# tools of the trade

Nokia N-Gage

## High Tech for the Holidays

The Hewlett-Packard **DVD Movie Writer dc3000** will let you transfer personal home videos to your PC or DVD+R/+RW discs. Just plug in your camcorder or VCR, and you can copy your movies unattended with the automatic Video Transfer Wizard. Or use the software suite provided to edit your videos or to copy photos, music, and data applications. You also can write and read CD-R and CD-RW discs. The software even assists in writing DVD case covers. Because DVD burning is a processor-intensive task, you need a computer with at least an 800MHz processor, 128MB of memory,

and 550MB of space on your hard drive. See www.hp.com/go/dvd writer for the requirements and other features. A demo on the site explains the editing process.

**Radio YourWay™** is digital radio that has finally caught up to VHS. It's an AM/FM digital radio recorder that lets you record news, sports, music, or talk shows for playback later. Press a button for recording a live broadcast, or program the radio for automatic recording at a later time. The quality is skip-free digital, and there's a speaker as well as headphones. You can transfer the recorded files to your computer if you

want to send voice or other recordings by e-mail, and Radio YourWay has a microphone for recording personal messages. You

**Radio YourWay AM/FM Recorder**

can download MP3 files for playback at near-CD quality. Go to www.pogo products.com/radio_your way.html for more information.

Voted by one computer publication as the "gadget of the year," the **Nokia N-Gage** is the latest attempt to provide all things for all people in a single pocket.

Because it's from Nokia, it's, of course, a telephone: a tri-band EGSM 900/ GSM 1800/GSM 1900 phone. It has the Internet with access to current WAP services with its XHTML browser, e-mail support, and multimedia messaging. Built-in Blue-tooth wireless connects you to other phones and PCs so you can send and receive pictures, graphics, and business cards. Its Java 2 Micro Edition support permits over-the-air download of Java-based games. The game deck has high-performance mobile 3D gaming. The N-Gage is also a digital music player for AAC and MP3 files, there's a stereo line-in for audio recording, and a stereo FM radio as well. Go to www.n-gage.com for full specs and links to many other related sites.

## A Studio and a Great Manual

Corel Painter has been a standard for professional illustrators for years, and

**Hewlett-Packard DVD Movie Writer**

# Ready for Another Acronym? ◆ Michael Castelluccio, Editor

■ The ever-increasing amount of information aimed at each of us every day is overwhelming. Because some of it's necessary and yet most of it's as useless as spam, the problem we face is how do you safely sip from the proverbial fire hose without losing your teeth or drowning?

There are three possible solutions: Shut off the flow, step aside, or get a filter with a pressure regulator. Number three sounds the most practical.

One interesting information filter currently offered by Scopeware will arrange the clutter that accumulates on your computer. It combines an indexer and search function so the information flow appears on the screen as a stream or cascade of cards. The cards have information, such as the type of file, thumbnails, and brief content descriptions. The Scopeware program, called Vision, can index and find Office documents, PDFs, pictures, songs, e-mail, contacts, Web pages, and more. Not only does the program sort the growing lists of information, but it presents the cards in a time-sorted stream that flows backwards, with the most recent in front.

As you run your cursor over the cards, the effect is like thumbing through index cards, and, if you stop, the touched card appears in a larger view on the screen. Click on the card, and you go to the file.
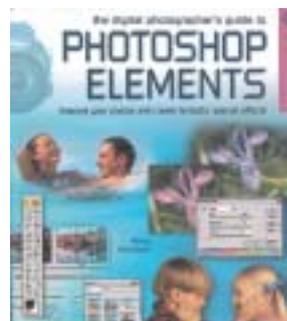
**Corel Painter 8**

now **Painter 8** has two significant enhancements that make it a complete studio for serious hobbyists who paint, water color, sketch, airbrush, or do calligraphy. First, the workspace has been simplified, and you can choose to include or eliminate toolbars and smaller menu windows. There are more paint and drawing tools—a short list includes pencils, chalks, charcoal, pens, brushes of all sorts from water color to sumi,

and a tool for designing your own brushes. It has digital tracing paper, the traditional select and layer tools like Photoshop, and an interesting Sketch Effect tool that renders photos into line drawings for the ultimate paint-by-number scenario. Painter 8 is still essentially a professional artist's set of tools, but because the learning curve is fairly short and there's the possibility of creating an entire studio in the space occupied by a desktop, this version may find its way into the hands of many amateurs. It might even become the killer app that causes the Tablet PC to finally take off. Go to www.corel.com/painter8 and take the guided tour.

