

FL Studio development ideas

Version 1.4

Update log

17.09.2008:

- added two ideas (thanks to reflection) to "Playlist" section (v1.4)
- fixed text and edited couple of topics (marked with [edited in v1.4]) (v1.4)
- added "Plug-ins -> Sytrus" and two ideas (v1.4)
- added "Plug-ins -> General" and one idea(v1.4)
- Ps. I bought PoiZone to my arsenal, it rocks – hard! ☺

16.09.2008:

- fixed text (v1.21)
- added two ideas and fixed some text (v1.2)
- fixed some text (v1.1)

15.09.2008:

- document version (v1.0)

Contents

Introduction	4
Greetings to FL Studio developers and users.....	4
The ideas.....	5
General.....	5
1. New option to general settings: "Window title bar size"	5
2. New option to general settings: "Show Hint Bar info as a tooltip" [edited in v1.4].....	5
3. Fully skinnable user interface	5
Step sequencer.....	6
4. Channel display filters' drop-down menu could be changed to "Channel group tabs"	6
5. Two new buttons (add channel and add channel with favorite plug-in [preset included])	6
6. New option to channel/instrument title bar menu: "Save channel as favorite..."	7
7. Couple of changes to step sequencer layout [edited in v1.4]	7
8. Couple of changes to step sequencer right-click menu [edited in v1.2]	8
Mixer.....	8
9. New option to step sequencer title bar menu: "Automatically link added channels to free mixer tracks"	8
10. Remove the "FX slot X options" buttons and make the effect bar to do the job [edited in v1.2] ...	8
11. New features that enables you to rearrange effects in FX slots and move/copy effects from one mixer track to another [added in v1.2]	8
12. Little change to "mixer track send" managing [added in v1.2].....	8
Playlist.....	9
13. Clip focus should only allow to edit/move the clips that belongs to the selected class [edited in v1.2]	9
14. New feature that allows you to snap the automation control points (horizontal line snaps to other control points)	9
15. Improved clip management and layout [edited in v1.4].....	9
16. The way pattern clips are inserted should be improved	10
17. New option to pattern right-click menu: "Ghost pattern notes in every piano roll"	10
18. Automation control points should show the value [added in v1.4]	11
19. New feature: ability to mute audio clips from playlist's clip view [added in v1.4]	11
20. New feature: ability to automate the basic properties in audio clips [added in v1.4].....	11
Piano roll	11
21. Change the piano roll note property right-click "Note properties / Channel controls" menu to tabs or radio buttons at the left side of the note property control area	11
22. New piano roll title bar menu option: "Show notes on keys" [edited in v1.4].....	11
Browser.....	11

23.	New browser right-click menu items: "Add folder...", "Rename...", "Delete folder...", "Copy to folder..." and "Move to folder..."	11
24.	New title bar menu item: "Configure folder structure..." [edited in v1.4].....	11
Plug-ins -> General		12
25.	Preset browser to plug-ins [added in v1.4].....	12
Plug-ins -> Sytrus		12
26.	"Bigger controls, smaller keyboard keys, less confusion and use of magnifying glass" [added in v1.4]	12

Introduction

FL Studio has been around for years and has evolved a lot throughout the time. There are many ways and styles to work with FL Studio. The features' allowed way to work suits fine for most producers but some might think otherwise about some implementations. Some things are behind too many steps or are missing completely. The main point now is to improve the workflow a bit and redesign some features usability in mind. I have used FL now for about 5 years (there have been producing pauses though) and I think it rocks in many ways. The price for this software is superb compared to the features (plug-ins, editors, options etc.). Despite of all that, there are things that just bothers me now and then. There are implementations that could need redesigning, thinking and planning.

