

PRODUCT REVIEW / ANALYSE DE PRODUITS

Product Review: Camtasia Studio Version 7.1

Product: Camtasia Studio Version 7.1, by TechSmith Corporation, 2405 Woodlake Drive, Okemos, MI 48864-5910 USA

URL: <http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html>

Audience: Librarians, faculty, staff, students

Purpose: Create training videos and tutorials by recording action on your computer desktop; record PowerPoint presentations as videos

Updates: As needed

Compatibility: Windows XP and later; Camtasia for Mac works with Mac OS X v10.6.3 or later

Pricing (USD): Single-user licence is \$299; multi-user licence (5 or more) is \$1,245. Educational pricing: single user license is \$179. Nonprofit and government institutions: \$249. Contact Camtasia to discuss multi-user educational or nonprofit pricing. Upgrades: \$89.50.

Pros: Easy to use; affordable; rich set of features including callouts, captioning, and quizzing; multiple publishing formats.

Cons: Cannot change default appearance of quizzes/surveys.

Introduction

Screencasting is the process of using software to record on-screen action on a computer desktop; for example, you may wish to demonstrate how to search in a database or use a library catalogue. Myriad screencasting software products exist, but the current heavyweights are Adobe Captivate and Camtasia Studio by TechSmith. Both offer sophisticated features such as audio narration, closed captioning, quizzing, and chapter divisions. These options allow creators to align their tutorials with higher learning information literacy outcomes and with accessibility guidelines. I used both of these products while creating online database tutorials for the Health Sciences Library at McMaster University. While Captivate offers a fuller set of features including advanced quizzing options such as branching, I prefer Camtasia because it is much easier to use and offers more file format options for publishing the finished recording.

Description

Once Camtasia is launched, users can choose to record full screen or drag a recording window to fit a specific size and area. Once the area is selected, you click the “rec” button and a countdown begins before the recording starts. A small menu pane remains on screen allowing you to

pause, stop, or delete the recording at any time. The controls are well organized, intuitive, and easy to see. Users can choose to record narration while recording on-screen action or add in audio afterwards. I found it easier to add audio during the editing process because if you end up adjusting a video clip, you will need to rerecord the accompanying audio. So it seems easier to add the sound once you have finalized the action. Clicking “stop” halts the recording and allows you to save and edit your clip. You’ll be prompted to select a dimension that is most suitable for your finished video, e.g., 640 × 480 for the Web, and the clip you’ve just recorded will be stored in Camtasia’s Clip Bin.

Features

Now the fun begins! Anyone who has used Windows Movie-Maker will see similarities between these two drag-and-drop interfaces; each has a storyboard timeline that allows you to easily adjust the position and length of your recorded clips. Each clip is automatically added to the timeline and to Camtasia’s Clip Bin, which is useful if you delete a clip from the timeline but then want to reuse it.

Numerous options allow you to enhance the visual appeal and add interactivity to your screencast.

- **Callouts.** Inserting a graphic attracts attention to a specific part of your video. For example, you can insert an arrow pointing to a search box. The Callout menu includes a variety of shapes, with options to adjust colours and transparencies. Highlighter strokes and screens are included; you can also link to an external webpage or to another section of the video.
- **Cursor effects.** Enhance the cursor for better visibility to help viewers follow the action using the highlighter, spotlight, sound effects, or other options.
- **Title clips.** Add a still image with text to mark the beginning or ending of your recording or to separate by sections.
- **Transitions.** Add a special visual effect to your clip such as fade in, page turning, or swiping.
- **Import media.** Add digital video clips, photos, music, and animations to your project.

As you add these effects, they show up on the recording timeline as small icons and can be adjusted or removed relatively easily.

Editing and adding quizzes and captions

Editing is done in the Camtasia project storyboard, and overall it is an intuitive process. However, it can take some time to become accustomed to the rather finicky slider tool used to separate and (or) trim recording clips. Otherwise, it

is easy to adjust the timing of effects such as callouts by simply clicking and dragging your mouse. Audio editing allows you to compensate for slight problems with your sound recording with functions such as volume leveling and allows you to add effects such as fading in and out.