The great thing about

Photoshop is all the ways you can manipulate a photograph with it. The worst thing is its daunting complexity. Even Photoshop Elements, the simplified version that's included with many digital cameras, has much of its parent's ability, but you still have to learn how to manipulate layers and read slider controls. The new ***Digital Photographer's Guide to Photoshop Elements*** from Lark Books is an outstanding example of the way



**Lark's *Guide to Photoshop Elements***

manuals should be written. The author, Barry Beckham, uses few words but many photos and illustrations. You don't need and don't want a mini-dissertation on Gaussian blur when pictures can show you what unsharpening means and does. He covers each tool or technique usually in just a couple pages so, instead of turning pages, you are trying the techniques. The text is clearly written, not technically overwhelming. Elements is the best mid-priced photo editing program around, but it needs a good manual. Camera manufacturers should consider packing Beckham's guide along with the software and their cameras. Go to Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, or www.larkbooks.com.

The process is a visual one that uses time to jog your memory, not space as in the analogous file cabinet/folder/file used in Windows directories. David Gelernter, Yale computer expert and developer of Scopeware, reminds us that the file cabinet and folders metaphor is an artificial construct that makes storing information easier than finding it later. You can keep creating new folders for your e-mail to help sort it, but each folder adds to the complexity, making retrieval more difficult. The difficulty of "Where did I put it?" is often insurmountable because of the more annoying obstacle, "What did I name it?" The time-sorting done by Vision allows navigation forward and backward in time, and you can even select a general period of time to limit the stream.

The most recent version of Scopeware also includes a document preview and highlighting function. Pause on a card, and you can review the document. If you need more information but don't want to open the document's application, you can right-click and select Preview. That gives you a larger, more complete view of the information in the file. In Preview you can also do something called hit highlighting, which highlights all the occurrences of a word or phrase in the document.

To improve the program's indexing, you can add your own keyword for identifying the document. There's a channel bar that gives you greater control over and retrieval of past searched streams, and it's in the channel bar that you can select RSS fields.

### RSS

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication information feeds (or Rich Site Summary), and it can act as the pres-



**Vision 2.1 from Scopeware**

sure control valve to keep the flow manageable. The word *syndication* is in the name because RSS is a way to publish content online, say on websites or in weblogs. The creators of the content use the XML format, and the information is fed to those on the syndicate's list. Those getting the information feeds use an RSS reader to download the information.

So how is this any different from sending e-mails to those on your list when you have something you want them to read? Well, to begin with, RSS feeds are spamproof. You choose what feeds you want to subscribe to and instruct your reader to go out and survey the latest information being offered. The feeds it looks at contain only information included by the publisher, and you select what you want to read or see. Because you don't give your e-mail to the syndicators, no one is selling or spreading around your address. If you already belong to any mail groups online, say on Yahoo, you might have noticed spammers with their herbal cures and car loans showing up in the daily discussions. That's because they can sign up and then post anything in the discussion groups. That doesn't happen with RSS.

The RSS reader can help you locate what sites are creating feeds, and you can sign up for any or as

many as you want. If you watch, you'll notice more and more websites listing RSS feeds on their pages, and they will help you sign up.

With RSS you have control over the flood of information released each day by selecting what you want or need. The RSS reader in Scopeware's Vision will present the feeds you want to look at in its cascade of cards presentation. The XML content is reduced to headlines or brief descriptions at the top of the card, and you peruse these the same way you navigate your own files on your hard drive. Pause on a card for more complete information (view of the whole card), and click on the link to read the entire content on the source's site. If you don't have time to browse your feeds, you can do a conventional Vision search for particular content. For the really big picture, the RSS content can be searched along with the entire contents of the storage drives on your computer.

RSS is just beginning to move out of the blogs into the mainstream, and businesses that regularly produce new content are taking a serious look at its advantages. A 24-page "Primer for Publishers & Content Providers" is available at www.eevl.ac.uk/rss_primer. A simpler introduction for RSS subscribers is at www.knowyourstuff.com/rss.html. And, finally, Scopeware's Vision 2.1 is described at www.scopeware.com. It's available in five versions: personal use, professional use, a CRM module for contacts listed in Outlook and their associated information, and two versions for archiving information. If you're tired of being knocked flat by what comes rushing at you every day, David Gelernter's ingenious solution is worth a look. ■