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Videoguys Top 10 Products of 2009

It's hard to believe another year has gone by. I think 2009 was one of the most challenging years for our industry. The troubled US economy created budget problems for videographers, video editors and producers on every level. In today's economy every Penny counts and before we invest in new technology, we have to be sure of the benefits.

In 2009 Tapeless camcorders started dominating the landscape, at every level of video production, each with their own unique wrinkles and complexity. The emergence of tapeless HD acquisition formats have thrown a curveball into our post production workflows. In the past all we had to do was capture the footage to our hard drives - via a capture card or Firewire. With Tapeless acquisition we can go straight to editing, no need to waste time capturing, as long as our NLE supports the format we shot the footage in. Make no doubt about it, Tapeless workflows save you time and time equals money. In 2009 we saw many exciting new products and upgrades that made working with both consumer and professional tapeless HD formats easier and more efficient. So as you would expect, these products dominated our 2009 Top 10 List.

On the consumer side the proliferation of AVCHD based camcorders deliver unbelievable HD quality at even more incredible prices. While AVCHD delivers fantastic quality video in a small file sizes, that biggest feature is also our biggest problem. It take a lot of computer horsepower to handle these highly compressed files. While today's editors can handle basic cutting and dissolves, any more complicated editing with additional effects or layers of video and graphics will bog down even the fastest multi-core computer. Fortunately we saw some very exciting new products introduced in 2009 that make editing AVCHD footage so much easier!

On the professional front we have DVCPRO HD, XDCAM, RED and the new DSLRs from Canon and Nikon delivering HD quality video. Each of these formats comes with it's own special needs, requirements, work arounds and gotchas. Working with any one of these formats is challenging enough. Trying to edit a production with footage from two or more different HD formats makes it even more difficult, but it can be done. Especially with some of the new products and tools introduced this past year.

We love all the new and exciting opportunities these new Tapeless formats and workflows represent. It's just going to take some time and effort to get to know them better and optimize how we use them. Last year we published one of our most popular articles ever "[Videoguys Guide to HD Formats](#)". It is a great place to start to learn more.

Videoguys.com Top 10 of 2009!

1. [Matrox MXO2 Mini & MXO2 LE](#)
2. [Apple Final Cut Studio 3](#)
3. [Avid Media Composer 4](#)
4. [Sony Vegas Pro 9](#)
5. [CineForm NeoScene](#)
6. [Grass Valley EDIUS Neo 2 w/ Booster](#)
7. [Pioneer BDR-205 Blu-ray Disc Writer](#)
8. [G-Tech G-RAID \(4th Generation\)](#)
9. [Focus FSH-200 Pro / Aja Ki Pro / Convergent Design nanoFlash](#)
10. [Matrox CompressHD and MAX Technology](#)

So without further ado, let's jump into our 2009 Top 10 List and start telling you about all the great new tools introduced last year that make your video editing and production more efficient and productive.

1. Matrox MXO2 Mini & MXO2 LE
2. Apple Final Cut Studio 3
3. Avid Media Composer 4
4. Sony Vegas Pro 9
5. Grass Valley EDIUS Neo 2 w/ Booster
6. CineForm NeoScene
7. Pioneer BDR-205
8. G-Tech G-RAID version 4
9. Focus FSH-200 Pro / Aja Ki Pro / Convergent nanoFlash
10. Matrox CompressHD and MAX technology

The future's so bright - I have to wear shades - 3D shades that is!

Matrox MXO2 Mini & Matrox MXO2 LE

In 2008 Matrox introduced the MXO2 product. At the time, it set the new standard for affordable HD I/O for Final Cut Editors. But at \$1695, it wasn't exactly affordable for most video editors. There was, and is, a demand for under \$1,000 I/O solutions that don't skimp on connectivity or mechanical design. Matrox didn't just meet this demand, they knocked it out of the park, delivering a complete product family of I/O solutions for video editors of every level, for both PC & Mac multiple platforms and multiple NLEs.



