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Reviews

Toon Boom Studio is a welcome addition to the arsenal of creative tools for OS X



Pros *Excellent animation features based on traditional methods + Lip sync feature helps facial animation + Support for Wacom pressure-sensitive pens*

Cons *No text tool*

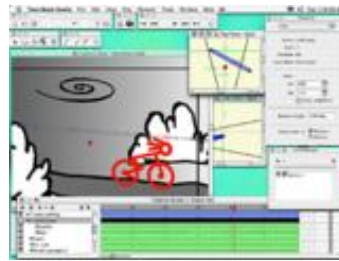
Maker *Toon Boom Technologies*

Contact *Toon Boom Technologies 001 514 278 8666*

Price *\$374, education price \$124*

Date *Vol 18 Issue 2*

Toon Boom Studio 1.0.1



Tools such as Director and Flash have offered animation features for years, but traditional animators haven't always warmed to these digital offerings. Now a completely new

application, Toon Boom Studio, aims to fill that gap by providing all the features that animators really want.

Toon Boom Technologies' Toon Boom Studio is a fully featured 2D Web graphics animation package. It uses the core Flash graphics and animation technology developed by Macromedia, but bases the entire application around the techniques that have been used for decades in traditional animation. The result is a touch quirky, but rather impressive. It's also Mac OS X-only, so if you're currently bemoaning the lack of an OS X-native version of Flash, this could be your salvation.

Toon Boom Studio has two work modes: Drawing and Sceneplanning. The graphic elements of an animation are created, tweaked and inked in the Drawing mode, while Sceneplanning takes these elements and provides timeline and scene layout windows.

Top drawer

The Drawing mode offers graphic tools reminiscent of Flash, but with a less quirky, more clearly object-oriented approach. Toon Boom Studio's Brush Drawing tools are pressure sensitive, which allows very expressive illustration, but all strokes are created as separate objects rather than combining as paint. Fills can be applied separately with the Paint tool and gaps in open paths can be invisibly closed with custom shapes. There's no text tool, so you'll have to import text as graphics from other applications.

The Sceneplanning mode offers a form of 3D object

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positioning. This provides a useful way to arrange different graphic elements in front of the camera's view. Background scenery is placed further back, while mid and foreground elements are positioned proportionately nearer the camera using the Top View, Side View and Properties windows.

Elements moved around the scene over time will grow or shrink as they're moved nearer or further away from the camera. This makes animation choreography pleasingly simple. Multiple scenes can be set up within a single Toon Boom Studio document, so you can easily achieve graphic and colour consistency across whole animation productions.

Refined palettes

Toon Boom Studio has a number of different palettes, organised to task, but as these palettes are unlabelled and the tool icons are unusually stylised, it can take a while before you're ready to grab the right one without hesitation.

Graphics can be animated in two basic ways. One method is to assign one or more elements to 'pegs', which are then tweened in the Sceneplanning mode's timeline. Motion can be eased in and out via motion control paths, complete with Bezier-style handle.

The other animation method uses the Exposure Sheet in the Drawing mode, cycling through different frames for a single graphic. This allows complex animations to be put together within a single graphic element, with multiple layers for separate parts of an overall item, then moved through the scene via the timeline while playing through its drawn frames.

If you prefer to do graphics work in other applications, Toon Boom Studio will import Illustrator and Flash (SWF) files. The Flash import expands the SWF artwork, creating a series of graphic elements in the Exposure Sheet and the Timeline. However, Toon Boom Studio doesn't attempt to tackle the interactive aspects of Flash. It's a shame there are no Flash-like features for triggering looping, pausing and starting playback from clicks, but the Toon Boom Studio manual includes instructions for adding these features in Flash. Productions can be exported in QuickTime as well as SWF format.

Lip service

One unique trick that will please character animators is the Lip Sync feature. Toon Boom Studio can analyse the waveform of an imported sound element and assign different example graphics and labels to key points in the

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audio. It's relatively simple to arrange the appropriate facial graphics in the Exposure Sheet to match the Lip Sync examples.

For regular audio syncing, the graphic waveform display helps the user make visuals tie in with sounds.

Toon Boom Studio is a welcome addition to the arsenal of creative tools for OS X. This level of traditional 2D animation can be a nightmare to tackle in Flash, but Toon Boom makes it easy and fun. You need OS X to use it, but these days that shouldn't be a problem. All in all, Toon Boom Studio is a great tool for creative animators.

Keith Martin

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