

26 March 2008

By: Ionut Ilascu, Editor, Software Reviews



WebCam Max

[Webcam Max for Maxing the Fun](#)

Make yourself look pretty, or funny, or pretty funny

There was a time when no one believed there could be something new and exciting to be added to instant messaging category. And yet technology and the work of a handful of developers have proved us wrong, by introducing new sets of emoticons, audibles, webcam support, improved sound for online talks, better file transfer as well as a myriad of other things I am not even familiar with.

With Webcam Max we definitely land into another dimension of instant messaging, enriching the present environment with a myriad of effects, both hilarious and cool at the same time. The application comes with thirty days of trial and a \$29.95 price tag. During the evaluation period, all of its features are fully available and there is no restriction, save for the time and the fact that the image will have Webcam Max's logo.

The software is designed to add a myriad of effects to all webcams and works with a wide palette of instant messaging software such as MSN, ICQ, AIM, Skype or Yahoo Messenger. Frankly, the application supports at least ten such programs and can be set to work with additional apps.

Installation process was brief and quite simple, but on all three Vista systems (Basic, Business and Home Premium) we put Webcam Max against, we benefited from the same error when it came to installing the necessary drivers: Windows did not recognize the publisher of the capture driver. Although this would not be a problem itself, the downside is that the application would detect that the Capture Driver was not correctly installed and offer to fix the problem. Attempting the installation of the driver always ended with the display of an error message, so at the next launch of the software it had to be addressed again. Also, if the webcam is not connected to your computer, the application will alert the user that it is in use by another program and ask for the termination of that software.

The interface is nice and simple to use providing the possibility of adding various backgrounds instead of webcam view, such as desktop screen, a movie file (AVI, MPEG, VOB, WMV, ASF, FLV, MP4, DAT, IFO, etc.), a picture of your choice or roll an entire folder of images (JPG, PNG, BMP or GIF) or simply add a color from the provided palette. Unfortunately, in the case of video, only some of the formats were played by the software (AVI, MPEG, VOB and SWF) despite the complete installation of Webcam Max with FFDSHOW. As for the rest, the application posed absolutely no problems and we could elect our background easily.

Apply myriads of effects

Effects area is quite rich in options, especially if you add the suite of effects available for the application (if the download of effects pack is not steady from the default source, try [here](#)) which increases the number of choices exponentially. Effects menu is structured on six categories including backgrounds, various ways of transforming the source image, applying different masks (we had some great laughs with this one), opting for diverse frames, express yourself through a wide range of emotions (via a myriad of great-looking emoticons) or simply state your status (or any other message) on the webcam screen.

Each of the aforementioned categories contains a plethora of alternatives ready to entertain you and the video chat interlocutor. With Background effects, the idea is to replace your environment with a nice relaxing image, like forests or flower fields or an exotic island. The downside is that the feature does not work as it should because of frequent interferences of the actual environment you are in, although the concept is absolutely brilliant. The options for this sub-menu allow positioning, setting of a display time limit or removing it completely.

Transform

Transform effects do a wonderful job at changing the color, create all sorts of mirror distortions, make you look like you are on fire when you move or shake the image exactly as if an earthquake caught you chatting. Sure, there is more than this available in the software, but these really caught my attention and proved to be the best effects in the category. The list of options for this sub-category refers to positioning (horizontal, vertical, width and height), display time limit as well as switching to other effects.

Masks

Masks also make for a good entertaining source, allowing for replacing your face with different elements both from the animal kingdom or with cartoon faces. More than this, you can customize your looks by combining different sorts of glasses with various types of hats or hair pieces. An important sub-category is Faces, which sports a wild bunch of elements like eyebrows, noses, long-lashed eyes, several eyeballs, lips, and even mustaches. The great feature is that all these elements place themselves in the right place on your face and if your movements are not erratic and fast they will follow you. If you want a really funny look, build yourself a new face with the parts available, add some wicked sunglasses and a funny hat and shake your head (or move the hand over the webcam Jedi style) for a quick laugh.