Matrox introduced the MXO2 Mini at NAB 2009 and it was one of the biggest hits of the show. Forget about under \$1,000 - Matrox blew that price point out of the water. The MXO2 Mini comes in at \$449!! For under \$500 MXO2 Mini delivers HD & SD input and output for Apple Final Cut and Adobe CS4 editors on Mac and Adobe CS4 on Windows. Even more important you get your choice of laptop or desktop PCIe interface, making the Mini not just powerful, but incredibly flexible. We were so impressed with the MXO2 Mini that we put together a dedicated FAQ so potential customers like you could fully understand all of the features and performance of this small wonder.

This past summer Matrox introduced the MXO2 LE for professional videographers who require SDI input and output on a budget under \$1,000. Boy, does the MXO2 LE deliver on that! We've been blown away by the success of this product which packs all of the features and performance of its big brother, the MXO2, into a smaller case, with the only sacrifice being some additional audio I/O. If you are looking for the best, most cost effective way to get SDI and analog video (both HD and SD) into your Final Cut or Adobe CS4 editing suite, the MXO2 LE is just the product you've been looking for!

[Apple Final Cut Studio 3](#)

One of the biggest surprises of 2009 was Apple's launch and release of Final Cut Studio 3. Everyone knew it was coming, but speculation and popular belief was that it would be after the release of the new Snow Leopard 64 bit operating system. Well, as we all know, Apple marches to the beat of their own drummer, and they decided July was time to release the new Apple Final Cut Studio (we call it FCS3, but officially it's just Final Cut Studio).



The complete software suite includes the new version of Apple Final Cut Pro 7 with some very important fixes and features that will benefit both tapeless and traditional workflows. Most important of these are new flavors of ProRes that allow you to work with an even wider variety of HD formats, more efficiently than ever. The biggest new feature for us, that has generated the most excitement from our customers is the ability to burn Blu-ray Discs directly from the FCP timeline. With the new share feature exporting your video to Blu-ray Disc, DVD, iTunes, iPhone, YouTube, and the web could not be easier. You simply select your presets from the share menu and export directly, no need to go through Compressor. Although it is worth noting that Compressor 3.5 is included in FCS3 and it has gotten more powerful and easier to use. FCS3 also includes new versions of Soundtrack Pro 3, Color 1.5 and Motion 4.

One last note on FCS3. Apple did all its users a real solid on the pricing. The full version is now under thousand bucks (on sale \$949.95) and the upgrade is only \$299 (on sale \$279). Even more important, any owner of Final Cut Pro or Final Cut Studio (any full version) qualifies, so you can take advantage of this great upgrade opportunity.

[Avid Media Composer 4](#)

2009 was a very busy year for Avid - with two significant upgrades released for Media Composer. In March they released Media Composer 3.5 which added some very cool new features including Stereoscopic 3D editing. While this feature certainly seems way ahead of its time, after watching Avatar in all its 3D glory, the 3D future isn't so distant. At CES several broadcasters announced their 3D roadmap that includes dedicated 3D channels launching in 2011.



The most significant new feature introduced in Avid Media Composer 3.5 was AMA (which stands for Avid Media Access Architecture). AMA allows you to open and edit directly from supported tapeless media such as Sony XD CAM or Panasonic P2. No need for transcoding, or re-wrapping the files. Just open them up and edit. SWEET! Over time Avid has been adding AMA support for more formats and hopefully in 2010 we'll see AMA support for AVCHD and RED footage.

In September Avid released Media Composer 4.0 with another new feature that sets them at the top of the pack for HD tapeless workflows. Avid Mix & Match allows you to use media from different sources, in different formats, and even with different frame-rates - all on the same timeline, all in real-time. No transcoding, no frame-rate conversions, no time wasted waiting for them to render. You just put it on the timeline and edit. Combined with AMA that makes Media Composer the most powerful, flexible and efficient HD editing solution for tapeless and traditional workflows.