I have made this document to present different development ideas concerning FL Studio (step sequencer, mixer, playlist, piano roll, browser and general things). What graphical content demonstrates in this document *does not* mean that things should be made exactly like in the pictures. The point here is to give the developers ideas to think about. This is feedback from user that loves the software but feels to need some features that allow you to work more efficiently. I'm not representing myself as an all-knowing developer or user interface usability designer, but I have lots of experience from website and graphical design. I also study computer sciences at university for 5th year now and have taken user interface usability courses, when it comes to asking "Why do you think you know something about usability and interfaces?" I think it's better to tell that I'm not here bare naked. Usability tests, surveys and investing to UI development are crucial stages in software development; you want to keep your customers happy. 😊

Greetings to FL Studio developers and users

I want to thank everyone at Image-Line for this wonderful product. The one big thing to mention about is that the user-developer connection in FL community is great. It feels like there are no barriers between the users and developers, that there usually are. Anyways, to praise you a little among these improvement ideas I want to mention my favorite things in FL Studio.

My favorite elements in FL Studio:

- This many things for about \$200 surely make FL worth the buy.
- FL has great effect plug-ins.
- Sytrus, Toxic Biohazard, Morphine, PoiZone and the new Ogun sound great and have lots of potential.
- Maximus is great mastering tool.
- Edison is a great little sample editor.
- Slicex! Great and easy tool for pushing boring loops one stage further by making your own beats.

I hope the developers and users as well like these ideas and find them useful additions to FL Studio. Feel free to post comments in the forum thread in which this document was released. Now it's time to move on to the ideas. And apologies in advance – my English might suck. I'm bad at rating my language skills. 😊

Ps. I will be adding new ideas to this document and I inform about it in the forums.

PPs. Just a sentence of wisdom, "It's better to make the product please 500,000 users instead of 20 developers."

Thanks for your time! Over and out,
blazarian

The ideas

General

1. New option to general settings: "Window title bar size"

Primarily the reason for this feature is that clicking small buttons constantly throughout production process isn't so pleasant. Of course the buttons resize with the title bar.

There are some other small buttons in FL Studio that should be changed and I have mentioned about them later in this document.

2. New option to general settings: "Show Hint Bar info as a tooltip" [edited in v1.4]

I have to admit that I have never really understood the hint bar implementation. The information is too far from the things you tweak. Why not to give an option so user can decide between Hint Bar and tooltip.

The main reason is the focus of your eyes. Imagine if you need to check your driving speed and all other information from your car's ceiling when you are driving. Or when you use your radio and your radio's LCD is located at another side of the car, it makes no sense. So, if you watch the knobs which you are tweaking, you want to see the info there and avoid the up and down eye surfing repeatedly.

3. Fully skinnable user interface

I know too many friends that only dislike the FL Studio for one reason and that is graphically too cheesy/candy/detailed user interface. Simple solution would be to make the skinning as easy as possible for the users and make everything in FL Studio skinnable. (Haven't researched about FL Studio skinning at all but what I have read a little, some said that FL currently isn't fully skinnable).

4. Backup function with certain options [added in v2.0]

This function saves information of certain things as a copy in desired destination, so they can be imported in later installation of FL Studio.

- Everything from FL Studio settings (things excluded that doesn't feel relevant).
- Projects and data folders (file browser got backedup with all the samples, songs etc.).
- Settings considering enabled and disabled VSTi/VST/FL plug-ins (it's awful to go through the long list of plug-ins and disable and enable those you (don't) need after installing FL Studio and your VST plug-ins).
- Workspace layout.
- Templates.

Step sequencer

5. Channel display filters' drop-down menu could be changed to "Channel group tabs"

Tabs allow you to surf faster and easier between grouped items. For example, I have so many channels in my projects that it's clearer to have them divided in groups this way. "+" means "Add group". **FIX: Sorry! Tab called "All" is missing from the picture.**



6. Two new buttons (add channel and add channel with favorite plug-in [preset included])

Without any greater explanations, there are better context this way. No need to remove the others (channels menu at the top or the right-click menu on channels).



