

TrialDirector 5.1

by Brett Burney

InData Corporation is not one to rest upon its laurels. In May 2006, the company completely retooled the interface of TrialDirector 5, its award-winning trial presentation software. Exactly one year later, TrialDirector 5.1 hit the market. Small upgrades to software usually don't attract much attention since they commonly fix annoying bugs or adjust settings. However, with version 5.1, InData added brilliant functionality to a product that just keeps getting better.

Since InData regularly releases updates, it took the opportunity to make version 5.1 of the TrialDirector software compatible with Microsoft Windows Vista. That alone catapults InData Corporation beyond other software manufacturers that have not streamlined their products for the newer operating system. For this review, I installed version 5.1 on Windows Vista Ultimate and the whole process was smooth and flawless.

Historically, presenting documentary evidence in court involved making multiple paper copies for the judge, witnesses, jurors and opposing counsel. Today, however, we live in a "CSI"-style world where jurors expect to see action surround the world of law and a little more punch to the whole affair. Tools like TrialDirector and Microsoft PowerPoint can be effectively used in the courtroom not only as exciting alternatives to drab paper but also as a way to help you be more persuasive.

TrialDirector is basically a large database that can hold electronic documents, pictures, transcripts, video testimony and animation clips. Instead of handing a single, marked-up piece of paper to a witness, why not project it onto a large screen for the entire courtroom to see? Rather than impeaching a witness by tediously reading prior testimony from his or her deposition, why not show a video clip of the witness so the jury can observe the telling body language?

From a usability standpoint, the biggest new feature in version 5.1 is "Presentation Preview." As documents are collected and annotations added, you constantly need to test your work to make sure it's flawless before showtime in the courtroom. Presentation Preview allows you to experiment without actually going into full presentation mode. The "Presentation Preview" tab is accessible from the Case Library, and it acts the same as the regular presentation mode. If you have provided support during a trial by man-

ing the technology, you understand how monumental this preview feature is, allowing you to test and experiment with your presentation to make sure it's flawless before showing it in the courtroom.

Once you have all your documents organized and your video clips ready, you can click the "Presentation" button and watch your screen go black in anticipation of the show. The only other item on the screen will be a small, unobtrusive toolbar docked at the bottom. When you project a document onto the screen (either by typing the document ID, which is the alphanumeric code assigned to the document; selecting it from the drop-down menu; or scanning a barcode), there are tools you can use to zoom in on specific sections, highlight text, draw boxes and circles, and even bring up multiple documents to compare important passages side by side.

When preparing your presentation, the Case Library in TrialDirector is the headquarters for collecting all of the various pieces of digital evidence that you plan to show at trial — documents, images, videos, etc. The Case Library groups similar file types, but you also can create workbooks that allow you to organize related materials in one place. For example, you can create a workbook for each witness and copy related videos and documents into that workbook folder so everything is easy to find later. In the previous version of TrialDirector, you needed to drag and drop items from the Case Library into a workbook; however, with version 5.1 you now can simply right click on an item to quickly assign it to a workbook.

Another new feature in version 5.1 is the ability to edit information about a document directly in the Case Library. A miniature table appearing to the side of each document listed allows you to quickly edit such things as the document ID, description and trial exhibit number without having to jump into a convoluted database.

The "Transcript Manager" provides a wealth of tools for managing your transcripts. For example, you easily can search transcripts and assign color codes to key issues selected in the text of the transcript. In version 5.1, you also can automatically create video clips from any issue codes applied to your transcripts. The Transcript Manager provides a built-in media player that ably handles audio and video. When the text of a transcript is synched together

with the corresponding video, it only takes a few clicks to select a portion of the text and create a memorable video clip. Depending on your preference, you can have the text scroll alongside the video clip so everyone is able to follow along.

Version 5.1 also is streamlined for faster document loading, integration with CT Summation Enterprise and automatic update notifications. The network version of TrialDirector 5.1 now can display the list of users at any time so administrators can keep a better rein on licenses.

Features such as circles, squares, stamps and squiggly lines that, in my opinion, most attorneys never use, are probably beyond the needs of most people who use the software, but version 5.1 caters to the simple dabbler as well as the experienced professional. InData Corporation has allowed TrialDirector to evolve into a stable, easier-to-use presentation system, and it looks like they are going to continue to improve what they can.

Version 5.1 strikes me as a mature product. The interface is purposeful, everything has its place and it's fairly easy to find each feature. TrialDirector was first released just over 10 years ago and the software has definitely ripened into a sophisticated yet accessible product with the release of version 5.1. ■



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InData Corporation • (800) 828-8292 • www.indata-corp.com • \$595 (\$119 for one year of maintenance)
• Windows XP/Vista; 2GB RAM; 256MB Video RAM

Pros: TrialDirector 5.1 features a mature interface, easy-to-find feature set and effortless drag-and-drop functionality.

Cons: Most users will never need the array of additional features that tend to get in the way. For example, in presentation mode you can add stamps, draw circles and squares, preprogram layers and change the color of the pen tool; however, most users just zoom into a section of text and highlight it in yellow. Another feature that I don't see many people using is the color-coding system for issues in transcripts.

Verdict: TrialDirector 5.1 is one of the best products for litigators and other legal professionals to use for displaying documents and video testimony in a courtroom or official hearing.