Media Composer 4.0 no longer requires a dongle, but post houses and rental facilities that rely on Dongles can still have it as an option. The big news for registered Avid editors, is that you can upgrade to Media Composer 4 for just \$495. The upgrade offer now extends to Media Composer, Xpress Pro and Xpress DV owners. Students who take advantage of the Media Composer 4 Student Pack qualify for 4 years worth of free upgrades. Nice job Avid, way to take care of both existing and future Avid editors.

[Sony Vegas Pro 9 with DVD Architect Pro](#)

Over the years I've referred to Sony Vegas Pro as the "Best kept secret in the industry". While it's no longer a secret, it's still not thought of in the same way as Avid, Adobe or Apple. If you're one of those folks who looks down on Vegas, you need to take the latest version of Vegas 9 Pro for a spin. It is a very powerful and professional NLE solution, loaded with features, performance and enhancements to get the job done. And that's what Vegas has become, an NLE workhorse that gets the job done, and done right.

At NAB Sony introduced Vegas Pro 9 including Sony DVD Architect with some cool new features and a clean new interface that definitely makes it look and feel more professional. What I liked best about Vegas Pro 9 was the new levels of HD support. Vegas can handle HDV, AVCHD, XDCAM EX and RED footage with ease. Just give it all the CPU horsepower you can, and let it rip. Vegas 9 Pro also allows you to pan and scan and fly through Gigapixel still images turning them into an HD video. Vegas also now supports the Aja Xena card for I/O, and we are hoping and wishing that they get together with Matrox to enable the MXO2 family of products to work in 2010.



This past fall we got together with the folks at Sony to create some amazing bundle offers with Vegas Pro 9 and G-Tech G-RAIDs and/or Pioneer Blu-ray Disc burners. These bundles have been a huge success and we have extended the program into 2010. Right now we are offering Vegas Pro 9 with DVD Architect Pro bundles with your choice of either a G-Tech GRAID4 1TB or Pioneer BDR-205 Blu-ray burner for just \$599! Even better, for a limited time these bundles will include the Vegas Pro Production Assistant - a suite of plug-ins that automate everyday tasks and streamline your workflow.

[CineForm NeoScene](#)

So, you have a new AVCHD camcorder or one of those new amazing Canon DSLR cameras (Mark II 5D/7D) and you want to edit the footage with Adobe Premiere Pro. You can create basic edits, but anything complicated and it's just not smooth. You can spend a couple of thousand dollars on a screaming fast dual 8-core workstation, or you can spend \$100 on CineForm NeoScene and get the job done. That's right, for just a hundred bucks you can handle all this fantastic HD footage with ease.



CineForm is a digital intermediary CODEC which means that you convert your footage to CineForm and then it becomes soooooo much easier to edit. The CineForm CODEC is visually lossless. They've got big-name, Hollywood producers using it as part of their workflow. So you can be confident it will hold up for you. You simply convert your files to CineForm and edit away in Adobe Premiere Pro CS3/4 or Sony Vegas 8/9. The conversion process takes about 15-20 minutes for 1 hour of footage, but that time will vary based on the speed and power of your computer. The engineers at CineForm are constantly tweaking and improving speed. If you are editing with Adobe CS4, you can add the Matrox MXO2 Mini to your edit suite and preview and export directly from your timeline in full HD resolution!

If you're shooting HD video with one of the new DSLRs or an AVCHD camcorder and you edit with Adobe Premiere Pro or Sony Vegas, you simply must get NeoScene. it will be the best \$100 you have ever spent.

[Grass Valley EDIUS Neo 2 with AVCHD Booster](#)

Let's face it, not everyone who buys a new AVCHD camcorder is a professional video producer or independent filmmaker, most of us are just folks who want to shoot in HD and deliver the same great video quality in our final production. While low cost video editing programs say they can edit AVCHD footage, the reality is that it's simply not worth the effort. Anything more than cuts-only editing will bog down even the fastest computer, until now.