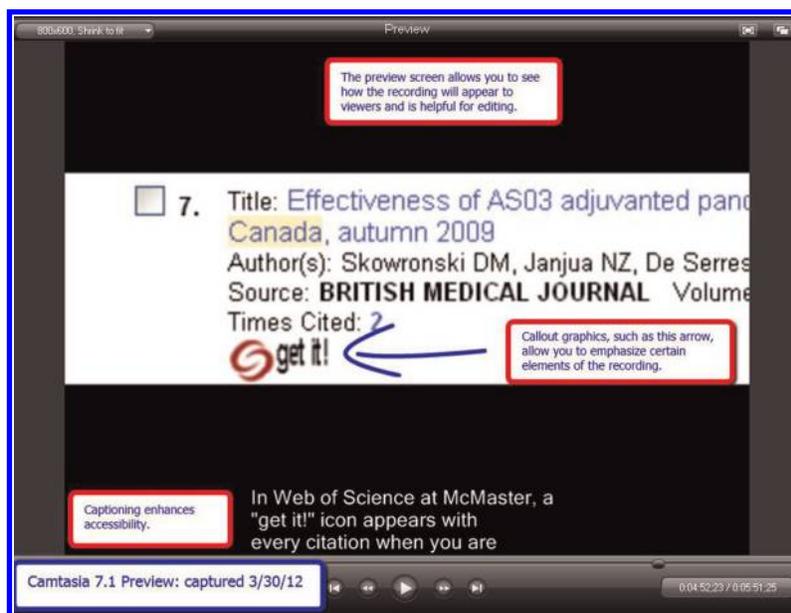
Quizzes and surveys are easily added during the editing process; this function is accessed under the “More” tab. Questions may be multiple choice or comment style. The appearance of quizzes or surveys is one of Camtasia’s biggest drawbacks because the default setting of small white text on a black background cannot be changed. This is a detraction from a usability and accessibility standpoint.

Text captions, which explain the on-screen action, can also be added while editing; you can cut and paste text from the script for your recording or simply type captions to pair with each clip. While not mandatory, I think captioning is an important consideration as it helps us make products accessible to a wider range of users.

Camtasia and PowerPoint

A handy Microsoft plugin allows users to record a PowerPoint presentation; this can be augmented and published as it is or used as part of a larger Camtasia project. Because database interfaces change so often, librarians may want to consider using screenshots to create a slide-based searching tutorial in PowerPoint and then use Camtasia to record the tutorial and publish it to the web. This would save time: it can be quicker to grab screenshots from a database, use them to create PowerPoint slides, and then import the slides into Camtasia. Recording a database searching session can be a longer process. Users may also wish to convert existing PowerPoint presentations into videos that could then be published to the web.

Example 1 of Camtasia Studio Version 7.1 user interface.



Accessibility features

Camtasia’s speech-to-text feature converts narration into captions that will appear at the bottom of the video screen. Camtasia’s speech-to-text conversion is not perfect, but it promises to improve once the software gets to “know” your voice. An option for webcams allows you to record yourself, picture-in-picture style, as you’re demonstrating something onscreen.

Another important consideration for any screencast or online learning object is searchability. Viewers are impatient and may be unwilling to sit through a five minute tutorial on using MEDLINE. Adding a table of contents to your recording allows them to skip to the parts most relevant to their needs. Camtasia also offers a variety of styles and colours to customize playback controls for a recording.

