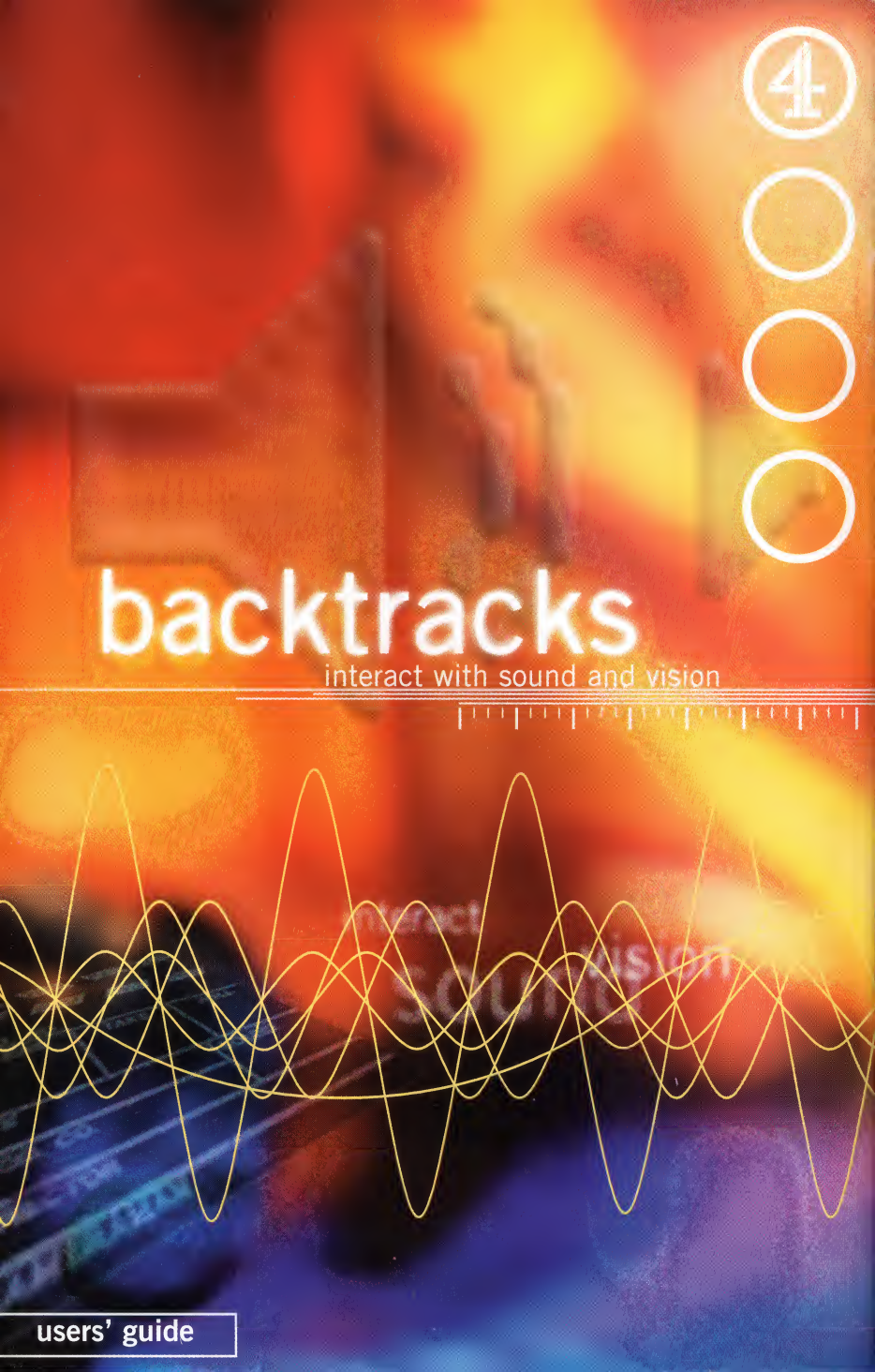
backtracks
interact with sound and vision
users' guide

backtracks

Users' Guide

This booklet provides the basic information you need to load Backtracks and start using it. More detailed notes on educational use are provided on the disc itself and can be printed off from your computer.