Grass Valley EDIUS Neo 2 with AVCHD Booster allows you to edit up to 3 streams of AVCHD footage in real-time for under \$200! You'll need a fast computer like our DIY7 build to achieve that many layers in real-time, but that's a pretty darn affordable AVCHD editing solution. That's right, EDIUS Neo 2 w/ Booster not only handles AVCHD footage, it allows you to do such effects as picture-in-picture, 3D transitions and applying filters in real-time! For those of you who've been around this business for a while, the fact that Grass Valley was the first to accomplish this task should not really come as a surprise. Back in the early days of DV, Canopus (now part of Grass Valley) lead the way in performance and stability. Now those same great engineers have delivered the first real-time native AVCHD solution. But it gets even better...



You can buy EDIUS Neo 2 with AVCHD Booster for \$199.95 or get it bundled with Grass Valley's own HD Spark hardware for \$499. This allows you to output your video directly from the timeline via HDMI. For under \$500 this is a killer bundle. Neo 2 also supports Blu-ray authoring directly from the timeline, and we are bundling it together with the Pioneer BDR-205 Blu-ray burner for under \$500. The best bundle of all includes both the HD Spark hardware and Blu-ray burner for just \$699!! We are hopeful that by this NAB Grass Valley will announce the Booster for the full version of EDIUS 5 for editors requiring even more professional features.

[Pioneer BDR-205](#)

In 2009 Blu-ray burning arrived. With the introduction of the BDR-203 early in the year Pioneer brought the price down below \$250. Then they skipped ahead to the introduction of the BDR-205 this past summer and set the bar by which all Blu-ray burners are now compared. With 12X BD-R burn speeds and Dual-Layer support for under \$250, it's no surprise.



Videoguys put together our BDR-205 Mega X bundle for under \$300 and it quickly became, and still remains, one of the top selling items on our website. This bundle includes the Vantec NexStar External USB /eSATA Enclosure that assembles in minutes and allows you to take the BDR-205 with you anywhere and attach it to any computer. PC or Mac, desktop or laptop. All for just \$299 including a 10-pack of Verbatim BD-R media and Eye Scream Factory DVD Art Essentials.

As we mentioned earlier in this article, Apple Final Cut Studio with Final Cut Pro 7, Adobe Premiere Pro CS4 w/ Encore, Avid Media Composer 4 w/ Avid DVD, Sony Vegas Pro 9 w/ DVD Architect Pro and Grass Valley EDIUS all support Blu-ray. It is easier than ever for you to deliver your HD content on Blu-ray Disc. Videoguys has taken that one step further, with our exclusive Blu-ray Disc bundles for both PC and Mac that offer you additional savings when you purchase an NLE (or NLE upgrade) bundles together with the Pioneer BDR-205.

G-Tech G-RAID 4th Generation

We get asked all the time what's the best external storage solution for video editing. For the past 5 years the answer has been the same - G-Tech G-RAID!! It's hard to believe it was 5 years ago that G-Tech (then a division of Medea) introduced the world to these sleek, affordable, sexy and high performance solutions. Since then there have been lots of changes at G-Tech, they are now a subsidiary of electronics giant Hitachi, but one thing has not changed; the quality, reliability and performance of G-Tech storage solutions are still the best in the industry.



In 2009 G-Tech launched version 4 of the G-RAID. The new version supports eSATA, FireWire 800, FireWire 400 via FW800 adapter, and USB 2. All G-RAIDs now contain Hitachi 7200RPM drives and come with a 3 year manufacturers warranty. The new 4TB models have a pair of Hitachi 2TB drives inside and deliver incredible performance at the lowest cost per / GB of storage we have ever seen. With a sale price of \$555 that brings the cost down to under fourteen cents per gig! WOW!

No discussion of G-Tech storage would be complete without mentioning the G-SPEED eS and eS Pro family of storage solutions. These external 4 drive solutions come with or without PCIe controller and RAID software. When you configure a G-SPEED eS for RAID5 you get lightning fast throughput combined with redundancy. That means if a drive fails, you don't lose any data! You simply remove the bad drive, re-build your RAID and go back to editing. In the meantime you send your bad drive back to G-Tech for a new one. When it comes back, you re-build the RAID 5 and continue editing. With today's tapeless workflows using a RAID5 for your video editing provides you with the security you need without any sacrifice of performance.