Frames

Frame section is filled with all sorts of pretty pictures and can add moving elements in the video area. More than this, you can add themed frames from movies, clocks (that really work), frames expressing emotions or simply place your national waving flag on the screen (note: only 28 nations are available for now). A very important feature is that you can import SWF files to be displayed in webcam area (resizing it and moving to the desired spot on the screen is supported with no problems).

Emotions

Emotion sub-category is one of the richest in items as after the addition of effects package there were over 1000 alternatives to play with and the sections have some of the most appealing names: Pirate Kitty, Weasel, Yeti, Yellow Face With Hat, Pirate, Ninja, Gun, Goth Girl, Genie, Devil, Fat Pig (it contains flying pigs as well), etc. All elements are animated and extremely well drawn. Just as in the case of Frame area, you can also import elements from your computer (JPG, PNG, BMP and GIF). Moving the elements inside the window to a desired position requires a mere dragging.

Text effects

One of the last sections of Effects menu is called Text and this is where you get to select the different messages you want to display to your friends. The best part is that, besides the

preset ones, you can create your own and save them for when the time comes, due to Save As function of the application. Additional customization options refer to font selection, size, color (for background and background border or text border).

The last section in the menu is the Favorites section that should contain all effects you think are cool and worthy of your attention more than once. By default it is an empty container, but you can add as many effects as you want, regardless of the section. For easier management, users can place them in folders according to the category they relate to.

Doodle your way

Doodling menu is exactly what it sounds like: permits you to doodle on the image and draw whatever you want using a palette of colors and pencil instrument with different sizes. A simple click can remove all the strokes and it seems that the application should also be able to let you undo the last action or re-do it, but in our case the buttons were de-activated.

Apart from all these features, Webcam Max can also take snapshots of the camera and capture streamed video. The options are available at the end of the menu and immediately after the recording has been made (either picture or video) you will be given the saving location. Customizing it can be done from Options menu under Tools.

Getting to more serious stuff, configuring the application is as easy as handling it and the three tabs available stand for setting the software to start with Windows, define the webcam source rate and size, as well as setting the format of the snapped pictures (JPG, BMP, GIF or PNG) and of the video recording (Non-Loss AVI or ASF) and set the storage locations for the output result.

Webcam Max does not restrict the user to the effects available by default in the program or those in the downloadable pack, but also permits the creation of personalized effects, either from an image on disk or from a flash file (SWF). The process is simple, thanks to the built in wizard that guides your steps till completion.

The application works fine with a suite of instant messenger and some web services and handling it is a walk in the park. It is very flexible through the wide palette of effects it sports and also through the various sources it makes available. There are several glitches to be addressed, but it works well on both XP and Vista.

The Good

The number of great effects you can apply to the webcam is indeed impressive and Webcam Max doesn't fall short when it comes to variety, because it covers plenty of areas. Working with the software is piece of cake regardless of your skills and the picture in picture support is just great.

Recording options sure come in handy and the quality of the video depends entirely on you (non-loss AVI does a great job in this sense). Mask effects follow the movement of the face.

For the best laughs you can apply multiple effects from different sections.

The Bad

There are several glitches that need to be addressed, such as the driver compatibility in Vista and the fact that when no webcam is plugged into the system the software alerts the user that the webcam is actually in use by another program.

Mask effects are not always accurate when it comes to following your face, and some of the pictures under Famous people section are really old.

During our testing we could not play all video files supported by Webcam Max and CPU usage levels seemed to be pinned around the value of 50%.

The Truth

All in all, Webcam Max does a great job at adding effects and works very good with the most popular instant messengers on the market. There are some issues to be addressed, like computer resource usage optimization, but the bright side includes an avalanche of effects to play with, all great looking and covering a wide diversity.

Here are some snapshots of the application in action: