

Movie Outline 3

Review by Chris Patmore

Beyond a good imagination and storytelling skills, screenwriters actually need very little in the way of tools – just some paper and a way of getting the words on it.

While the industry frowns on hand-written screenplays there are still people using typewriters, or in the words of Jack Warner, “schmucks with Underwoods”, but the bulk of today’s scribes use computers to commit their ideas to paper. Most pros prefer a dedicated programme such as industry standards Final Draft or Screenwriter, which are essentially glorified word-processors that automatically format text, but over the years they have added additional tools for story planning and development.

Movie Outline, created in 2004 by British screenwriter and director Daniel Bronzite and now at version 3, takes a different approach to scriptwriting: a logical one that puts its emphasis on the planning stages of writing, which, according to the screenwriting gurus, is the most vital part of the process. These experts are always stressing the importance of structure, making Movie Outline all the more valuable. There is other outlining software available, but this programme has the advantage of being designed specifically for screenwriters, particularly novice ones. To help new writers there are examples of a variety of familiar movies from recent years that show you how to use the software to build the structure.

Right: Character Profile Wizard for devising your character.

Below: The Movie Outline interface showing the script writing module.

One of the great features of this programme is the way it allows you to develop your characters. There is a Character Profile Wizard for creating all the essential details about your characters, including questions for a detailed interview to get to know your character better. The characters are then integrated into the project so that at each step in the story notes on motivation, actions and interactions can be added.

If you are one of those people who have stacks of notebooks and index cards filled with scribbled ideas and scenes then this programme will be a godsend. The software takes that traditional note-based approach and puts it into a single integrated package. Just being able to organise everything in one place, and link all the elements together, makes the final task of actually writing the screenplay so much easier. There are virtual index cards, which can be moved around, for each scene or step, and any changes to characters and situations are updated universally.

Of course, the important thing is to produce the final script and Movie Outline’s tool for doing this is rudimentary but more than adequate, with built-in thesaurus and spell-checker. It formats the text in the accepted industry-standard layout and exports it as plain text, rich text (rtf), Adobe PDF and HTML. Being able to export directly to or from Final Draft or Screenwriter would be a useful additional option for sharing with other writers, but in the end it’s what’s printed on the page that is important.

If you are one of the small minority of people fortunate enough to be able to knock out a winning script without any serious planning then good luck to you, but if you are like the rest of us, then Movie Outline could be just what you need to get your ideas organised, out of your head and onto paper.

Movie Outline is available from www.movieoutline.com for £120 (download)

