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TEST DRIVE

Move into movies

The latest upgrade by Zenfolio to its web-hosting service has seen a provision made for video hosting, enabling photographers to provide their visitors with access to HD video clips promoting the business **WORDS DUNCAN GROVE**

Times are changing and moving images have now become a way of life for many photographers, particularly on the back of the HD video functionality on so many of today's leading professional cameras. It has led to a growing number of photographers wanting the facility to host video on their websites, but up until now it's not been easy to achieve this end.

Now, however, the latest upgrade from Zenfolio to its web-hosting service includes video hosting as standard, and it's going to open the door to many more photographers who will see this facility as something that they can make good use of. I decided to take a look at this new service to see what exactly was being offered and whether it was something that really would help photographers to upgrade their sites and to offer a new service to their visitors.

My own background is that I switched my web hosting to Zenfolio nearly two years ago and have had no regrets. It is easy to customise to the point where I can ensure my site looks exactly the way I want it to and, more importantly, it's easy to manage. Zenfolio's tech support is the best I have ever encountered and they really do listen to feature requests – several of mine have already been implemented. Video was not one of my requests but I can see from the forums that many users did want it and now it's there for them to use.

Software in action

So, now that it's here, how good is it and will it suit the needs of all photographers? Well, the good news is that, based on my experience, most photographers will find it simple, logical and easy to get to grips with.

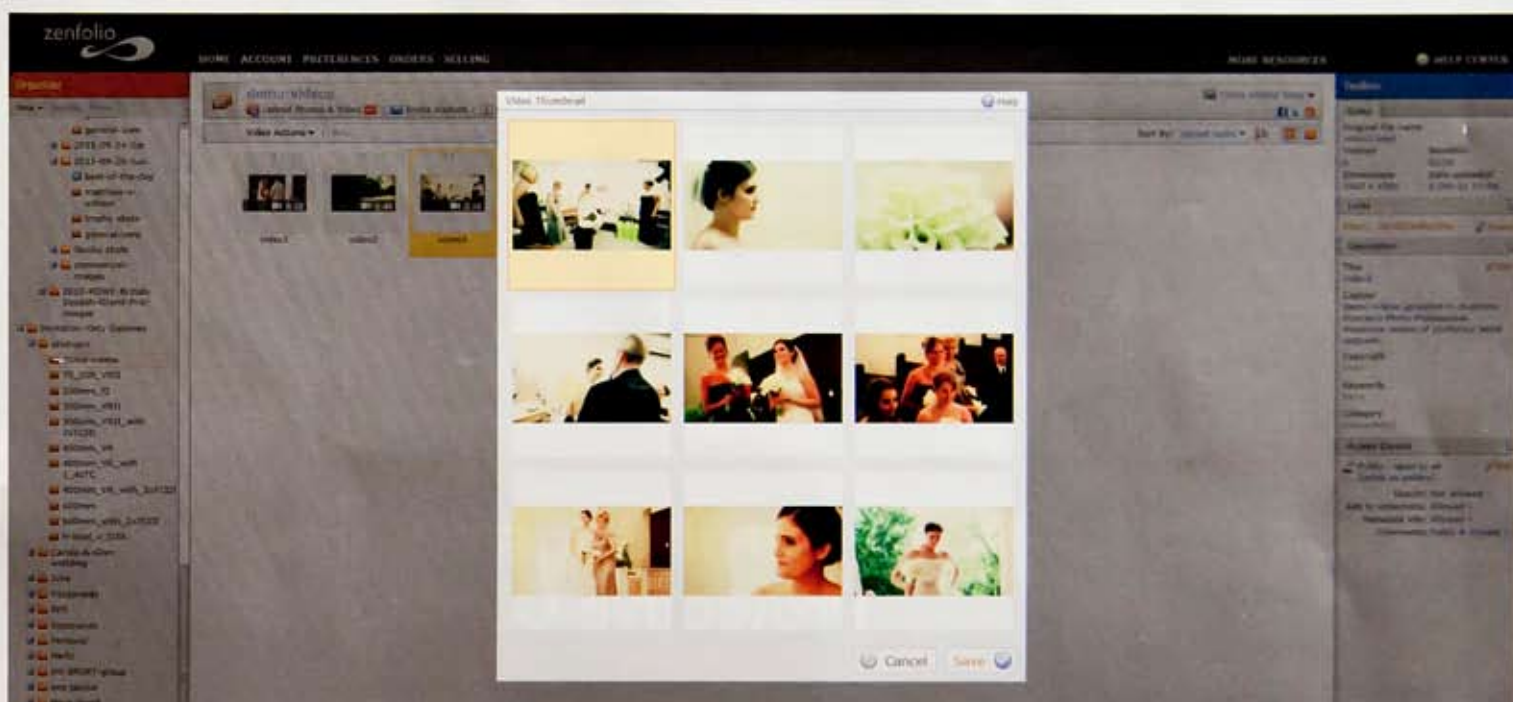
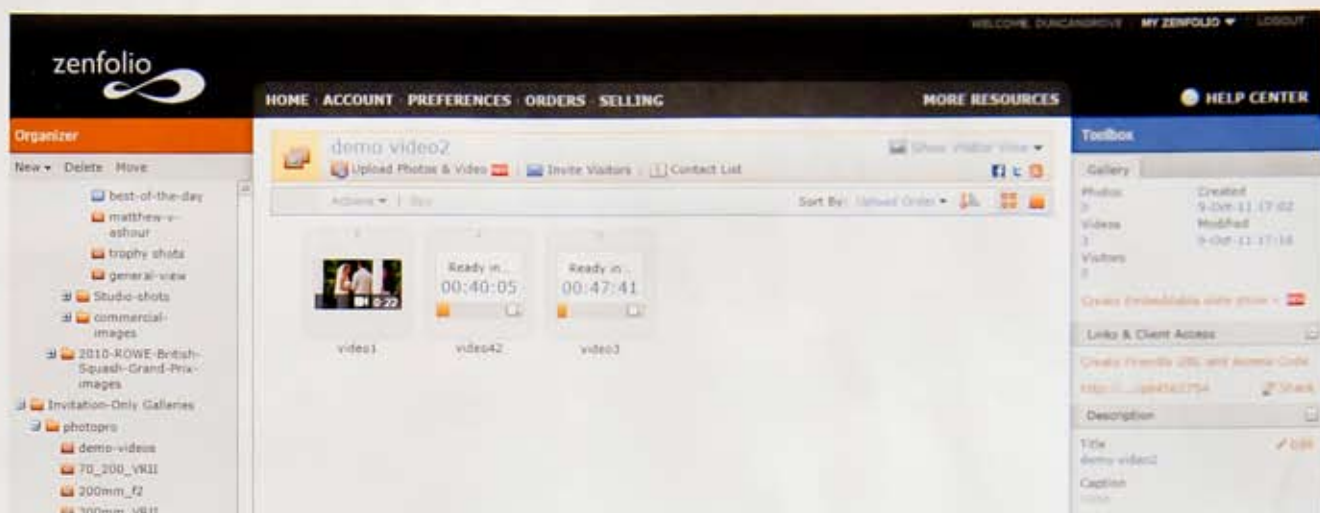
ABOVE: This is the visitor's view of a gallery of three videos

