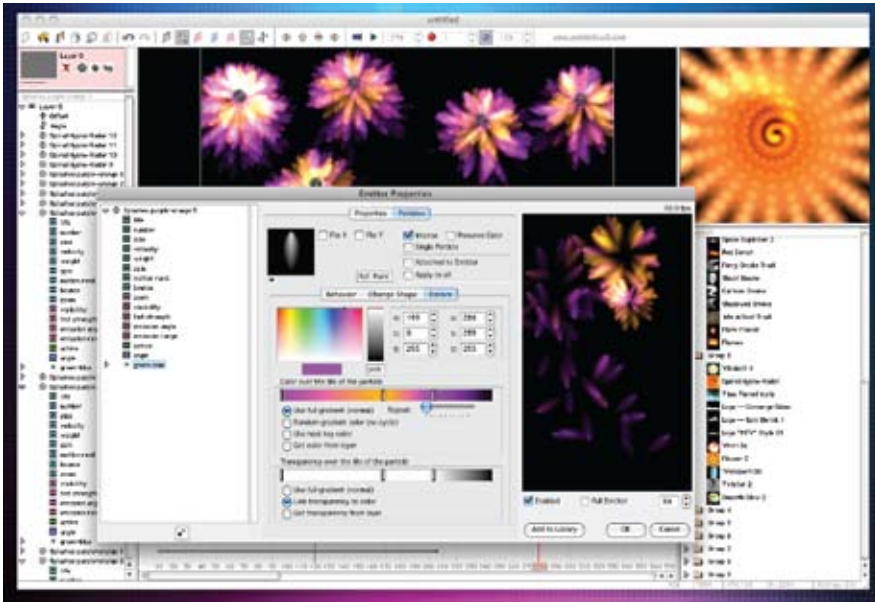




Wondertouch particleIllusion 3.0's main interface includes numerous options for tweaking the parameters of the scene on the left. In the middle is the individual emitter requestor box with even more options for altering the scene.



grams for particle generation on the Mac and PC platforms. Harnessing the power of the GPU chips in current-gen machines, the software enables the creation of dazzling effects and offers

tons of parameters to tweak. It also ships with a complete stand-alone renderer that's capable of top-notch professional output.

Creating animations is very easy. You choose from one of hundreds of particle emitters on the right side of the interface and click to add it to your main project window. Below is the timeline, and to the left is a list of tweakable parameters for the particles in your scene. Options include size, velocity, zoom, bounce, spin, angle, color, tint, randomness, and weight. Just change the timeline and move some parameters, and you'll start to execute pro effects quickly. Hit the playback icon or hit record to save the movie.

wondertouch particleIllusion 3.0

Easy particle-generation program grows and gets more powerful.

REVIEWER: FRANKLIN MCMAHON

Wondertouch has released particleIllusion 3.0 for Mac OS X, finally making its feature set and its options equivalent to those of the Windows version. The company has also updated both versions in the past year via free incremental advances (3.0.8 at press time). These updates have added features for which other companies would charge an upgrade fee. For those unfamiliar with it, particleIllusion 3.0 is the one of the leading pro-

To drill down to more advanced parameters, open the Emitter Properties dialog box of any emitter and find even more parameters to tweak. (Emitters are the center, or the spark, of the particle effect.) The background can be black, gray, or any color. You can also load a movie or image as the background. Change the screen size to any dimension, alter the frame rate, and even add motion blur.

Once you set stuff in motion, you can add dynamic environment effects via the top row of icons. You can add deflectors, blockers, and invisible forces that make your particles bounce and veer. The best part of this process of creation: no rendering. It all plays back in realtime via your video card's GPU. So you can change any parameter and tweak over and

over, and still just tap the spacebar to view your creation.

I have used particleIllusion on so many client projects, I think I've lost count. I started using it on Windows, and I'm happy to see the current version on the Mac platform, where I now do most of my visual-effects work. (The new Mac version features full compatibility with OS X 10.5 Leopard.) For a recent project, I created a very simple background, then jazzed it up with bursts of colored light. It looked impressive on the computer screen, but that was nothing compared to the output to an HD monitor. The client loved the look, and after seeing the company's product added, they loved it even more. We ended up returning to that same background for a series of ID spots. If you've ever been in a position where you need animated backgrounds, skip the 30-disc sets of royalty-free HD content that go for thousands of dollars and get particleIllusion for \$400.

Version 3.0 features new tweaks and updates to various parts of the program. (Wondertouch is especially focused on refining the workflow.) One notable improvement is a new auto-update right inside the program. From within particleIllusion, you can now download the latest emitters—released free every month on the wondertouch website—as well as update to the latest version. You can even see new emitter sets to purchase on the same upgrade screen. The website also has a line of Pro Emitter libraries.

The program also features tighter integration with pIllusionRender, the standalone rendering program that ships with the package. You can now execute automatic rendering of HD movies from pIllusionRender. This is handy if you want to offload a project to render while you create a new project in particleIllusion.

ParticleView is an included application that allows viewing presets. It now includes a search engine to help you find just the effect you are looking for. You'll need it; particleIllusion 3.0 has more than 2,500 different particle effects. A new quick-load library makes it very easy to swap to a new library of particle presets. With previous versions, switching was a little clunkier and slower; this new feature loads new libraries in seconds.

The program continues to be a solid workhorse for particle creation, but a couple areas are ripe for improvement. The program works with Adobe After Effects; you can import position data from AE directly into PI. But wondertouch did hint at a dedicated After Effects version—well, years ago. I recent-

ly chatted with wondertouch president Alan Lorence, and that was one of my first questions: When? He did not set a date, but he did say it was definitely (still) being worked on. I hope to see it soon. As a plug-in for After Effects, the package would really hit its stride. Now it can seem a little detached—you basically bring in particleIllusion particle effects as a separate movie when you move it into a program such as After Effects. Mixing the live effects into your After Effects project via a plug-in would be the ultimate. Wondertouch has, however, packaged a version of its particle effects for Apple Motion. So if you use Motion, definitely look into the set of particleIllusion effects that's available separately.

Also, particleIllusion's upgrade process is problematic. It's nice to have it within the program, but when you download the update, the program puts it in a separate library folder. Then it can't be copied into the actual applications folder via the installer. If you try to run the newly downloaded version, you get a license error. I eventually had to go to the website and manually download the update. Then I ran into a few more snags involving its placement within folders. Long story short, this process could be streamlined. Chances are if you are a media professional, you can work around everything, but unseasoned users may hit roadblocks while updating. I am also not keen on the Internet verification activation when you install. I installed once on my Mac, but when I had to reinstall it at a later date, my original activation number was no longer valid; I had to activate again.

The utility of particleIllusion all comes down to output quality, and that's where version 3.0 really delivers. The interface is easy to use, and you could get lost for hours experimenting. The program is constantly being refined, and it's a welcome addition to have the full 3.0 version now available for the Mac platform. In addition to the Pro libraries of emitters offered for sale, the company offers tons of new emitters for free every month. There are now thousands of them available for free, ensuring you will never run out of creative inspiration. □

bottomline

Company: wondertouch

www.wondertouch.com

Product: particleIllusion 3.0

Assets: Version 3.0 available for Mac OS X; includes search engine and auto-update; tighter integration with pIllusionRender; more than 2,500 particle effects with quick-load library.

Caveats: Upgrade process problematic; After Effects version would be a solid improvement.

Demographic: Anyone who creates video effects or performs video editing.

PRICE: \$399