

Cyberlink PowerDirector 9

Customer service

Seems below standard. Any question you have is only answered on their website (but no email sent to you that they have). The one question I had about buying upgrade (from OEM PD7) or full version came with a reply about "you have questions about the features of the program". No, I have not. This seemed an automated reply or something put together from standard pieces of text. I wonder whether the desk is fluent in English...

Recent rants in the forum about PayPal payments but not being able to download the paid version suggests to answer or useful help from customer service. If this is true, it is not a good sign.

A remark in the forum that Cyberlink doesn't look in this forum and everything has to go through tickets on their website also suggests they don't take general customer comments very seriously. That would be another bad sign. Customer satisfaction starts with the feeling of being listened to without having a cumbersome official ticketing process.

So for what it is then worth... my impressions after almost 4 weeks of trialversion.

Overall impression

Liked

- A lot more stable than PD8 (which I threw out) and more responsive too (on the same pc and configuration).
- Reasonably quick to scrubbing through a movie and show effects in a reduced resolution preview. Far better than PD8 but lightyears away from Womble's MPEG Editor instantaneous scrubbing from start to finish
- It even accepts .mkv Matroska files though this isn't listed anywhere. But acceptance of the widest range of (popular) video formats would be welcomed.
- It looks like currently PD9 is one of the few that is a workable environment to produce DVD and High Definition AVCHD and BluRay discs. It beats Adobe Premiere (sluggish) and Magix (that has 3D support but lacks in most other departments).
- Most steps (capture / edit / produce / disc) seem logical and the interface intuitive. But the level of detail of the online help is too shallow to be of much use/ The forum and online support are then better places to look for.

Shortcomings

- PD9 definitely must solve the problems involved in actually creating the final disc products because it is these end products that we aim for.
- Strangely, some problems may disappear by unselecting the "use hardware acceleration" option.
- If an error message does occur, often it is unspecific in describing what is wrong, where and why. Without this it is difficult to determine if one can circumvent the problem (for the time being). Error messages to the extend of "Insufficient disc space" are more informative if it specifies where it thinks there is no disc space. "Unrecognized format" could specify what is acceptable and possibly where the current file format does not conform. At the moment, some error messages are as useful as a generic "Error. Sorry. We appologize for the inconvenience" .
- Starting PD9 by double clicking on a .pds project file often results in a hanging and then crashing PD9. Opening PD9 first and then use the menu option "Open project file" usually then does work. Since this basically does the same, I am confused by this behaviour
- Personally I'd benefit if PD9 could also accept a range of .trp and .ts files (in MPEG2 and H.264 formats) produced by digital HD satellite receivers - to enable quick editing of tv HD recordings using PVR systems.
- From forum entries I understand the paid version of PD9 is somehow different from the trial I have used. What worked under trial may suddenly not work under the full version (when upgrades of video drivers and other stuff may be required – some of which you may not be able to do). The trial should be identical to the full version in these respects.

Capture phase

I did not use this. Most material I handle is already captured through a DVD recorder or satellite PVR (discs connected to pc via network or USB) and is subsequently edited.

Edit phase

Liked

- Time line can be expanded to a high level of detail with ease. Useful for focusing on a small segment, editing on almost frame level. Useful for adding titles and subtitles, pan & scan.
- Overlay titles have most of the features you need, incl. fading and transparency. Titles can overlay one another by adding two or more text blocks within a single title block and specify start/end and fading settings to each text block. Overlapping titles need to be in a single title block. It would be useful if there were at least 2 title tracks to have each contribution in its own block and overlap each other. (workaround: put one set of titles in the 2nd video track).
- By using the "eye/cross" icon on each track you decide what to see during editing and what to include in the final production or disc creation. It only doesn't work for the title track.

- Any video block can be split into video/audio allowing audio to continue while video is replaced or vice versa (L-editing).
- Insertion of a new video block in the middle of an existing set of videos is possible using the "group" feature and/or "link all tracks" for multi-track projects. These are not switched on by default however. You need to select your group.
A standard choice "automatically consider all later video blocks and tracks as a group" would be useful so you can insert stuff without constantly having to think of the material further down the timeline.
- The video preview screen allows resizing and re-centering of the video image. This allows a letterbox video to be enlarged to full screen 4:3 as well as a widescreen 1:2.55 letterbox on 16:9 showing horizontal bars to be made 16:9 full screen. Of course you then lose material on either side but you can specify for each video block which part should be in the center (real pan & scan by moving the "+" shown in the preview picture). By splitting a video block into multiple blocks you can do the centering for each appropriate scene.
- The View > SVRT shows which parts of the project need to be re-rendered due to changes made.
- The rendering live using low resolution shadow files during editing check-runs allows sufficient detail to see if the intended changes work properly.
- You need to be aware that any and all gaps between movie blocks are not closed automatically (use high resolution time scale to see them). You can close them using right mouse menu but it doesn't happen automatically. It would be nice if you could select this as manual/automatic.