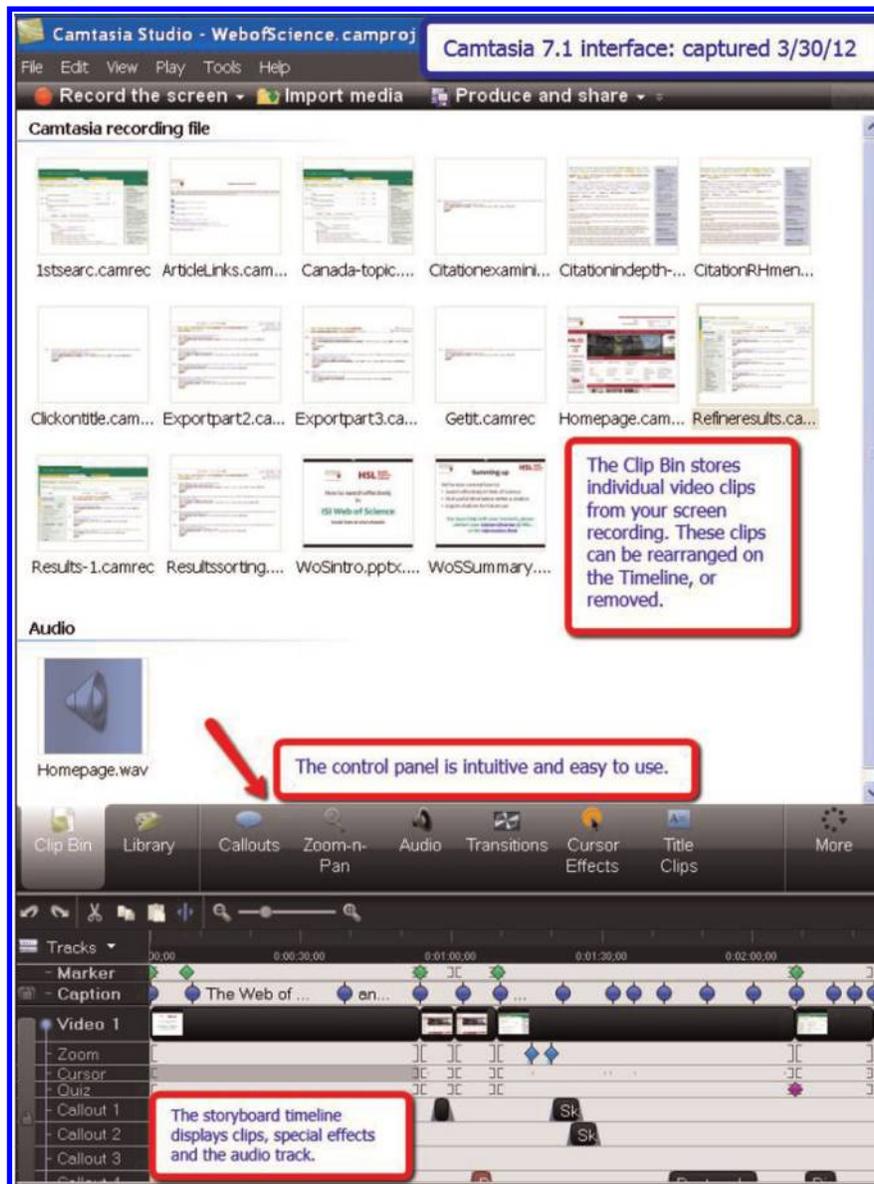
Producing, publishing, and sharing

Camtasia offers “one-click” publishing to YouTube or Screencast.com, which is TechSmith’s video-hosting site; however, this option removes functionality including captioning and quizzing from the recording. It’s better to publish your full-featured recording in one of the many formats offered and then mount it on YouTube.

An important feature of Camtasia is the variety of file formats available for publishing, including:

- **MP4/FLV/SWF** – Flash player compatible
- **M4V** for iPad/iPod/iPhone/iTunes
- **AVI** for CD/DVD/lossless export
- **Silverlight** – compatible WMV
- **MOV** for QuickTime
- **RM** – RealMedia
- **Animated GIF**
- **MP3** – Audio only

Example 2 of Camtasia Studio Version 7.1 user interface.



This broad range ensures maximum compatibility with users' favourite platforms.

User support

One of the things I like the best about Camtasia is the comprehensive support for users. Each time you select a function, such as adding a callout, a command menu appears that includes a hyperlink to a Help guide for that function. As well, the Help tab on the main interface offers links to several options including video tutorials, technical support, and user forums. I find the Help coverage quite comprehensive.

Conclusion

Camtasia is a great choice if you're looking for software to record a presentation or to create a tutorial,

training video, or other learning object. With a minimal learning curve and a rich set of features, you won't need high-level technology skills to produce a slick, professional product. While there are myriad screencasting tools on the market, Camtasia's usability and moderate price point, coupled with a rich set of features, make it a standout.

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