7. New option to channel/instrument title bar menu: "Save channel as favorite..."

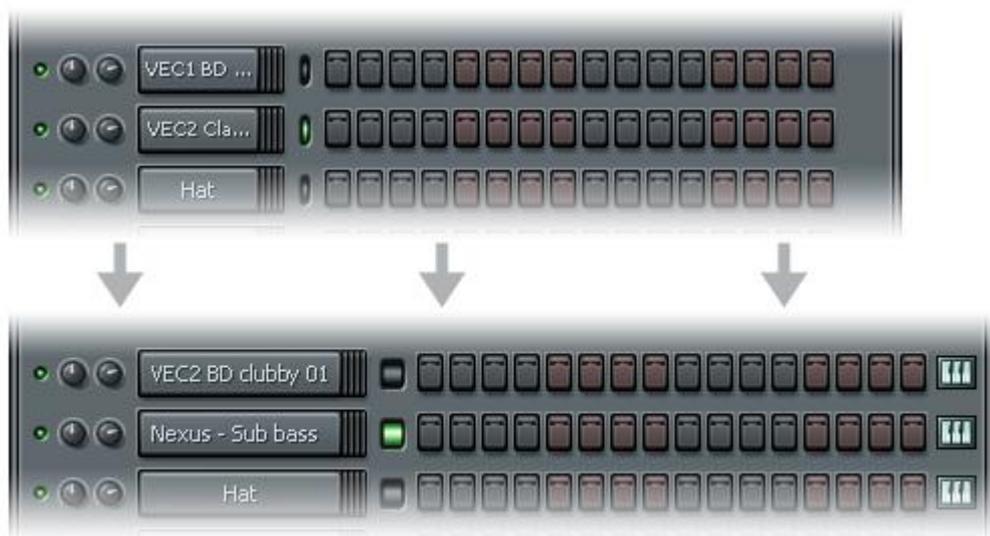
This option will save the plug-in used and its configuration. Favorites can be added to a project as new channels from the step sequencer window.



Note to ideas 5 and 6: I know there is a way to work with the "favorite presets and generators" from browser like this, but it's too messy and out of context in some way. It's faster and less complicated to do this way than search the browser for generators right after you have played with samples. Again, I know there are snapshots but that's still not the same.

8. Couple of changes to step sequencer layout [edited in v1.4]

Three main changes are wider channel and select channel buttons, piano roll toggle buttons and one cosmic change that is described below in a smaller picture.



Channel and select channel buttons should be wider

Tired of reading the same channel text in multiple places in step sequencer because the texts are clipped? For example: ten times text that says "VEC2 Sna..." or "VEC2 Cy..." or "reFX Nexu...". That really is annoying, isn't it? Anyways, there's only a benefit from this change. See the picture below.

"Piano roll toggle" button could be added at the end of the step sequencer row

Delete the menu item "Piano roll" from the title bar menu and add a button for "Piano roll toggle" at the end of each step sequencer row. When you add sampler you probably are going to use it for drums or similar to

that so you need the step sequencer. But when you add channel with melody instrument you always want to use the piano roll with it, not the step sequencer. You just push the "Piano roll toggle" button once at that channel and the step sequencer steps will be replaced with piano roll view on that row.

Channel level indicators from horizontal to vertical

The channel volume level indicators (four horizontal leds) could be vertical like the peak meters are in the mixer. One benefit is to have more level leds to it (more scale).



9. Couple of changes to step sequencer right-click menu [edited in v1.2]

- New menu item called: "Save channel as favorite..." (same purpose than in idea number 6)
- The "Fill each X steps" menu items could be moved to new submenu called "Fill pattern >"
- The "Insert...", "Replace...", "Clone" and "Delete..." menu items could be brought at the top of the menu. (Used kinda often I think.)
- Remove the piano roll menu item as mentioned in idea number 7.

Mixer

10. New option to step sequencer title bar menu: "Automatically link added channels to free mixer tracks"

When new channel is added, it would be automatically linked to a free channel. I have all my channels linked to mixer tracks very often, because they need effects and are clearer to mix in general. Oh my, mixer for mixing!

11. Remove the "FX slot X options" buttons and make the effect bar to do the job [edited in v1.2]

Especially with big screen resolution it is a nightmare to use software that contains small buttons to press or too small text to read. In this case the FX slot buttons are way too small. There's even whole lot of space: the whole FX slot! So why can't user use the slot area to add the effects?

