

# NVIVO 8 REVIEWED

WILL THIS WEB INTERVIEWING PRODUCT DELIVER ON ITS PROMISE TO ALLOW USERS GREATER FREEDOM? **TIM MACER** REVIEWS THE EVIDENCE

**N**Vivo, the stalwart of academic qualitative researchers, has suddenly embraced multimedia files with a passion, and in doing so widened its appeal to a much broader spectrum of qual researchers. While video recordings of qualitative interviews and groups are now commonplace, handling video is often unwieldy and can force researchers to fall back on textual transcripts that fail to capture expression or nuance.

The breakthrough with NVivo 8 is its ability to import a wide range of source materials and make these easy for researchers to tag with comments and observations, including video and audio. You can also import Word files and even PDFs, and you can link them together if you have a full transcript and a video of your group.

At the heart of the tool is a multimedia player with a timeline of the video or audio. You can view and hear the recording, pause it or slow it down, or start it and stop it from any point simply by dragging a cursor to

any position along a time track along the top of the window. Dragging also previews the video, giving you an extremely efficient way to cue in on the part you are interested in. As you add coding or annotations, you can apply these to the timeline. Each is then colour-coded as a band running parallel to the timeline, giving you a very useful graphic representation of the data and where themes and overlaps occur, or even simply the parts you have not yet reached.

Importing any of these file formats could not be easier – NVivo 8 recognises all the main audio and video files format and deals with them appropriately, including AVI, Quicktime, MPE, WMV, or for audio, MP3 and simple WAV files. And you

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can also output video or audio – the software will enable you to create a collage or summary for your client to view.

The power of NVivo as an analysis tool lies in its concept of nodes. Nodes let you bring together strands of data, observations or comments however you wish – used creatively, they become the essence of the analysis, mapping out the concepts and the relationships between them. For example, if working from a topic guide, each topic could be represented as a node, and nodes can be stacked within nodes to form a hierarchy. Nodes can be used more freely too, to mind map the data in a post hoc way.

As you work through the data you assign as many examples as you can find to each node, or attach your own observations or interpretations as you go, so that, ultimately, when you examine any node, you have a rich and relevant collection of examples and ideas for each one as the basis of your report. Those

## CLIENT PERSPECTIVE: SILVANA DI GREGORIO, SDG ASSOCIATES ON NVIVO

Silvana di Gregorio, owner of SdG Associates, is an independent qualitative analysis consultant who specialises in software support and integration. NVivo is one of several qualitative analysis packages she uses to analyse data for both social policy and commercial market research projects.

“I first used the software in 1995 when I was working as an academic. At that time academics had similar reservations to market researchers today about using software for analysis of qualitative research – but this is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how this software will support the analysis and a fear that it will reduce everything to numbers.

“Nvivo 8 has made an extraordinary leap forward, with the ability to analyse videos, audio and graphics. I think it can

revolutionise ways of analysis. For example, if you code the video, NVivo adds coding stripes along the top and suddenly you have an entirely different picture of the data. It offers a new ways to analyse and also to present your data which may be more attractive to the commercial market researcher.

“With NVivo 8 you don’t have to transcribe everything, you can import the audio or video and then you can just write notes as you work through it. I have found coding directly onto the video timeline works well. With video it is quite easy to do as you can see where you want to stop; it is harder to do with audio. If there are parts that interest you, you can then do partial transcripts just on those parts.

Silvana is also impressed with the data visualisation and charting that have been

introduced with NVivo 8. “These are quite straightforward to use. With a focus group, for example, you can instantly get a visual picture to show you if anyone is dominant in the group. Recently, I created a matrix query between the different speakers in two focus groups. I had coded for the different types of statements made. I simply turned the matrix query into a radar chart, with each spoke representing one of the speakers. You could quickly see there were two people who made no balanced comparisons. It offers another quick visual feel for the data. NVivo support a lot of ways of analyzing data – and I am still discovering more.”

- A new book, *Qualitative Research Design for Software Users* by Silvana di Gregorio and Judith Davidson, will be published by Open University Press in October.

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE IN USING THE SOFTWARE, HOWEVER, IS LIKELY TO BE ITS COMPLEXITY. THIS IS NOT A TOOL THAT YOU CAN EASILY FIGURE OUT FOR YOURSELF. PROPER TRAINING AND PROBABLY SOME COACHING TOO IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL

examples coded directly in the transcript or video timeline will allow you to jump straight back to the source, so you can see the context, and in the case of video will cue you directly to the segment where the very words were being spoken. It is the moment that makes all the upstream preparation worthwhile.

NVivo 8 does support a degree of collaborative working, in that

different members of a team can log into the project and any coding and annotations they make will be tagged by who did it. You can even analyse the variance in the use of coding between different users to check for consistency. However, the software falls short of a true multi-user system in that for users to work concurrently on, say, a large international project you will have to

provide them with their own separate versions of the project and merge the files together later.

The greatest obstacle in using the software, however, is likely to be its complexity. This is not a tool that you can easily figure out for yourself. It is one of the consequences of a design that offers a wide range of tools but does not seek to impose its own order by reducing the art of qualitative research to a series of wizards. Proper training and probably some coaching too is therefore essential.

To get the best out of many of the tools within NVivo, you really need to spend time coding and tagging your data first – which can easily take a day or two for a couple of groups.

If this level of rigour is considered overkill, or there just is not the time to achieve it, NVivo's sister program, XSight, is more amenable to quick turnaround jobs. But at present, XSight cannot handle audio or video. However, NVivo does not force you to code, and the ease by which you can analyse audio and video material makes it much more appealing to researchers with short deadlines to meet.

## THE VERDICT: NVIVO 8

### NVIVO 8 FROM QSR INTERNATIONAL

Complete end-to-end web based interviewing solution with a database – and object-based approach to allow greater freedom in working across surveys and incorporating other applications or sources of data into the research process.

Ease of use ★★★★★★

Cross-platform compatibility ★★★★★★

Value for money ★★★★★★

### COST

Single user licence for commercial users £1155 plus optional annual support and maintenance for an extra £231. Upgrade from NVivo 7 £405. Volume discounts available. Substantial discounts for educational and public sector users.

### PROS

- Very flexible: offers many ways of analysing qualitative data in many formats
- Excellent support for video and audio recordings of groups or depths
- Offers visual as well as textual ways to handle and present data
- Very good help and tutorial material

### CONS

- Steep learning curve: not intuitive to the uninitiated
- Limited multi-user capabilities

### FURTHER INFO

[www.qsrinternational.com](http://www.qsrinternational.com)