

Nero 9 Suite

By Judy Forman

One of the giants in the world of rip and burn, Nero is considered by many to be the industry standard. Like other software applications in this category, an abbreviated version of Nero arrives loaded on many new computers. The full version in the latest generation of the Nero family, Nero 9, is designed to meet the needs of our multi-tasking and multi-media 21st century. Besides the basic rip/burn functions, Nero is an array of applications that do everything but perk your morning coffee, although there's always hope for that in the next version.

You can rip, burn, copy, share videos online, backup data and recover files, create and play slide shows, movies, music libraries and files for your iPod, plus convert old disks and tapes to MP3s. And that's just the beginning. You can also extract music from the sound track of a music video. Nero PhotoSnap is included as a photo editing program. Do you want to watch Hi Definition TV with picture in picture mode on your computer, stream High Def video content to UPnP or DLNA compatible media players including Xbox 360 and Play Station 3? No problem. (*Note: Not all applications are installed at once, but are easily installed as necessary. In addition, some applications require plug-ins not included in the box, and must be purchased.)

Installation of the program came off without a hitch. I declined the option to include Ask.com to my internet tool bar. The guide strongly recommended updating to the next version, (free) after installation, which I did. (Nero.com > Support > Update) Nero offers 10 days of free tech support within 2 weeks of registration. Only online instruction manuals in PDF format are available, but there are separate manuals for the various applications included with the program. They are embedded with screen graphics, and offer cross references in red to other appropriate sections in the manual. Clicking on the cross reference jumps to the reference itself. All manuals offer an index and glossary. Tutorials cover a limited range of subjects, and contain no sound.

Nero StartSmart launches many applications in a clear, formatted window from an icon on the desktop. General headings such as Rip and Burn, Create and Edit, and Home Entertainment can then be individually selected to open specific tasks.

Six ripping and burning menu options are listed on the left of the StartSmart screen. Clicking on a small Nero icon in the bottom left corner reveals the application list, plus a tool box that includes the Control Center. An option to subscribe to newsfeeds also appears in the bottom left of the StartSmart screen.

I have been on a quest to produce high quality slide presentations suitable for TV viewing, so I headed immediately to "Make a Slide Show ."First, I dropped the photos into the slide show workspace, which appears as a filmstrip along the bottom of the page. This feature gave me a good sense of how the project would look upon completion. Next, I added music. I saved the music to the desktop, grabbed it from there, and after several

trials, dragged it into the right position for insertion. Since the slide show was longer than the musical selection, the music automatically repeated until it reached the last image. However, attempts to insert titles and text proved futile. Ultimately, a call to tech support (\$1.29/minute) revealed that the correct task would be to Make a Movie. Make a Movie offers all kinds of options compared to the slide show application. In the slide show, drag and drop your photos, add music, burn it to DVD and you're done. This works well as far as it goes (slide shows hold up to 2000 images), allowing for editing and rearranging of images, and a preview of the project.

"Make a Movie" is opened in NeroVision. It offers more choices, and is more detailed than "Make A Slide Show". Text can be added to individual slides as titles, or one line headers or footers. The desktop consists of 2 workspaces: the story board, and the timeline, each of which allows only certain actions to take place. The workspaces track along the bottom of the screen using graphics similar to "Make a Slide Show."

The program states that you can do everything "simply" and "easily," but I found that neither held true. For the most part, the application is not intuitive, and uses an idiosyncratic vocabulary (for instance, "subgroups" refers to menus to be inserted into the project). In both creating the slide show, and making the movie, it proved very advantageous to have the photos in order before they were imported to the "asset" (items to be added) menu. Repositioning slides, while possible, was not fun. Some slides duplicated themselves in the process, appearing in both the old and new positions. I am not a stranger to slide show applications, but I found the learning curve fairly steep, even after having used an early version of Nero.

On the plus side, projects can be saved to the desktop, dragged to the Nero StartSmart icon, and burned to DVD with one click. Great feature. In spite of the surprisingly steep learning curve, my slide shows, complete with text, and a variety of transitions between images, and music, appeared smooth and professional, especially when viewed on TV.