- Left-click or right-click to empty FX slot row → Menu (for adding new effects...)
- Left-click to FX slot where's effect already → Opens the effect window (like it currently acts)
- Right-click to FX slot where's effect already → Opens menu (for presets, replacing or deleting effects...)

12. New features that enables you to rearrange effects in FX slots and move/copy effects from one mixer track to another [added in v1.2]

The topic says it all. At least this sounds logical. Again... arranging happens for example with alt + arrow keys.

13. Little change to "mixer track send" managing [added in v1.2]

Currently you select the mixer track you want to route to another track and then select the send button from that mixer track in which you are routing the selected one. If you send from multiple tracks to one track you have to "select track X and then click the other track's send in which you want to route". It would make more sense if you first pick the track in which you wanna route a bunch of other channels and then just choose the channels by clicking the other channels' send buttons (means that THEY send to this track).

So: First, you select the mixer track in which you want to route other tracks. Then you press the send buttons from the tracks from which you want to send to the selected track.

Playlist

14. Clip focus should only allow to edit/move the clips that belongs to the selected class [edited in v1.2]

When the "pattern clip focus" option is selected the only thing you can move and edit are the pattern clips. The other clips are grayed (transparency 50% or something like that) out for clearer view. The benefit is that user doesn't get distracted by the other clips that are below the clip that the user is working on. Overlapping informative graphics aren't good thing, they just mess each other up.

15. New feature that allows you to snap the automation control points (horizontal line snaps to other control points)

Option that let you maintain the wanted standard levels easily. For example, when automating volume, you need to have the peak value exactly the same with every control point. Snap will help you with this and you don't have to do the fine-tweaking every time you automate your things. Snap could be enabled with key + mouse click (drag).

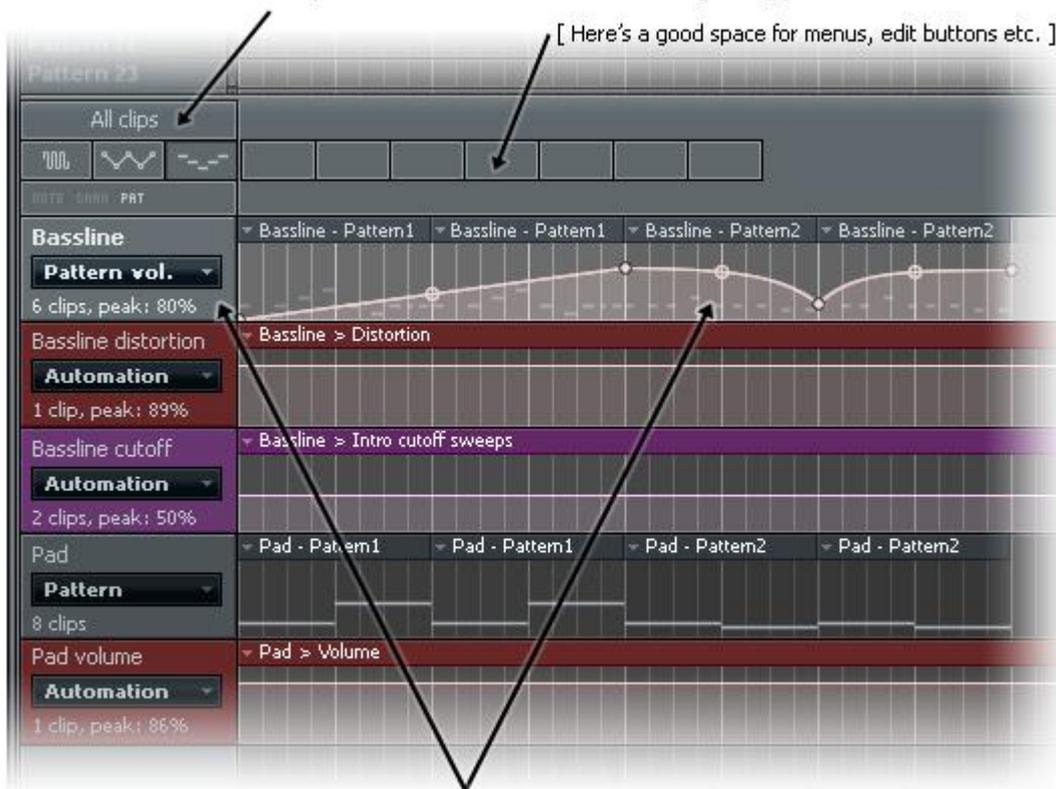
16. Improved clip management and layout [edited in v1.4]

