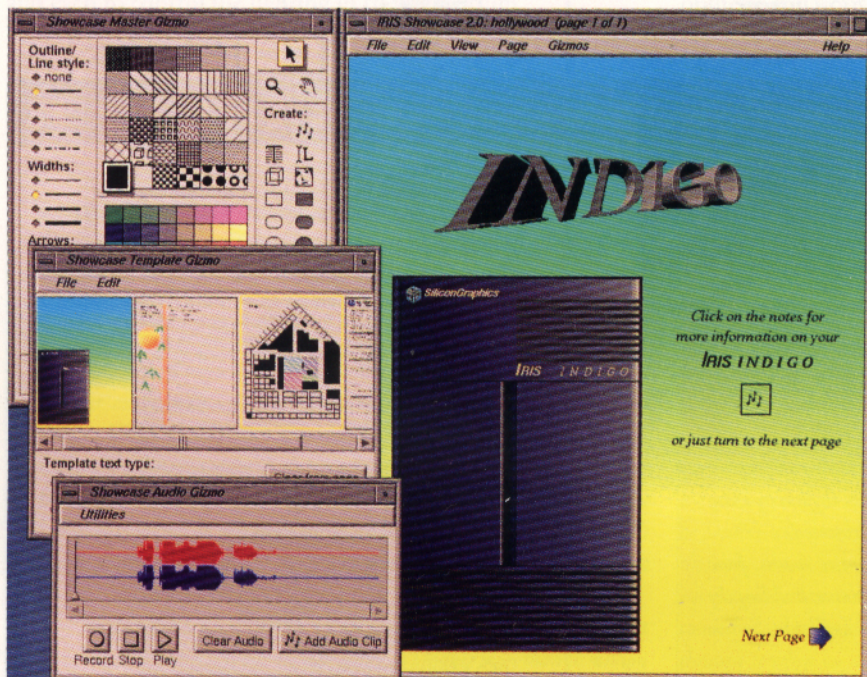# IRIS

Gets the Beat

SHOWCASE

By Cynthia M. Marshall

IRIS Showcase application screenshot depicting Master Gizmo, Template Gizmo and Audio Gizmo.

Have you heard the latest version of IRIS Showcase yet? That's right—reflecting the latest improvements to the IRIS Indigo and Personal IRIS 4D/35 platforms, IRIS Showcase now chirps, chimes, croaks, boings, and even plays the castanets.

Audio on the IRIS platform is integrated modularly with specialized hardware and software libraries, in the same way that graphics are handled. And the tools and sound quality are the most sophisticated currently available on a general purpose workstation. Compared to other companies' standard offerings, the IRIS Indigo offers the clearest sound quality, supporting a range of sample rates up to 48 kHz—compact disk-quality sound. IRIS Showcase highlights the richness of these capabilities and opens up a whole new set of options for designing multi-media presentations that include voice annotation, music and other sounds.

To make getting started with audio fast and easy, the IRIS Indigo and 4D/35 ship with ten megabytes of sound samples created by Prosonus, a Hollywood, California-based sound engineering company. Upon opening IRIS Showcase, the user has immediate access to more than fifty different samples ranging from the peaceful sound of crickets on a summer night to the terrorizing timbre of breaking glass.

If these samples are not enough, the user can purchase additional samples as well. Or, using the sound editor that also

ships with the system, the user can customize presentations with original audio effects.

Supporting audio in presentation software puts Silicon Graphics at the forefront, technology-wise, of this market. "With companies such as Apple, Microsoft, IBM and now, Silicon Graphics building in operating system support for audio/visual data, vendors see this kind of support as a definite requirement—something that will be considered standard functionality down the road," says Nick Arnett, an analyst at Multimedia Computing Corporation, a Santa Clara, California-based research organization.

ADVANCED HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

Audio is just one new system capability offered in IRIS Showcase. The program has roughly half a dozen other new features reflecting major improvements to the IRIS hardware and software environments. Video, hyperlinking, view-only mode, templates and encapsulated PostScript importing are among the other notable enhancements available in the latest version of the product.

Video. Using the IRIS Indigo with a video board, the user can play live video on an IRIS Showcase document. The video can be overlaid with text or graphics, and IRIS Showcase presentations also can be recorded and stored on videotape.

Hyperlinking. This feature, something like a "go to" in programmer's talk, lets an IRIS Showcase presentation proceed in a non-linear, associative fashion, rather than sequentially. With hyperlinking, the user can jump from one place in a document to another, to a different IRIS Showcase document or to an entirely different application. Recognized as a major breakthrough in presentation technology, hyperlinking facilitates custom presentations based on viewer participation.

View-only mode. This function acts as one might imagine, letting users watch and interact with IRIS Showcase presentations, but not edit them. Accepting user interaction, including events such as mouse clicks, is an important aspect of view-only mode. It enables IRIS Showcase presentations to become interactive rather than passive and canned.

Improved templates. The ability to generate materials such as overhead slides is the bread and butter of most presentation packages. Since many presentations are developed using a consistent format—with logos, backgrounds and the like presented the same way from page to page—templates are critical to enhancing productivity. IRIS Showcase ships with more than fifteen templates, including models for memos, slides, certificates, simple documents and on-line help cards.