Shortcomings

- Two text blocks within a title block can be shown individually (not showing the other). This is useful for modifying that one text block. However, as soon as you click on an area where the hidden other block is, that block gets the focus. This should not be. If I select one block, focus should stay there until I specify "show all".
- Font size for titles cannot be reduced below 8 points. This is still a rather large font in a title sequence - especially in HD material. Allow downsize to 5 points or leave it entirely up to the user.
- The title bar cannot be disabled (the "eye/cross" icon disappears shortly after startup of PD9). If you need this, you must move the title blocks into the 2nd video track.
- It seems to allow for only a single subtitle track. Sufficient in most cases, but for multi-lingual purposes clearly not enough.
- Subtitle .srt files can be read from most sources, but the .srt output is useless to most subtitle tools because the encoding PD9 uses is not supported by the others. Output using UTF-16 and some ISO-standards only or include these as "limited feature" options next to the PD9 full featured output styles that no other subtitle tool (such as Subtitle Workshop, Jubler) understands.

- The chapter and subtitle tracks are not shown unless explicitly asked for. This seems to be the case always on opening projects (even reopening those that had these tracks visible in previous sessions).

Produce

Liked

- You can specify your own templates for various output file types such as AVC/H.264, MPEG2 using video and audio bitrates of your choice. This helps to keep file size limited and no unnecessary "upsampling" of source material.
- The set of output options should suffice most users: MPEG1, MPEG2, AVCHD, MPEG4, MOV, WMA. I would like to have Matroska .mkv as output too.
- When this rendered output is re-used as source in a project the smart rendering works. This re-use is helpful to make "baselines" of projects where the included effects are final and incorporated while some additional work still needs to be done. Saves a lot of rendering time for stuff already in final state but still part of the project to render.

Shortcomings

- Not on all output formats you can specify your own configuration setting such as lower bit rates (than those allowed currently)
- Because the "Disc creation" part of PD9 leaves much to be desired the "Produce" must often be used for output and then additional tools are needed to author DVDs or AVCHD discs. This makes the presence of custom profiles for any type of output important.
- Sometimes a "produce" may fail but then work fine if "hardware acceleration" is switched off
- The m2ts output format allows for multiple audio and subtitle tracks (like the AVCHD file in the \stream folder). PD9 does not support this. It muxes everything into a single stream. Not helpful for multiple audio tracks. It also loses all chapter information.
- The Smart Video Rendering doesn't always seem to work. A single video file of 90 minutes H.264 taken from a television broadcast, is rendered regardless. Possibly because bitrates in tv broadcasts are below the 6000 kbs that PD9 sets as a minimum. It should accept the full range of bitrates used in the field.
- For some cases it would help if one could "produce" only a video or audio stream (especially audio for additional tools that allow multiple audio streams in a project where PD9 doesn't in "produce" streams).
- Output to YouTube or Facebook is only allowed when a valid username is known and you can connect to YouTube or Facebook. A local copy cannot be made without the connection. This should be possible. Also YouTube seems to use wmf output where I think flv is the standard there.

Create Disc

I haven't been able to use this much due to a major shortcoming: premature ending of this phase due to "insufficient storage space" errors whilst there is plenty of disc and memory space available. So most "create disc" actions were done via "Produce" and diverting to other products to handle that (such as Ulead DVD Workshop, Womble MPEG video-editor, e-RightSoft's SUPER and SmartLabs' tsMuxer).

Liked

- Allows for "no menu" to skip menus on final product. The "no menu" menu screen while inside "Create Disc" is confusing as it suggests you still have a menu, however basic.
- Multiple types of disc output (once it works)

Unknowns

- Does it support multi-audio tracks and multi subtitles in the DVD or AVCHD or BluRay output? It should, but in "Produce" it doesn't.

Shortcomings

- All disc output options should be able to output to a hard disc folder (if only for final checks before burning coasters) next to direct burn to disc
- The "Create Disc" function appears not to work properly. Initially I could create a DVD but later in the trial period (while no other s/w was installed in that period) it suddenly complains about "insufficient storage space" although on all drives there is plenty left (50 GB or more) and also memory is available. Removal/Reinstallation does not solve this problem.
- All disc functions have limited options to create a customized menu. Most is template based, none of which you may like. I also did not find/could experiment with the setting of proper language names for audio streams and/or subtitle streams.
- The AVCHD disc function does not allow use of your own profiles and forces to render at high bitrates while for some files 6000 or less will do (especially if broadcast with lower bitrates).
- A "smart fit" function like there is for DVDs should be available to all output discs to fit preselected size (down to a lowest level of acceptable picture quality or even lower: leave it to the user to decide what's still acceptable).
- The BluRay disc function does not allow copying files to hard drive - it insists on a medium inside your BluRay burner. This doesn't allow for final checks before burning.

Workarounds

In my own situation where PVR recorded satellite programs are captured in .trp or .ts files:

- I convert these with Tipard or TSDocor (shareware) to .m2ts files (multi-audio).
- Next PD9 is used to edit these programs and the result output to a new m2ts file. Sometimes twice if a 2nd audio track is there that I want to keep.

- Use open source Jubler to add any subtitles you may want. Import the .srt file into PD9 to see if it sync's. If not, correct. (Jubler also allows a video file as picture source to see while sync'ing).
- Use the e-RightSoft SUPER tool to wrap each m2ts file made as "produce" output (AVCHD) into a Matroska .mkv file.
- Use SmartLab tsMuxer to enter all the .mkv files (of which only one has picture selected, others only audio) along with any subtitle .srt file and audio tracks to create a single AVCHD image/folder.