Focus FSH-200 Pro / Aja Ki Pro / Convergent nanoFlash

Tapeless Workflows are the headline story for 2009 and these 3 solutions each add a unique twist that makes them worthy of a top 10 award.

Focus FSH-200 Pro

The Focus FSH-200 takes the features and performance of the FS-5 (a 2008 Top 10 award winner) and combines it with the flexibility of using CF storage. With the FSH-200 Pro you can capture your HDV footage directly to CF cards, then preview them on the built in color LCD screen. You can select thumbnail images for each clip and add metadata while logging your footage. Then, using Focus Direct-to-Edit (DTE) technology, you can drag your clips into your NLE and immediately start editing. No need to take an hour capturing an hour of footage!



Aja Ki Pro

The Aja Ki Pro was the hit of NAB2009. This amazing product allows professional shooters and Final Cut editors to record directly into ProRes 422 QuickTime files while shooting via SDI, HDMI or Analog inputs! With a price point of \$3,995 the Ki Pro is clearly aimed at professionals, as you can see from the rugged field production design. If you're editing in Final Cut and shooting HD the time saved and added workflow efficiency should pay for itself in a matter of months.



Convergent Design nanoFlash

The Convergent Design nanoFlash is aimed at the same market as the Ki Pro, but it delivers a solution that is much smaller and a bit less expensive. The nanoFlash weighs about a half a pound and fits easily into the palm of your hand. It uses either SDI or HDMI input and records to CF cards. The nanoFlash supports MPEG2 8-bit 4:2:2 video at a variety of frame rates and bit-rates. You can import these clips using the XDCAM HD setting in your NLE for immediate editing.



Matrox CompressHD and MXO2 family with MAX technology

This year's Top 10 list began with Matrox, and it ends with them as well. The Matrox Compress HD and MXO2 family of products with MAX technology allow you to encode your footage into H.264 faster than real-time. A one-hour video might take several hours to encode using Compressor or Adobe Media Encoder or a 3rd party encoder like Sorenson Squeeze, even on a Dual Xeon Mac Pro or HP workstation. With the Matrox MAX technology this same clip would take around 50 minutes. That's right, from HD to Blu-ray H.264 in under an hour! Now that's a huge savings in time, with no sacrifice in quality. In the video business time = money. So you should immediately be able to see the value of the MAX technology.



H.264 is more than just Blu-ray. It is the best delivery compression for delivering HD footage. Either on Blu-ray, Flash, YouTube, iTunes, mobile phones or any other device. H.264 packs the best possible picture quality in the smallest possible file sizes. The only drawback to H.264 is the long encoding times, Matrox MAX is the solution for this dilemma.

Matrox Max can be purchased as a stand-alone PCIe card called the Matrox Compress HD for \$495. Compress HD works with your existing I/O solution, such as the AJA Kona or Blackmagic Decklink card. You just capture and edit as always. When it comes time to encode to H.264 select the MAX presets and sit back and enjoy the dramatically faster encoding times. If you do not have an existing I/O solution, or you want to do your encoding on your laptop, then purchase your choice of MXO2 flavor with MAX technology integrated inside! For only \$849 you can get the MXO2 Mini with MAX and get all of the HD I/O plus accelerated encoding. If you need SDI the MXO2 LE with MAX is just \$1,395. For those in broadcast professional environments the MXO2 Rack MAX at \$2,395 is the way to go!

The New Videoguys.com website!

My Top 10 article for 2009 could not be complete without mentioning our new website which launched in January and has continued to improve over the year. It was no small task shifting over from our content loaded, hand encoded website to a modern 21st century database driven design. The results are well worth it. You get even more articles, reviews and information than ever before, with much easier to use navigations and integrated searching.

We've just updated our "[What's New in the Videoguys website](#)" Guide to include some the latest new features. Keep an eye out for one of the biggest new features, our all new back to the future Kitchen Sink Bundle Configurator!