The "PhotoSnap" feature, a photo editing program, proved to be basic and cumbersome. The crop tool refused to allow resizing without first disappearing and forcing me to start over. Furthermore, results of the various editing functions could only be viewed in small thumbnail windows. The edit menu includes 2 special effects: one, a motion blur, and the other a pillow-like contour of the photo edges. Note: I was not pleased to find that Nero PhotoSnap had inserted itself as the default photo viewer/editor without my prior knowledge or permission.

After some trial and error, I was able to create a music CD from various sources. However, it was time consuming, included wave graphics, and like creating the slide show, required a hefty learning curve. For the layperson who wants to create a quick music CD/DVD, a better option would probably be to build a music file, and then perform a simple data disc burn.

Audio Ripping went smoothly, as I expected. The process for ripping an entire CD of 23 selections was slow, but might be the fault of my computer. It ran in the background

with no noticeable interference, allowing me to work on other files during the process. According to my directions, the ripped files were saved to my external drive, and from there it was an easy matter to drag and drop them into my iTunes library.

NeroBackUp is easy to use, efficient, and fast. As a test, I selected My Pictures, My Music, My Documents, and My Video files for back up on my external drive. The 4.49GB files of data, including over 3GB of images, took 16 minutes. The program allows you to edit, add and delete files from the back up volume, and keeps you apprised of progress in the Nero BackUp window.

I confess to being unable to try all of the 19 applications loaded with Nero. For starters, I don't have Xbox or Playstation3, am not an aspiring DJ, and prefer to use another photo program to edit images. Plus, the ability to watch Hi Definition TV assumes an HD screen is in place, which disqualifies my middle aged flat panel LCD.

Bottom line: Sizable learning curve aside, Nero 9 does what it says it will do, and I recommend it to anyone who wants a reliable, comprehensive burn program. Even if you don't use all of its bells and whistles, for the current street price of just under \$53.00, you can't go wrong.

Street Price: Online - Amazon.com \$52.49 (qualifies for free shipping)

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USA Phone (818) 956-7551 (No tech support – Customer Service number only)

USA Tech Support Hotline: 1-888-309-4212 (\$1.29/min)

Free Email Support: <http://support.nero.com>

System Requirements:

- **General System Requirements**
- A DVD-ROM drive is required for installation
- Windows XP SP2 or SP3, Windows Vista, Windows Vista SP1, Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005 SP2, Windows Server 2003 SP 1, Windows Vista x64 Edition (all applications except InCD and Nero DiscCopy Gadget work in the x86 emulator for 32-bit Windows applications)
- Windows Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher
- 1 GHz Intel Pentium III or equivalent AMD and Intel processor (2 GHz Intel Pentium 4 or equivalent AMD and Intel processor for Windows Vista), 256 MB RAM (512 MB RAM for Windows Vista)

- 1.5 GB hard drive space for a typical installation of all components
- CD, DVD, or Blu-ray Disc recordable or rewritable drive for burning
- DirectX 9.0c revision 30 (August 2006) or higher
- Up to 9 GB available hard drive space for DVD images and temporary DVD files
- Graphics card with at least 32 MB video memory and minimum resolution of 800 x 600 pixels and 16-bit color settings (24-bit or 32-bit true color is recommended)
- Installation of the latest WHQL certified device drivers is strongly recommended.
- For the Nero Online services: Nero product registration, product updates, patent activation, Gracenote services, Nero Online Backup, and other features (such as photo sharing) an Internet connection is required.
- Nero recommends a broadband connection (DSL-1000 and higher or Internet connection with equivalent performance) for all Nero online services such as Nero Online Backup and Nero Video Services. Internet connection charges are the user's responsibility
- **Optional Requirements**
- 16-bit Microsoft Windows compatible sound device and speakers (16 bit sound device required for Nero Wave Editor and Nero SoundTrax)
- Installation of latest WHQL certified device drivers recommended
- Blue laser reading/writing device for Blu-ray Disc support* (check special blue laser system requirements)
- Up to 50 GB free hard drive space for Blu-ray Disc BD-R/RE dual layer disc images
- SecurDisc compatible optical drive for SecurDisc features.
- OHCI compliant FireWire controller (IEEE 1394) for DV or HDV capturing
- TV tuner or video capture card for analog and digital video recording
- For a list of supported capture cards please see: www.nero.com