software houses will have to raise their game and compete.

This is software that we have been waiting for. This does not have to be confined to media education. You could, for instance, research the issues around pollution in your locality and run a studio interview with the competing view points. It would be a more compelling compilation of the evidence than the conventional way of presenting it in a Word document.

All this comes at a cost of £350. Expensive? Sure! It has, however, been in development for over three years. And it is cheap when you think of how much it would cost you to run a studio with four cameras, lighting and mixing desk.



When you see MediaStage you will find some money to pay for it. You can't do this in any other way. Finally, you do need to see this software and all a review can do is to convince you to seek it out. Quite simply, this groundbreaking software is the best I have seen in a long time. ●

Jack Kenny

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