This is the one exciting improvement that I'd like to see in FL Studio at near future. The idea is to avoid the mess and make the usability better. Badly arranged clip playlist is kind of common problem when clips are added here and there along the project. Here I present an idea to make the clip management a little clearer and organized. See the picture for visual implementation suggestion. **Note: This whole idea could be switchable if it's not too hard to develop. If it is possible to allow user to switch between older and newer implementation, that's good option to have then.**

- There can only be one type of automation clip type per clip row
 - o Example: No cutoff, volume or panning etc. automation clips in the same clip row
 - o Pattern basic options like volume and panning are possible to be automated inside the pattern clips for example by selecting the "Pattern vol." option from the drop-down menu that is located at the left end of the clip row
- Clip information (name, peak values, type...) and basic pattern clip output properties (volume, panning, like mentioned previously...) are shown at the left side of the clip section that currently is empty, see picture below.
- Clip rows can be rearranged with alt + arrow key like the patterns, channels and mixer tracks currently
 - o This means that the clips are made to the rows, so they can NOT be moved from row to another. The whole line moves with alt + arrow key when selected.
- There are some exceptions:
 - o ONLY audio clips can be overlapped. Automation and pattern clips CANNOT be overlapped.
 - o There can be multiple different audio clips in single audio clip row (different samples) and pattern clips (different patterns that play different instruments) in pattern clip row. Multiple automation clips aren't allowed to be at the same row if they are controlling different things.
 - Explanation: When you add automation clip, the whole row is assigned to tweak the one and only thing. There cannot be another clip that automates something else. This is anyways impossible because the clips cannot be moved to another row.
- Clip row usage/behavior explained:
 - o When you add new clip to a empty clip row the name of the clip row is asked, so you name it for example as "Bassline" or use the default name that is suggested.
 - o After naming it you right-click to empty space in that clip row and choose "New pattern clip".

- When you are done with the notes in that clip you can automate the pattern output “basic” properties (volume, panning etc.) by selecting the “Pattern vol.” from the left clip drop-down menu. Then just drawing the automation line (these are not automation clips, so the property automation lies IN the pattern clips).
- If you want to automate something else like cutoff you just add automation clip below the pattern clip row and draw the automation as usually.
- Above the clip section is good space for tool buttons for clip editing etc.
 - Audio clip cross-fade and other useful options are always welcome to the tool menu. ;)

[You can filter the clips you want so see and the rest are darkened and cannot be edited or moved. If you select “All clips” then there is no restricting filtering on. In this picture the “All clips” should be pressed down because others than patterns aren’t darkened. So it’s a little glitch. :)]



[Clip row named “Bassline” is selected so the left side panel part of the row is highlighted. The “Pattern vol.” is selected from the drop-down menu because the user is currently adjusting the bassline pattern volume automation. Pattern’s note content is untouchable and is darkened and behind the automation drawing view.]

17. The way pattern clips are inserted should be improved

In my opinion the thing that doesn’t work currently is how you build your song with the pattern clips. Clips are nice way to build a song (someone may think Logic Pro sequencer now) and I think that method should be praised and its usability has to be improved.

Right-clicking once on empty area in clip section could bring menu with the following menu items: “New pattern clip” a list of “Existing patterns” that can be added too by that way. Same thing for audio clip row (menu item: “Open sample...”).

