

## Product Review: NewTek's *TriCaster*

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The hottest product to come out of NAB 2005, NewTek's *TriCaster* delivered more than it had originally promised when I first discussed the possibility of such a concept back in the spring of 2004 at the world headquarters of the company. After signing a non-disclosure agreement, I was bound to keep my excitement contained to myself, as the idea of such a disruptive technology was hard for even the most techno-savvy to imagine.

What I was not prepared for in that initial meeting was a chance to live out a dream: I was able to share and "whiteboard" with famed desktop video inventor, Tim Jenison and the brilliant Dr. Andrew Cross. During those few hours, the two industry giants listened and scribbled with me on the office wall (all office walls at NewTek are whiteboards) as I described a product that was desperately needed in churches.

When I saw the *TriCaster* prominently displayed and demonstrated live at NAB this year, a sense of pride welled up inside of me because they had developed *my product*. Now, I can hardly take credit for inventing it, but NewTek did what few manufacturers do when it comes to the church market: they listened. And then they made it.

### **Portable Power**

The *TriCaster* is really a video appliance. It does run on Windows XP, but you can't get to the operating system or install other software on it. The closed-architecture system is done in the interest of keeping the *TriCaster* stable and running smoothly. During startup, you'll see the familiar Windows XP taskbar, but the desktop is lined up with applications you can run, making it very volunteer-proof.

Plugging the unit in is obvious and intuitive, as a video appliance should be. Three Composite and three S-Video inputs, along with corresponding RCA audio inputs, dominate the front top portion of the unit. Video outputs are also located here, making it very quick and easy to get started. The back of the unit includes a DVI projector output, VGA monitor output, 1 streaming output as well as 9-pin serial ports, firewire ports, USB ports, PS/2 mouse & keyboard ports and even PC mini-stereo outputs.



**The TriCaster shares a Shuttle PC chassis**

### **Lots of Functionality**

The TriCaster is a whole lot of video power stuffed into a 10 lbs. unit. The main interface has everything you need to start switching live video, playing back digitized content (pictures and videos), adding overlays (keyed graphics and videos), modifying themed graphics, bringing in live sources (including another PC!), and streaming the output to the internet.



**Simple but elegant**

### **The Switcher**

Mouse clicking on preview monitor windows enables preview switching, as does the use of the optional VM hardware switcher (\$995). "Live" and "Next" are used instead of the more technical "Program" and "Preview", and red lights mean "stop - this is live!" while green lights mean "it's OK, this is next". Again, it's a completely volunteer-proof. With the VM switcher, it's possible for one person to switch live shots and use overlays while a second operator updates graphics and/or cues the VCR (really a DDR for digitized clip playback). More volunteer-proofing.

### **Camera Setup**

A row of menu tabs along the bottom middle of the screen allows for users to adjust each camera input (6 total - 3 composite and 3 S-video) independently. What's more, an "auto setup" button helps streamline the process. Basic controls include brightness, contrast, hue and saturation, and the unit remembers these settings, even after shut down.

### Overlay (CG)

Keeping things simple, the Overlay is a large set of pre-made templates that can be modified to make custom content. This includes LogoBug, Vignettes (alpha mattes), Song Lyrics, Show Titles, Lower Thirds, Left Thirds, Right Thirds, Billboards (full page) and music videos (just like the MTV/VH1 style music video titles!). New templates can be made by modifying aspect of each overlay template, and a simply "cloning" feature can create quick copies for other similar pages. Real time changes can be sent live to the switcher, a real benefit for use in worship services.

### iVGA

Perhaps the neatest feature is a new technology called "iVGA". Basically, this allows you to add another computer as an input source to the TriCaster. It lets you display this in two ways. First, you can use the built-in scan converter (which looks phenomenal) to use on the video output. But unique to the TriCaster is the ability to use the on-board *scaler* to send an XGA output directly to your projector! With the "enable VGA output" selected, **all** switching can be send at computer resolution! This is simply amazing and works like a dream! [Pictures and Videos](#)

Additional features include video cueing, which enables the user to cue a video, transition to it from a live source and transition back at the end of the clip - automatically with one button push! Yet more volunteer-proofing.

All pictures can also be easily accessed right from the main interface, and even a picture playlist can be created.

### Editing

As if that weren't enough, the TriCaster includes a slimmed-down version of the VT[4] Non-Linear Editor! Useful for trimming clips, creating clip sequences and even editing videos for playback in the TriCaster.



**The TriCaster!**

### The Final Word

NewTek has created what may very well be the ultimate solution for churches needing a lot of power with a little price tag. At a suggested retail price of \$4,995 the TriCaster suddenly opens the door of video production to the majority of churches. I highly recommend your church demo one at a local dealer and see for yourself this new "killer app".

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