The future's so bright - I have to wear shades - 3D shades that is!

At the end of each years Top 10 article I like to speculate a little about what to expect in the next year or two. While we referred to 2009 as the year of Tapeless Workflows, I think it will also go down as something even bigger. The dawn of the 3D era.

Back at NAB I was surprised by all the hype 3D was getting and all the 3D technology on display. After seeing Avatar, I now understand it. After attending the CES show this January in Las Vegas, I realized it's not a matter of when anymore, it's a matter of how big and how soon it will hit. Both Hollywood and the TV networks are betting heavy on 3D, and I think these bets are well placed.

One of the things I found so amazing about Avatar was the facial imagery of the Na'vi (cat people) and the live actors. With 3D it was like you were right next to them. Sure the action scenes were intense, but it was the immersive effect of the lush planet and the creatures that made it such a powerful experience.

So I say - it's more than a gimmick. it's a tool that allows for better story telling as well. I'd love to see Lucas remake Star Wars or Indiana Jones in 3D. Can you imagine what the Godfather would look and feel like if you could sit in the room with the Don or watch Michael wheel him around the hospital or see Sonny get ambushed.

Now it's up to a new generation of filmmakers to take it to the next level. I think you are going to see smaller character driven scripts that are even more powerful in 3D. But you are also going to have to sit through a whole bunch of crappy 3D movies that simply exploit the technology along the way. But Avid, Adobe and Apple are already making these tools available to everyone. 3D editing is built into Avid Media Composer TODAY and CineForm's NeoHD 3D plug-in for Premiere is also available NOW!



Videoguys Wish List for 2010

What do we want to see in 2010, here are just a few:

- **From Avid** - AVCHD support. An importer utility that converts the files into DNxHD would be a start, native AMA support would be even better. While we're at it, lets add in support for low cost monitoring hardware like Matrox MXO2 le or Mini! If you really want to make lots of folks happy, get ProTools and Media Composer to work TOGETHER on the same computer!
- **From Adobe** - They have already started leaking out information about the new Mercury playback engine. By tapping into nVidia GPU power and the CUDA instruction set the next version of Adobe Premiere Pro will have the ability to handle multiple streams of HD footage including AVCHD with ease. Lets hope they not only deliver this promising technology, they make it work with the more affordable QuadroFX cards like the FX1800 or FX3800.
- **From Apple** - Blu-ray support in Final Cut Pro 7 was a great surprise. How about releasing a full featured Blu-ray version of DVD Studio Pro. Better support for AVCHD is another one on my wish list from Apple. What I can't wait to see is the mythical Apple tablet and the impact it will have on print, web and video content producers.
- **From Matrox** - The MXO2 family of products now support Final Cut as well as Adobe CS4 on both PC and Mac. They also added support for Telestream Episode. Let keep it going guys. How great would it be to have MXO2 Mini work with Avid Media Composer and Sony Vegas Pro!
- **From Grass Valley** - Lets get the AVCHD Booster integrated into EDIUS. Then lets take the FireCoder Blu encoding technology and integrate it into a card like the HD Storm or HD Spark - just like the folks at Matrox have done with their MAX technology and MXO2 products.
- **From Pioneer** - How about the next generation of Blu-ray burner being available in a sleek, sexy external housing as well.
- **From Sony Vegas** - Lets get support for more I/O hardware, especially something as inexpensive and powerful as the MXO2 Mini. Then lets see you integrate some of the great audio tools in Soundforge and Acid into the Vegas workflow.
- **From G-Tech** - Just keep those great quality drives coming. Bigger, faster and less expensive as time goes by.



OK folks. That completes this years 2009 Top 10 article. You've got my best products from last year, my crystal ball look ahead at 3D, and our 2010 wish list. I'm also hoping to get my hands on one of those cool new DSLRs from Canon. Once I do, I'm going to write an article on the various workflows and editing solutions for getting the most out of it. Till then - have a great 2010, keep on shooting and editing.



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