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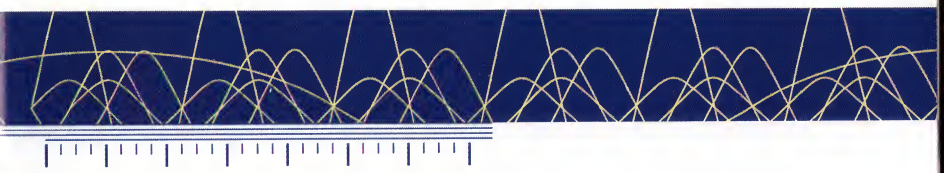


1. Computer Specifications

The Backtracks CD-ROM is designed for use on PCs running Windows 95 and on Apple Macintosh computers running the Mac OS 7.5 or higher. You will need to ensure that the computer you use to run the Backtracks CD-ROM meets the following minimum technical requirements:

PCs running Windows 95

Pentium processor
8Mb RAM, 16Mb recommended
8Mb free hard disk space, 12Mb recommended
14" colour monitor
Thousands of colours / 16-bit high colour at 640x480 (VGA/SVGA)
Double-speed CD-ROM drive, 4-speed recommended
Soundblaster sound card (or compatible)
Mouse and keyboard

Apple Macintosh Computers running Mac OS 7.5 or higher

68040 Processor, PowerMac recommended
8Mb RAM, 16Mb recommended
8Mb free hard disk space, 12Mb recommended
14" colour monitor
Thousands of colours at 640x480
Double-speed CD-ROM drive, 4-speed recommended
Mouse and keyboard

2. Helpful Technical Hints

In general

- Quit all other applications before installing and running the CD-ROM.
- Delete old or unused files and empty your wastebasket.
- Run a defragmentation program to consolidate your free disk space.
- With a CD-ROM drive slower than 4-speed, sound played from the Palette Window may be impaired if you run video at the same time. Move the sound to the Edit Window to play properly.

On the Mac

- Turn off Appletalk in the Chooser (under the Apple menu).
- Use Extensions Manager to disable RAM-hungry extensions. Turning off Powertalk, Quickdraw 3D or GX, Open Transport and some desktop printing extensions can free up more RAM for Backtracks. Turning off any third-party extensions you may have installed could also help. Remember to save your current settings before you begin, so that you can return to them later.
- Try using Virtual Memory from the Memory control panel. (This will use some disk space.)
- Make sure that RAM-disk is turned off, and try reducing the disk cache slightly.

On the PC

- Check your System control panel: under Performance, make sure that your file system has been set for full read-ahead optimisation and that the maximum graphics acceleration has been selected.
- A Soundblaster 16 or other DirectX-compatible soundcard is strongly recommended.

3. How to Install Backtracks

Loading the CD-ROM

Place the CD-ROM in the CD-ROM drive. On the Macintosh an image of a CD will appear on your desktop, and a Backtracks window will open, containing an 'INSTALLER'. On the PC, double-click 'My Computer' and find 'D:Backtrak' (where D is your CD-ROM drive). Double-click on the image with your mouse, and you will see an item called 'INSTALLER'. Double-clicking on this item will begin the process of transferring the essential running files onto your computer.

Information for use on Apple Macintosh and Windows 95 operating systems.

When you run Backtracks on the Mac you will find a folder called 'Backtracks*f*' on your hard disk. Open this to find the BackTracks Projector icon, and double-click on this icon to start. On the PC, look for the BackTrak folder on the 'C:' drive, or select the Backtracks folder from the Programs list under the Start menu. Run 'Back95' to launch Backtracks. Research Machines Window Box users should follow the Research Machines guidelines on installing CD-ROMs.

4. A Quick Introduction to Backtracks

The first thing you see when you open the disc is the title page, followed by the start page which has three buttons on it marked 'Start', 'Demo' and 'Teacher's Notes'. The Teacher's Notes are designed to be printed out and used alongside the CD-ROM, so we suggest that you do this right away by clicking on 'Teacher's Notes' and then on the Print icon which you will see at the top of each section.

The Demo takes you through the basic applications of the CD-ROM. After you have explored the Demo, we strongly advise you to Start: browse through the applications, try them out, and preview the video clips.

