

Vectorworks Spotlight 2010

By: Patrick Immel

Nemetschek NA's latest iteration of its flagship product, Vectorworks 2010, is now available. I will be looking at what I consider to be the top ten new features of its entertainment design package, Spotlight. In addition to these tools, Nemetschek provides solutions for other fields with its architectural, landscape, and machine-design products in addition to Renderworks, which is a solution to photo-realistically create and render your designs for presentation. I teach and use Vectorworks in our production process at my university. Also, these are my personal observations, so your experience may vary. Let's take a look at the list:

1. *Lightwright 5 Connectivity*. You might ask, "Wasn't this a new feature last year?" Yes, it was, but it is such an amazing item that I felt it needed more time. Just to get everyone up to speed, Lightwright 5 is a program that assists the lighting designer in creating the myriad of paperwork needed for production planning and implementation. In the worst-case scenario, the designer (or assistant) would need to manually enter data from the plot into Lightwright. Prior to Spotlight 2009 and Lightwright 5, the designer would be able to transfer data via an

the user a fairly good sense of optimum viewing areas and distances. So, while the overall tool suite might be better suited to event and meeting planners, theatrical and other live entertainment designers may also find it useful.

3. *Improved 3-D Snapping*. As computers and programs such as Spotlight become more powerful, more and more designers will take the leap into 3-D. I began working more in 3-D about three or four years ago, and my main frustration was that accuracy was difficult. The ability to use "snaps" (clicking exactly on an object's end, middle, center, etc.) has been commonplace in the 2-D world for many years. Drawing in a 3-D environment with 2-D snaps was a challenge, and often resulted in inaccurate drawings. With improvements to 3-D snapping, creating, editing and aligning objects is easier than ever.

4. *Double-Click Symbol Insertion*. Prior to Version 2010, if you wanted to insert a lighting object into a drawing, you needed to make the symbol "active," then invoke the Instrument Insertion Tool to place the unit. With Spotlight 2010, all you need to do is double-click on the appropriate resource and you are automatically placed in "insert" mode.

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import/export process, which, at times, was quite frustrating. This has all changed: Designers and technicians can now create a data exchange between Spotlight and Lightwright 5. Once this connection is in place, any changes to the light plot are immediately reflected in the paperwork and vice versa. When the paperwork is complete, a lighting console patch file can be generated. What was once quite the exercise is now a no-brainer.

2. *Event Planning Suite*. While most users of Spotlight are probably theatrical or other live entertainment designers and technicians, it is also used by folks who plan meetings and other non-theatrical events. Nemetschek created this event planning suite just for them. With this tool set, it is possible to plan room layouts with tables and/or chairs, including aisles; design stages with attached step units; insert lecterns; and create detailed reports and views for client presentations. But I believe that the most important widget of this suite is the new video screen objects tool. It allows a designer or event planner to more accurately specify projection screens (single, blended, or LED) and video projectors. It also gives

You might say, "What's the big deal? It is only two mouse clicks!" When you are working on a plot with many hundreds of fixtures and accessories, those clicks add up. This small, but very useful, addition is a great time-saver.

5. *New Content*. This includes new manufacturer symbols from Altman, Clay Paky, ETC, High End, Strong, and Vari-Lite, with updated gobo catalogues from Apollo, GAM, Rosco, Goboland, and GoboMan.

6. *Improved Lighting Device Color Support*. With the advent of more advanced, powerful color-mixing fixtures and LEDs, Spotlight gives you the ability to input RGB or Hex values for your colors in addition to manufacturer names and numbers.

7. *New Stair Tool*. While this is technically a Vectorworks Spotlight review, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the new stair tool, because many LDs also fill other roles on the design team, and this tool is a real time-saver. Actually, it is close to being a *great* time-saver. I don't know about you, but I am not a fan of drafting stairs or step units. This new tool gives a designer or technician the ability to create a nearly limitless number of stair and step units. Nearly every


parameter of a step is customizable, including hand rails. I do have one request: This tool is mainly designed for the home/architectural market, and I can appreciate that. In the theatre, however, we have slightly different needs and construction methods. This is most obvious in the “stringer underneath” construction mode, where the only options given are one or two stringers. Many times when I draft a large staircase or step unit, I require three or four stringers for support. I think this would be an easy fix.

8. *New Lighting Device Types.* Although this is not a flashy addition, it is quite helpful. Because we have advanced and powerful paperwork software (see #1 above), it becomes more and more useful to be able to accurately categorize all items in a plot. Spotlight has added the categories “power,” “SFX,” “practical,” “device,” and “other” to the existing “light,” “moving light,” “accessory” and “static accessory” categories.

9. *Select Similar Objects.* This is another new tool that has great promise, with just a few tweaks. The thought behind it is that, once the tool is invoked, you can select an object, then all other like objects in the drawing are selected as well. This is a nice start, but, as a lighting designer, I need just a bit more. Often, I need to select all of one type of fixture on a position. With the right parameters selected, this would be an awesome click saver!

10. *Support / Education Options.* Again, I believe that the support system provided by Nemetschek NA is second to none. I could call and speak to a technical support staff member, but many times I either visit the Vectorworks “community board” or the Spotlight list serve. Usually within minutes I will have a response to my question, sometimes from a Nemetschek staffer, other times from one of the hundreds of active, knowledgeable users who frequent the help sites. At any rate, I know my problem will be answered.

Another great feature is Nemetschek NA’s commitment to education. Yes, I know this isn’t a feature of Spotlight, but it is wonderful nonetheless. After an easy registration process, Vectorworks Designer is provided, free of charge, to any eligible student or faculty member. You might say this is simply Nemetschek is building its user base, and while that might be true, the company is also introducing CAD to a new generation of students. I have had a few students come into our program with actual Vectorworks knowledge and skills; four or five years ago, this simply wasn’t the case.

Nemetschek NA’s Vectorworks Spotlight is a “soup-to-nuts” CAD solution that will allow you to conceive, design and present your work at the highest levels. I highly recommend giving it a try! 

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