18. New option to pattern right-click menu: “Ghost pattern notes in every piano roll”

So, when you right-click “Pattern 11” and select the checkable option “Ghost pattern notes in every piano roll”, then the pattern’s piano roll will be seen faded at the background of every piano roll. This is good for making chord/note progression that follows the main progression so you don’t have to assume or remember

how the things are. Currently the ghosting is different; ghosting only shows the notes that are in the same pattern in different channel.

19. Automation control points should show the value [added in v1.4]

The value of the control point should be shown next to it. There should be an option for this if user wants to hide the values.

20. New feature: ability to mute audio clips from playlist's clip view [added in v1.4]

This option is for instant comparisons during clip placement. There could be a key + click combination or other button in tool menu bar above the clip area that mutes the selected audio clip. The mute state could be shown as red color or cross or something like that on the clip.

21. New feature: ability to automate the basic properties in audio clips [added in v1.4]

At least volume automation inside a clip could be nice so you don't need to sacrifice a clip row for that.

Piano roll

22. Change the piano roll note property right-click "Note properties / Channel controls" menu to tabs or radio buttons at the left side of the note property control area

Why to hide the options behind right-click menu when there is even a space ready for the mentioned options? Without any further thinking, those menu items could be there for faster switch between modes during note property modification.

23. New piano roll title bar menu option: "Show notes on keys" [edited in v1.4]

Good option for newbies and for those who don't know/remember the keys and produce music with mouse hacking (put the notes in that sound ok together style).

The notes should be shown with 50% transparency and only in white keys.

Browser

24. New browser right-click menu items: "Add folder...", "Rename...", "Delete folder...", "Copy to folder..." and "Move to folder..."

When working on project it is handy to have the ability to organize your samples in folders etc. when adding new samples and other stuff to your song. I know there is "Explore folder" option in the right-click menu, but give this idea a thought.

25. New title bar menu item: "Configure folder structure..." [edited in v1.4]

Ability to hide the folders you don't use. For example, I don't use anything else but my Samples folder (and my Songs folder) from the browser to add samples to samplers. Browsing generators, presets or other stuff from browser feels messy. There are way too much subfolders and different main folders (lots of folders visible when all the folders are collapsed), in general. Without any reordering or deleting the FL Studio default content, the best solution is to give the user an option to hide the folders he doesn't need.

Plug-ins -> General

26. Preset browser to plug-ins [edited in v1.5]

Browser would be at the left or right side of the plug-in and user should have ability to hide it if it takes too much space to be open all the time. It's not drop-down or cursor menu, it's a list like in Native Instruments' Massive or reFX's Nexus.

Scenario:

1. You want to find a sound from which you want to build your sound for the project.
2. You open your plug-in and browse the plug-in browser categories (bass, pad, lead...) and pick one.
3. Then you play with your MIDI keyboard and same time switch the presets with your arrow key (up and down... of course the browser section must be selected/active).

Another interesting thing would be separate plug-in preset browser that shows the same plug-ins in a list that will be shown when you press the title bar menu button and then choose the presets menu item from the plug-in. The preset browser list updates to that list what the plug-in contains when you select different plug-in.

Plug-ins -> Sytrus

27. "Bigger controls, smaller keyboard keys, less confusion and use of magnifying glass" [edited in v1.5]

I just love Sytrus, it's so amazing synth, but one essential thing is off path a little. The thing is that the Sytrus has way too small controls (and way too big keyboard – MIDI or PC keyboard and piano roll do the thing anyways).

Option that allows user to show / hide the Sytrus keyboard in Sytrus could be added to its title bar menu. When the KB is hidden there is more space for controls, in case you think bigger controls takes too much space. I would certainly love to have bigger faders, knobs and checkbox buttons in Sytrus. As far as I know it's not the main important thing to have as small plug-in interface and controls as possible, especially these days when people mostly use 22" monitors and up. It doesn't bother me if the Sytrus window is 50% taller (after keyboard removal) and 50% wider if I can finally see what I'm controlling there. Although, there are other plug-ins in FL that have little control knobs too.

But people, comments? Am I the only one? 😊