IRIS Showcase templates can be modified quickly using the template editor. This special mode lets the creator make global changes (e.g., to a document's background or border) in a few simple keystrokes.

Expanded software compatibility. In addition to handling audio and video, IRIS Showcase also can import images and backgrounds from a number of packages that run on the IRIS platform, including:

- Power Background, a collection of overhead slide backgrounds
- Image CEL, textural, photographic- and professional-quality patterns and objects for integration into a variety of presentations
- Render Manager, a scene composition and rendering package that supports Silicon Graphics' RGB image file format—a format that can be imported into IRIS Showcase
- Creative License, a software paint package that also supports the RGB file format

In addition, IRIS Showcase can import encapsulated PostScript images. Adopting this industry standard for graphics files improves IRIS Showcase's interaction with other applications and streamlines printing. (IRIS Showcase also continues to support PICT and RTF file formats.)

SHOWCASE AS DEVELOPMENT TOOL
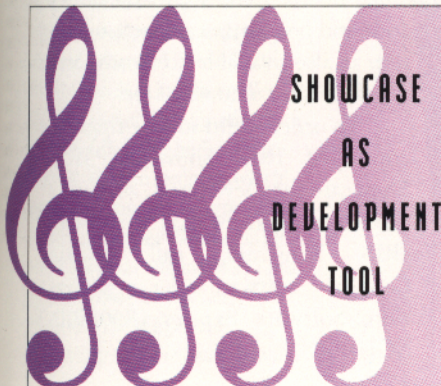
Presentation developers are not the only ones who can use IRIS Showcase's new features; with IRIS Showcase for Developers, programmers can use them, too.

IRIS Showcase for Developers is a low-cost source-code product that gives developers access to all of IRIS Showcase's code. It is not a tool kit in the traditional sense, but it does contain a number of easily extracted modules such as a file browser.

The source-code product also comes with documentation that explains the user interface, file browser, UNIX socket mechanism and how to integrate socket events and graphics events.

Applications developed using IRIS Showcase for Developers are not subject to royalty fees, and all of the code is available for re-use on IRIS workstations. For purchasing information, contact Software Express.

USERS ARE ENTHUSIASTIC

The latest versions of IRIS Showcase have been available for only a short time, but users are already developing sophisticated, multimedia presentations with it.

For example, staff members of Princeton University's graphics lab recently developed an IRIS Showcase presentation about the px tools, a set of image processing and visualization utilities used extensively by students and researchers.

"We've found that computer users are coming to training classes less frequently. They don't want to take time out of their day to learn about a tool; they want to learn on their own time. To respond to this situation, we've used IRIS Showcase to develop an instructional presentation about the px tools," says Kirk Alexander, who manages the university's interactive computer graphics lab.

The presentation consists of three modules joined by using IRIS Showcase's hyperlinking feature. The first module introduces the tools and can be watched in its entirety or rerouted when a topic of particular interest is described. "If the student wants to know more about a command mentioned in the overview module, he or she clicks on that command. The application registers the click, generates a live copy of the command, and offers the option to move into a second module, which contains a finer level of detail about the function," Alexander explains. A third module describes auxiliary tools used to do advanced image processing.

Alexander emphasizes that IRIS Showcase's hyperlinking feature was key to pulling together the px information presentation. "The presentation would not have been nearly as useful without hyperlinks," he says.

Alexander also reports that initial reaction to this presentation-as-training has been positive. University administrators are pleased by the application's potential to increase the productivity of their computing center's staff. Likewise, students and researchers are encouraged by having to attend one less class; learning the package, instead, when their schedules permit.

Alexander's staff is interested in exploring IRIS Showcase's audio and video features for recording lectures and developing other training materials. In addition, students, faculty and administrators take advantage of the forty publicly available IRISes located on Princeton's campus to produce slides and overhead transparencies for their own talks and presentations. (In total, Princeton has more than 150 IRIS workstations on campus.)

WHAT'S NEXT...

In line with developments planned for the IRIS hardware and software environments, the next major release of IRIS Showcase—scheduled for sometime in 1993—promises to support movies. Movies are audio-video files kept in IRIX's file system as opposed to live video, which is not stored as a file.

A full range of other enhancements has also been planned, including improved font handling, better rendering of 3D images, refined self-running presentations and more sophisticated hyperlinks.

Cynthia Marshall is a freelance writer in Mountain View, California.

IRIS Showcase opens up a whole new set of options for designing multi-media presentations that include voice annotation, music and other sounds.

IRIS Showcase is bundled with all IRIS workstations shipped since last spring and is free of charge with those systems. Version 2.0 runs on the entire IRIS product family, but audio is available only on the IRIS Indigo, the 4D/35 workstation, and the 4D/30 workstation with the audio option. Version 2.1 runs only on IRIS Indigos equipped with a video board. IRIS Showcase source code and programmer's documentation is also available to third-party developers for a nominal fee.

To order additional or upgrade copies of IRIS Showcase, IRIS Showcase for Developers, or any of the other packages that work with IRIS Showcase, call Silicon Graphics' software sales organization, Software Express (800/800-SGI1).