



Product of the Month Vivien - Virtual Event Designer

Cast Software, the company that created wysiwyg to help previsualize lighting, has done it again, this time for the event market, with Vivien-Virtual Event Designer. Designed for the special event planner and designer, Vivien 3D design software enables planners and designers to bring their ideas to reality. With this program, you can now show a client what the event will look like, see if your ideas will work before you get on site, and coordinate with other designers to make the event work for your clients' needs.

Vivien's Wizards assist with the layout of tables, chairs, drapery, staging, and lighting. Users can create renderings that include textures, colors, materials, and surfaces and can quickly start to create simple floor plans via point and click. More advanced users can create some of the most complex designs imaginable.

Like wysiwyg, which won an Emmy Award, Vivien has so far won two industry awards: the 2005 EIBTM Worldwide Technology Watch Award and the Biz Bash NY 2005 Best of Show Top 10. And for those out there who, like me, wonder where the name Vivien came from, I am told that it was derived from the words virtual and event.]

What It Does

"Vivien-Virtual Event Designer is the most comprehensive design tool available to event and meeting professionals," says Litsa Rorris, communications manager of Cast Software. "Vivien helps planners and designers sell their ideas and get the biz, design fantastic events, communicate changes immediately, and deliver clients' objectives clearly and accurately. In just a few hours, event professionals can create winning proposals using Vivien's Wizards and tools."

Rorris also describes the breadth of this application, explaining that "Vivien users can design eye-catching proposals containing 3D photo-realistic renderings, create Virtual View images of their event from every imaginable angle, draw accurate 2D floor plans, choose from thousands of objects — including tables, chairs, staging items, people, and textures — use the Projection Wizard to test different locations/distances for A/V equipment, use the Drape Wizard to customize draping, use the Truss Wizard to create truss and hang varied types of lighting, add lights with the Light Tool and then focus, add color, and/or gobos, and import floor plans from other graphics programs or DWG/DXF files from a CAD-based program."

One of the cool things that users can do is create a JPEG or PDF of a design to send off to a client or producer so they can get a visual idea of what the event will look like. If a picture is worth a thousand words, well...

"We've posted some great step-by-step tutorials and helpful tips and tricks that are constantly being updated," says Rorris. "Users can also sign up for our free online training and read through past issues of our e-newsletters."

How It Came to Be/What's Next

"Cast's concept was to build a software tool that would become the most complete 3D design solution available to event and meeting professionals — a software that was sophisticated yet easy to use, giving users the power to quickly and easily create winning proposals," explains Rorris.

"Cast has worked intimately with the lighting and event industry for several years," Rorris adds. "This relationship was formed in 1994 when we first launched wysiwyg. We recognized that there was a need for a software tool that would give the event and meeting industry the opportunity to easily construct and deliver powerful 3D event proposals," she adds.

“To date, we have released Vivien 1.0, 1.2, 1.2.1,” comments Rorris. “We’re currently working on our next version — release date TBD.”

What End-Users Have to Say

Stephen Carter, producer with Calgary-based Carter McRae Events, speaks about why his firm chose the Vivien product: “We had been using wysiwyg for our lighting designs, so this was a natural jumping-off point. My favorite feature of the product is the variety of views. To show a client in real time the changes we make while in a meeting is very impressive. If we put the stage here, this is the result. If we move it here, this is the result. Traditionally, event planners have always been able to see what the end product looks like. With Vivien, we can share our vision with the client. I have been working on sketches, Quark, and PowerPoint for way too long. Now I can get professional drawings very quickly just by pushing a couple of buttons. I am producing several huge shows that require multiple looks and huge lighting shows. Without Vivien, I would be working way more to create the looks I need.”

Carter comments on the improvements that he would like to see added to Vivien. “I am always looking for more library elements,” he says. “Each piece is a challenge because, often, we are working with unique elements. For example, showing a piece of spandex would be great if we could get the right texture, shape, and size pre-developed rather than us having to develop the look on our own.”

Blaine Kern Jr., president of Mardi Gras Productions Inc. in New Orleans, says, “I am involved in about 700 events per year, and I have worked with CAD programs in the past. I have had people to do the drafting, but because of [Hurricane] Katrina, I don’t have the staff that I used to. I used to count on a lot of artwork and scale drawings. Vivien was easy enough for me to pick up, and I am an antique. So although I have been doing this for over 30 years, it is easy to use; it’s very intuitive so that you don’t have to have a lot of training to figure it out, it’s to scale, and it’s easy to change and add things. That is what I have found to be the most refreshing, and I can give my clients enough of a visual that better helps me sell what I am trying to do. My work ranges from grand openings, hotel decorations, parties, and I have done props. I have done a bunch of things with the program, and I have only had it for a few months.” Kern would like to see a few things added to Vivien, as well. “There are a lot more images and props that I would like to have on my end that I can’t do.”

Kristjan Gavin, senior account manager for USA Hosts/Key Events-Event and Destination Management in San Francisco, gives his reasons for choosing Vivien. “We had been using some much simpler products — not simpler to use but more simple-minded,” he says. “I have to look at products that are easily trained, that staff within our company can easily use, yet technically can give us the finished product that we want to put out to our clients. Vivien fit the bill in all aspects — really easy for the non-CAD user to point and click and get a basic diagram out. Somebody who is a little more proficient can use it for design, and then, on top of that, it allows us to do professional renderings.” Gavin uses Vivien as a tool to talk through designs with his clients. “Not only for clients, we also use it for venues. For example, the particular event that I am doing right now is at the de Young Museum, so I asked for the DWG file for the museum, imported it into Vivien, and currently, I am putting in all of the specs. This is something that the museum requires, but it makes it easy for me to do it, and I don’t have to rely on somebody else.” Gavin particularly likes its ease of use and the ability to import and export in a number of different file configurations and create PDFs. “Also, for me, the visual ability within it — once I put something in there and being able to flip it into a 3D image and look at it — helps me,” he adds.

Gavin also likes the support of Cast. “So far, anytime I need a little something added or improved on it, I just call or e-mail Cast,” he says. “They are pretty quick at responding to requests, and their updates are expanding the libraries. They finally took the mannequins and put them in clothing and made them look like people; that helped.” Gavin’s firm interfaces with the lighting companies and appreciates the Vivien link to wysiwyg. “That is another handy little tool. While I don’t sit and put the lighting in, I know what I want to see, and I work with a lighting company to make that happen.”

For more information, visit www.viviendesign.com.