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## VideoGear Hands On Reviews

### AdvantEdge: A New Powerful Plug-In For Blue-Screen Composites

David Leathers

AdvantEdge is a new blue screen matte extraction and compositing plug-in from Ultimatte Corporation for creating blue screen visual effects within a wide range of leading graphics applications.

This plug-in supports Adobe PhotoShop, After Effects, and Premiere, Apple Final Cut Pro and Shake, Avid Media Composer, Xpress, and Xpress DV and Discreet **combustion** in Mac OS9 or OSX. In Windows it also supports Avid Symphony and DS and Eyeon Digital Fusion. In Linux it supports Shake. It also supports Shake, as well as Discreet **flint**, **fire**, **flame**, **inferno**, and **smoke** on SGI's. The single disk installs the plug-ins in any and all of

these programs on any of these platforms. It uses a USB protection key and has a list price of \$1,495. For our test we used it with Adobe After Effects in the Mac environment.

#### Quick Composites

Ultimatte AdvantEdge is a very simple way to pull a blue/green screen matte that provides very good results almost immediately. The manual includes specific instructions for setting up the layers for the effect in each of the supported programs. For a basic quick composite, once the foreground and background images are in place, the eyedropper tool is used to sample the backing color from the blue or green screen shot and automatically render a newly composited clip. You just drag the eyedropper

## HANDS ON review

### ULTIMATTE CORP. ADVANTEDGE

In Brief: AdvantEdge is a new blue screen matte extraction and compositing plug-in from Ultimatte Corporation for creating blue screen visual effects within a wide range of leading graphics applications. The AdvantEdge technology is a new set of algorithms and is also being applied in Ultimatte's advanced hardware products that are used in real time production, including their real-time HDTV systems. This should be an indication of the quality and value of the post production plug-ins offered here. If you need to make a lot of quality composites in any of the supported programs, this is going to be the way to go.

Price: For Win, Mac, Linux, (\$1,495 U.S.), upgrade for Win, Mac, Linux is \$495.00; Render Only Advantage for Win, Mac, Linux (\$495 U.S.); For Photoshop (\$495); For SGI (\$4,250 U.S.); Upgrade for SGI (\$1,995 U.S.)  
Info: [www.ultimatte.com](http://www.ultimatte.com)



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around the blue backing part of the image and the program analyses and renders a composite very quickly. I was working with a fairly good, but not perfect blue screen shot and the results were an impressive, nearly perfect composite that would be acceptable for many situations, particularly if the resulting image was to be further compressed. However, there are many additional tools that allow for fine tuning and correction of less than perfect source material and perfecting the detail of the matte, enabling the best possible results.

## Video Correction Filters

Many of the tools are automated in ways that save a lot of time and take some of the trial and error out of the process. One very practical tool is the video correction filter, which is designed to recognize and remove artifacts from film and various forms of digital video compression, including those found in 4:2:2, 4:1:1, and 4:2:0 video image formats. This makes this plug-in probably the best way to do blue screen compositing if you are working in the DV domain, where highly compressed material is generally less than ideal for compositing work.

## Roto Screen Correction

One of the biggest problems with blue screen composites is that it is difficult to properly light a blue screen so that it is completely even. Almost inevitably, variations in light intensity and shadows from the foreground subject or imperfections in the backing itself cause irregularities in the resulting blue screen information. If there is motion in the shot, either in the subject or the camera, these irregularities result in the blue screen backing being slightly different in each shot. Often this leads to frame-by-frame matte correction (rotoscoping)

which is time consuming and expensive.

Ultimate developed a system in the early 90s called screen correction. It used a robotic camera setup to track the shot twice, once with the foreground subject and once with just the blue screen. The second pass over just the bluescreen backing produced what is known as a "clean plate." This system provided the necessary information to compensate for differences in the background and produce a perfect "traveling matte." However, for obvious reasons of complexity and expense, this is not an option that is available in many situations. One of the most interesting features of the Ultimate AdvantEdge technology is its "Roto-Screen Correction Process," which does a good job of generating a synthetic plate that emulates the function of a clean plate.

## Fine Tuning

Depending on the requirements and specific characteristics of your material, there are a number of additional controls that can be applied to fine tune the resulting composites.

The Matte Density controls provide a way to add and subtract density to areas of the matte where it needs to be more or less opaque. This permits fine attention to detail such as smoke and wispy hair on the edges of the matte. These tools, like many of the others, involve scrubbing the cursor over the specific areas to be affected and letting the program calculate the changes.

Spill Suppression is used to remove blue spill from the foreground in a similar manner. There are also controls to automate color matching between the foreground and background and to control and clean up shadows.

## Overall Value

The interface is elegant and becomes quite in-

tuitive after a little getting used to. Attaining excellent results is a straight-forward process. There are still a few very minor bugs that vary with the program and operating system that it is used in. For instance, in After Effects in OS9 on the Mac, the "zoom out" control did not work for me. However, after returning from the "help" menu, I was back at full screen.

**The AdvantEdge technology is a new set of algorithms and is also being applied in Ultimate's advanced hardware products that are used in real-time production, including their real-time HDTV systems.**

There is a little laundry list of known bugs with the install notes and it appears and minor updates to fix most of them are already available for free download on the web. I appreciate the fact that these are being acknowledged and quickly fixed. With a program that works in so many different environments a few minor problems are not surprising. However, none of them are major that I've seen.

The AdvantEdge technology is a new set of algorithms and is also being applied in Ultimate's advanced hardware products that are used in real-time production, including their real-time HDTV systems. This should be an indication of the quality and value of the postproduction plug-ins offered here. If you need to make a lot of quality composites in any of the supported programs, this is one way to go. ■