Navigating around Backtracks

When you click on 'Start' you are presented with a window where you enter your name as a new user. You then pass to the basic workspace, which at first is an empty screen with a menu bar along the top. By clicking on any item on the menu bar you can pull down a list of other items.

1 BASIC WORKSPACE

'Window' opens a menu of six items. 'Palette' gives you access to all the media content of the CD-ROM. Clicking on any of the headings in the Palette will provide you with a choice of material.

[see overleaf]

2 PALETTE WINDOW

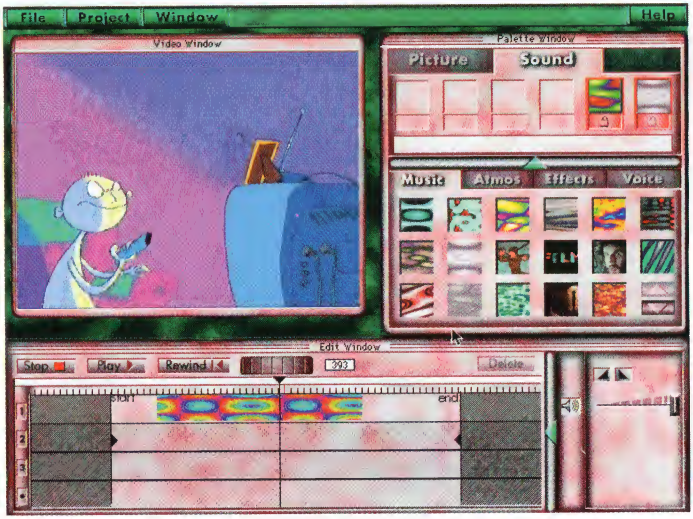
The contents of each Palette are shown as collections of icons, like colours in a paintbox. They are deliberately not listed by titles or genres. Each item has an ID number which is revealed in the Status Box of the Palette Window. If you want to remember which extract is which you can make a note of the ID number in the Notebook.

By clicking on any icon in the Palette you can move it to the Selection Box at the top; by clicking on it again you can play the video or hear the sound. If you decide that you want to work with a particular clip or sound, you can click on the lock symbol beneath the icon to keep it in the Selection Box. Clicking on a video icon in the selection box will move its opening frame to the Video Window; you can then click the Play button below this window to make it play.

3 NOTEBOOK

The Notebook is a very useful resource whenever you are working with Backtracks. A Notebook page is automatically prepared for you, in which you can record your ideas and make a note of the work you have done. Whenever you select a different application or go to 'Quit', you are offered the option of saving what you have done as a 'snapshot', to which you can return later. This will be a very small file which will take up little room on the hard disk. Provided that you return to the same computer to continue your work, you will be able to pick up exactly where you left off.

4 EDIT WINDOW

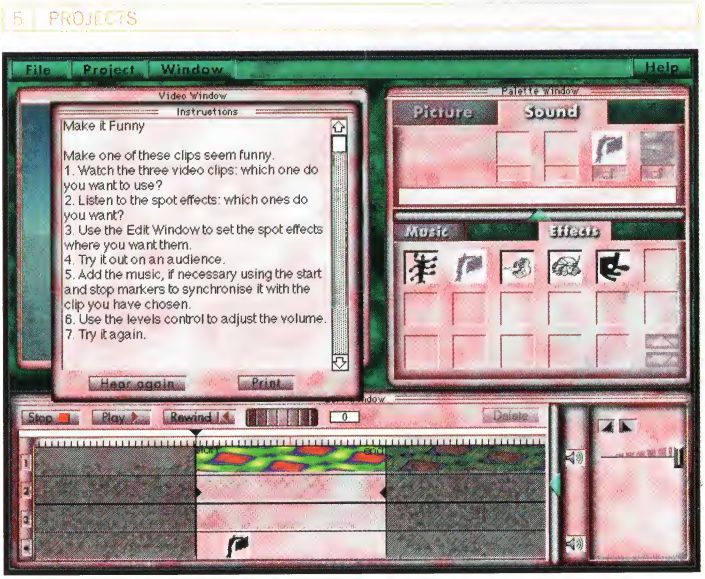


'Edit' opens the Edit Window at the bottom of the screen, which is where you can do more detailed work with video clips and sound. Up to three sound files (which may be music or 'atmospheres') can be dragged from the Palettes to this window. The bottom track of the Edit Window is used just for sound effects, and you can drag and place up to three sound effects at a time. The Edit Window works in tandem with the Video Window, so that you can adjust and manipulate the sound tracks more precisely. At the right-hand end of the Edit Window you can pull out an additional Levels Control which allows you to adjust the volume of each soundtrack and to insert fade-ins and fade-outs. The Demo shows you how the Edit Window and Levels Control work.

