Hippotizer V4

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When Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen said in 2011 that software is eating the world, he meant companies like Uber and Amazon who disrupt established industries like taxi-cab companies and retail sellers. But his message resonated with every business that could potentially be disrupted by a startup or competitor.

In the entertainment industry, software isn't necessarily eating the world, but it's definitely helping itself to a large serving of hardware, so many manufacturers are making space in their product lines for software applications to supplement existing products or to entice users to try them, hoping to hook them and reel them in.

The advantages of a software-based platform are many. Software can easily be updated, whereas hardware takes much longer and costs more to develop. Software can be quickly and easily distributed, and it costs almost nothing to ship or deliver. Computer hardware has been commoditized to the point where it's difficult to turn a profit selling it, especially if the platform is PC-based.

In our tiny industry, companies thrive on new products, and if they can't earn a profit, they quickly flounder. The idea of having a software-based product can be appealing; this is why so many lighting consoles and media servers now have off-line editors that emulate hardware and allow you to prep and/or program a show using no more than a laptop loaded with the latest software.

Press Play

Green Hippo, the manufacturer and developer of video hardware and software, recently launched a new software application called Play, which allows you to demo its Hippotizer V4 media server on your laptop or other computer. Until now, if you wanted to use the Hippo you had to have one of the company's dedicated hardware solutions, like Amba, Karst, Boreal, Taiga, or Portamus. Besides the demo function, the software application allows you to preprogram a show with a visualizer and encode your media to ensure that it will run properly. It's not a bad way to learn how to use the media server; that's a win for users and Green Hippo.

The software is free to download, and it runs on Windows 8.1 or Windows 10 64-bit version. Green Hippo says it can run on a Mac running Bootcamp (but not VMware or

Parallels), and the language has to be set to English, with a US or UK keyboard setting. The minimum hardware requirements include an Intel i5 or i7 CPU, 4Gb of RAM, and 6Gb of storage. The company recommends using a computer with a discrete AMD (Radeon) or NVidia graphics card rather than an integrated video card. For best results, it recommends an Intel fourth-generation CPU or newer, 8GB of RAM, a solid-state hard drive with at least 20GB of free space, an AMD discrete graphics card with at least 2GB of GDDR5 RAM, OpenGL 4.3, and a 1920 × 1080 display or better. I ran it on a Microsoft Surface Book with an Intel Core i5 and 8Gb of RAM and it worked very well.

What's in the box

Play comes with everything you need to program a Hippo show, which includes the engine, the user interface

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(Zookeeper), and HippoLauncher, the management tool, although it appears to only offer two layers, as opposed to the 16 offered by the company's hardware products.

Play also includes Shape, a 3-D projection mapping software tool. It allows you to import a 3-D set or create one using primitive objects (plane, sphere, box, or cylinder) in order to plan your 3-D projection mapping onto complex objects in real time. Once you have your projectors in the model, you can blend, mask, and warp them.

The engine renders video and works with external control like DMX. It has no user interface; all control is handled by Zookeeper. The Zookeeper start page is a hub with access to various control elements including mixes, viewports, a visualizer, media, outputs, and configuration. It also has custom layouts, quick access buttons, settings, network configuration tools, and more.

Effects (almost) unlimited

The main control surface is where you can configure layers, play media, apply effects, and more. It opens when you select the mixes button, and it allows you to select the source from a media player, a live stream, relays (a way of sending video from one layer, viewport, or mix to another layer as another source), or generated content. It has media playback controls, which allow you to select the in-point, out-point, playback speed, playback mode, and more, including time-

code synchronization. There are picture modifiers, including brightness, contrast, and saturation, color effects, and a host of other effects like blurs, masks, chroma key, strobing, water effects, lens flares, and a lot more. I counted 120 effects in total, and you can apply two at a time. Zookeeper also allows you to apply geometric correction and keystone correction, in addition to scaling. Along the bottom of the Zookeeper window are banks of media and a grid of thumbnails where you can choose a particular file.

Hippotizer has modular software components that allow you to customize your system for the intended purpose. You can, for example, use the DMX and CITP components to trigger the media server from a lighting console, or you can use the time line component to run the show from a computer. Components include a pixel mapper, screen warper, macro manager, video mapper, pin bridge, DMX control, sync component, LED component, visualizer, media manager, output manager, CITP component, and preset manager. There is much more to Hippo than space allows for a complete discussion, so I highly recommend that you download Play and check out theonline tutorials.

I've had very little experience with Hippo but it all seems very logically laid out and relatively easy to launch and use. But it's a powerful program and it goes deep, and I certainly don't know all of its intricacies, which is something that I intend to address now that I have Play loaded on my PC. 🔊