

Synchro Arts PC MAC VocAlign Ultra £342

Editing and aligning audio can be time-consuming but this newly updated industry standard could make your life considerably easier

> Synchro Arts VocAlign is a long established market-leading tool that adjusts the timing of an audio file (Dub) so it matches that of a source (Guide). It works well with vocals, instruments, sound effects and dialogue and is therefore commonly used for a whole bunch of music and post production tasks. VocAlign Ultra (AU, VST3, AAX, ARA, Audio Suite) is their new fully featured version and it replaces VocAlign Pro. In terms of features it sits between the affordable but quite basic VocAlign Project and their flagship processor, Revoice Pro 4.

Major Update

It's pretty obvious from the redesigned, resizable GUI that VocAlign Ultra is a substantial upgrade. The new window retains the colourful look of its predecessor rather than the more serious design of Revoice Pro, however, under the hood it's actually RVP's time compression and expansion algorithms that now power

things. This means that VocAlign Ultra can process longer and more complex sections of audio and also includes pitch-matching and formant-shifting.

VocAlign Ultra comes in both regular plugin formats (AU, AAX and VST3), Audio Suite for offline editing in Pro Tools and the latest ARA2 (Audio Random Access) format (see boxout).

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Synchro Arts have included DAW-specific instructions for implementation of each format.

Three Ways

VocAlign Ultra has three core processors - Match Timing, Match Pitch and Formant Shift. You'll see these to the right of the interface and each is accompanied by a single parameter control. For both timing and pitch these determine how loose or tight the matching processing is. Formant Shift includes a straightforward Higher/Lower option (+/- 20%).

The button above these controls reveals additional parameters. For timing the key parameter is Alignment Rule and this has six presets that tailor the way compression or expansion is applied to the Dub. Next up, Max Shift allows you to specify the maximum timing shift allowed, which is great if you have gaps in your Dub that may get misinterpreted. Finally, High Resolution upsamples the internal audio to

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384kHz and is designed to help with tonally sensitive sounds.

For pitch, the advanced features include the Pitch Target knob, which gradually moves from favouring the Dub to favouring the Guide, and two pitch matching Algorithms. Algorithm Mode 1 has four settings that dictate pitch target behaviour. Two of these (Nearest Octave and Absolute) deliver full-on pitchshifting, and for us did an impressive job of shifting harmony parts to match our lead. Next up, Relative imposes the pitch modulation of the Guide and is ideal for dialogue matching. Monotone is a more creative option that shifts to a single designated pitch (+/- up to 1 octave). Algorithm Mode 2 is designed specifically for vibrato-heavy sounds. Finally the Pitch Ranges setting can help focus the pitch detection algorithm towards specific higher or lower ranges for both Guide and Dub. It's worth emphasising VocAlign Ultra matches rather than corrects pitch, so make sure your Guide is in tune.

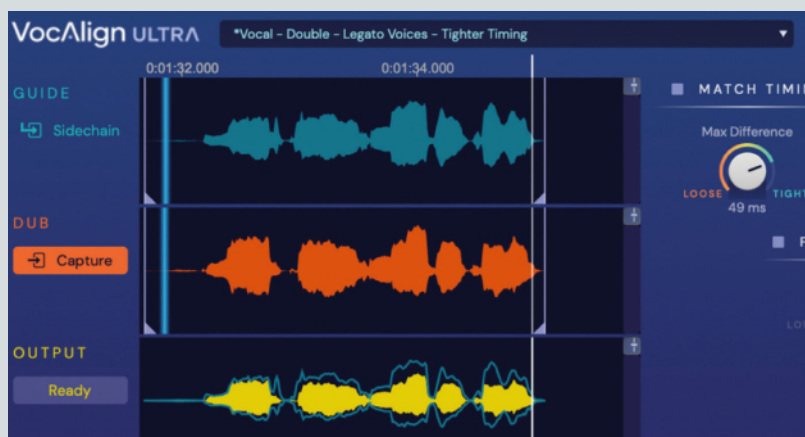
Smooth operator

VocAlign Ultra has considerably better visual feedback than its predecessors and the three zoomable views – waveform, pitch and signal energy (which is like the original VocAlign view) – allow you to see timing and pitch both before and after processing. The displays also quickly refresh as you make parameter changes. An additional bottom panel provides a useful timeline overview of the captured Guides and Dubs. As before, the display can be used to add manual Guide/Dub sync points. You can also use it to establish protected areas that won't be processed and this feature has been upgraded to support pitch as well as timing, with independent settings for each. We found the protected areas particularly handy for more creative applications.

Whether you're just trying to fix things or have more creative ambitions, with more than 60 categorised presets, you can use VocAlign



With the new pitch view it's easy to see the guide, dub and final pitches



VocAlign Ultra works as an ARA version 2 plugin for DAWs that support this format and also as a regular plugin and as Audio Suite in Pro Tools

Audio Random Access

There's no doubt that designing pitch and timing manipulation plugins that work successfully and seamlessly across multiple DAWs is no easy task. Audio Random Access (ARA), which was developed by Celemony and Presonus, makes two-way communication between plugin and DAW much slicker and considerably improves the user experience. That being said, practical implementation does vary across different DAWs so you should be sure to follow Synchro Arts' DAW-specific instructions.

In VocAlign Ultra ARA has a number of benefits, not least the fact that you don't need to manually capture each section of audio in real time. With the

ARA plugins loaded in line with your particular DAW, you simply use the Capture buttons to assign selected audio parts as either Guide or Dub. If you have multiple Dubs to align to the same Guide, these can be loaded collectively and accessed from the same VocAlign Ultra window simply by selecting their respective tracks.

For multiple Dubs it's wise to select a suitable VocAlign preset first, otherwise you'll have to go through and select the preset individually for each Dub. Beyond this, any changes to processing update straightaway and should you need to swap out or add further Dubs, these can be captured in the same way.

Ultra without delving too deeply into the advanced features. In that respect, we managed to tighten all manner of doubled and layered vocals. The results were very impressive and in many cases pleasantly transparent. It's also very easy to adjust independently the amount of timing and pitch correction, and loosening things a bit is often the key to getting the most natural results on multiple stacks. On instruments, particularly more complex ones with chordal content, it's much better to stick solely to timing correction. For monophonic instruments, we had much success matching both pitch and timing.

VocAlign Ultra also has enough features to get creative and the Monotone option, coupled with some judicious pitch protected sections, can achieve pretty convincing harmonies. Meanwhile, both subtle and heavy use of the Formant Shift can add welcome differentiation.

VocAlign Ultra is a major step up from VocAlign Pro, delivering a basket of tools much closer to their flagship Revoice Pro 4 and results to match. It's clearly not cheap and it's good to see a rent-to-own scheme that helps spread the cost. Still, if you do a lot of editing it'll save you a lot of time, and that's worth its weight. **cm**

Web synchroarts.com
Info Rent to buy from £85

Alternatively

Melodyne

cm230 » 10/10 » From €99

Doesn't specifically match timing, but delivers extensive pitch and timing manipulation/quantising

VocAlign Project

cm154 » 9/10 » £109

Quick to use and affordable, Project is definitely worth considering if you're on a tighter budget

Verdict

For New timing and pitch algorithms from Revoice Pro 4

Protected areas for timing and pitch

Impressively transparent results

Multiple ways to tweak outcome

Against Expensive

VocAlign Ultra is an impressive update. Yes it's a bit pricey but if you do a lot of editing and aligning it will improve your productivity considerably

10/10