Structured activity with Backtracks

The 'Project' heading on the menu bar opens up to reveal the six Project strands. Clicking on any of these opens up another window which lists the Projects in that strand.

When a specific Project is selected, you will first hear a spoken explanation of the Project, and then see a list of instructions on the screen, which can also be printed out. You will find that specific video clips and soundtracks have been preselected for each Project and will appear in their respective Palettes.



The Teacher's Notes on the disc include full supporting notes on all the Projects, together with notes on the learning objectives of each strand and suggestions for further activities. One resource that is available only with the 'Make a Title Sequence', 'Make a TV Trailer' and 'Make a TV Advert' Projects, is 'Graphics'. An important part of three of these strands is adding an appropriate graphic.

You can show your work to other people on the computer. All the editorial decisions you have made will be saved to the computer's hard disk when you go through 'File' and 'Quit' to leave the CD-ROM, and can be recovered when you log on next time.

The 'Credits' item in the Window menu enables you to access the production credits for the Backtracks CD-ROM and information about each video clip and sound extract: the film or television programme it comes from, when it was made and by whom.

The 'Help' button on the Menu bar enables you to access the Demo and Teacher's Notes. You will not be able to run any other part of the CD-ROM when either of these is open.

5. What You Can Do With Backtracks

We all get much of our entertainment and our information about the world from television and film. It is interesting and worthwhile to know more about these media: to enjoy them more, to be able to communicate that enjoyment to other people, and to be able to criticise them effectively when we think they could be improved.

Film and television are often called 'visual media'. Moving images naturally grab our attention and can have an enormous impact. We all naturally say 'Did you see that...?' of a film or programme. But sound is also an important element of film and television. Often the soundtrack carries more meaning than the images. Music, sound effects, voices, and even silence, all affect the ways in which we make sense of the images we see. And by changing the sounds it is possible to make the same sequence of images mean something quite different. Music can intensify meaning dramatically, or it can change it. Particular types of music help us to recognise film and television genres, and sound effects can build comedy or suspense.

Backtracks helps you to learn about how music and sound effects can be manipulated to achieve particular effects, and to explore these techniques creatively yourself. Using this resource should help you to have more creative ideas about what film and video can achieve. It should also help you to listen and watch more attentively and to make clearer critical judgments about these media.

6. How You Can Use Backtracks

You can use Backtracks in two ways: you can play and experiment freely with the video clips, music and sound effects, or you can proceed through structured exercises called 'Projects'.

To enter the Freeplay mode, select 'Freeplay', which is the bottom category under 'Project' in the menu bar. Then select 'Window' in the menu bar to access the Picture and Sound Palettes, which are where all of the media are kept. In the Freeplay mode you can select video clips, and start, pause, stop and review them.

You can listen to the music and sound effects and try them out with the video clips. A Notebook is also provided in which you can enter ideas and comments, and print them out or save them for a later session.

If you have selected 'Project', you will find 24 graded activities which take you through a wide range of more focused tasks. The Projects are grouped into six strands: 'Get Started', 'Build the Mood', 'Change the Meaning', 'Make a TV Title Sequence', 'Make a TV Trailer', and 'Make an Advert'.

Each strand contains four Projects at different levels of difficulty. You will have to make full use of the Edit Window, a resource specially designed for this CD-ROM. With this you can place music and effects exactly where you want them, adjust the volume level of each soundtrack, and fade tracks in and out.

It is important to note that this CD-ROM does not allow you to input your own images or sounds or to transfer your work to another system. The Backtracks CD-ROM is not designed for use over networks.