The service supports just about any video format and codec and converts them to H.264. Max video resolution is HD 1920x1080 pixels; scan and frame rate is 30fps progressive or 60fps interlaced; max file size is 2GB and max running time is 15 minutes.

Once a video file is uploaded, it is converted to multiple streaming formats (this takes some time, so be prepared for a wait). The Zenfolio player then automatically selects the most appropriate quality based on visitors' Internet connection and hardware. Playback quality full-screen on

“THE LATEST UPGRADE FROM ZENFOLIO TO ITS WEB-HOSTING SERVICE INCLUDES VIDEO HOSTING AS STANDARD”

RIGHT: There are several methods to upload – I found it best to simply drag files from Explorer into Zenfolio's upload window. Larger video files can take many minutes before they are converted into the various formats and are ready for viewing



my 27in monitor looked great. It is worth noting that the original uploaded file is not retained, so you should not consider your uploads to be a back-up facility.

As part of the upgrade Zenfolio has introduced new page layouts that are especially optimised for videos. I found that their appearance still automatically followed the theme of the rest of my site, but the video thumbnails were of a more appropriate size ratio. There is a nice touch for selecting thumbnails to represent each video file; in my case I thought at first that the automatically generated one had been corrupted since the left 10 per cent of the thumb was pure white. Closer inspection revealed that the white was in fact a white column included in the shot of a wedding! It was simple for me to select a more appropriate thumbnail from nine alternatives that Zenfolio had generated.

Just like every photo hosted by Zenfolio, each video has its specific URL that links to its presentation on a web page. This is very useful for sharing links via email, but I find it

indispensable for linking to images from my WordPress blog and I can, in future, see me doing the same for videos.

Sharing of video thumbnails works in the same way, and again this makes life easier when writing blogs.

It is also possible to embed the videos into other websites; Facebook etc by using the Zenfolio-generated embed code. You can specify the player size and another nice touch is that your own logo can be overlaid above the player controls.

Conclusion

Zenfolio has clearly made a big investment in this new service and, with an unlimited number of video files of up to 2Gb each allowed, they are clearly going to have to buy a couple of new external USB hard drives! Seriously, they already store several size variations of each photograph they host and now with the addition of video, their storage capacity must be massive.

So how much extra will they be charging for this new video service? Well, actually,

ABOVE: The ability to select from a choice of nine different thumbnails is a nice touch

nothing! As long as you are an Unlimited UK, Premium UK or Premium Business UK subscriber (£50, £100 and £150 pa respectively), video hosting is now included in your service at no extra charge.

I often reflect that in a sector where our equipment costs us eye-wateringly high sums and our clients always seem to have 'tight budgets' yet want images delivered five minutes before we've shot them, Zenfolio is one area where I feel that I actually do get value for money. The fact that this latest upgrade (which also includes several other enhancements) represents a fundamental broadening of the offer at no extra cost, only serves to reinforce this view. ■

■ Marks 9/10

■ Duncan has set up a video demonstration page at <http://www.duncangrove.com/demo-videos>. A free two-week Zenfolio trial is available and if you decide to subscribe, using referral code 8D1-PKN-B8F during sign-up will give you a 10 per cent discount.