

Toon Boom Studio

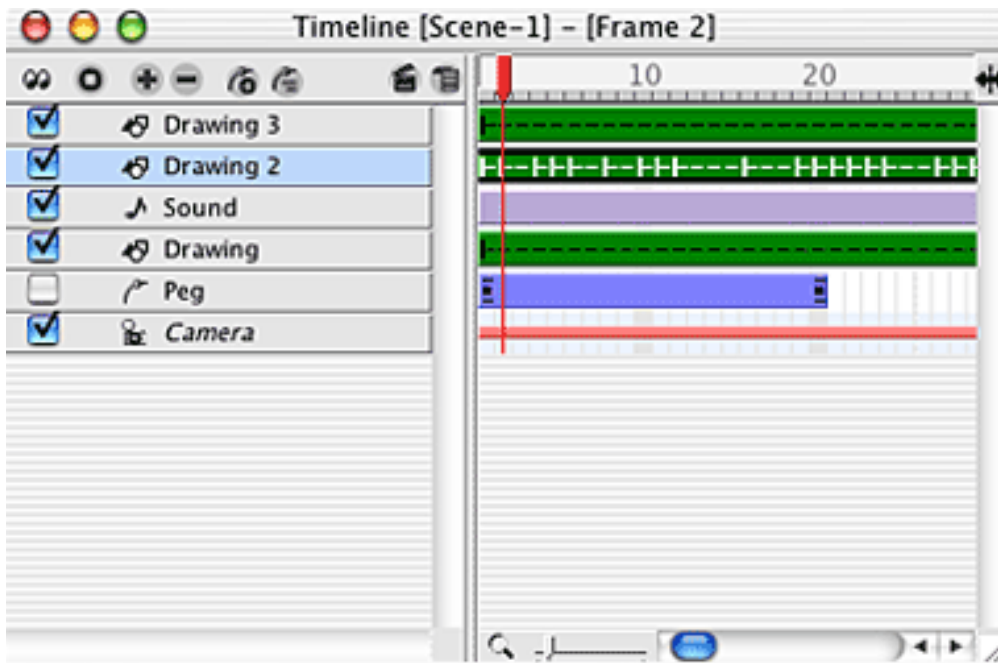
by Jeff Foxx

The internet has opened a whole new door of creativity with the introduction of Flash cartoons. From weekly [Strongbad e-mails](#) to bizarre one hit wonders [badgers, badgers, badgers](#), Web toons are a whole new medium for animators. With its introduction, Toon Boom Studio version 1 brought harmony between the old world of cell animation and the new world of tweening and vector animation. Version 2.5 is now available for Mac and it brings the amazing animation tools of its predecessor while adding some slick new features.

If you are familiar with Toon Boom Studio, getting up and running with version 2.5 will be a breeze. The layout is the same, with the same interface. If you are starting with this version, don't worry, there couldn't be a simpler layout. For more information on the basic layout of Toon Boom Studio, read the MacReview [review](#) of version 1.2.

The Goods

While new features may not jump off the screen, the added functionality in this upgrade make it well worth checking out. Each of the new features are designed to make animating a little easier, so I want to highlight a few of them that I think are the biggest values in this upgrade.



Like Flash, Toon Boom's scene planning mode has a chronological timeline, where the scene is laid out.

Bitmap To Vector Conversion.

Like Flash, TBS can now convert bitmap art into vector art. It does an amazing job, too, creating a vector version almost indistinguishable from the

MacReview

[Alphabetical Index](#)

[Category Index](#)



Version: 2.5

Type: Commercial

Street Price: \$374, \$230 (upgrade from Express), \$199 (Update old version)

Requires: PowerMac G5 or G4, OSX 10.3, 256MB RAM (512 recommended)

Strength: Makes web animation simple. Added features speed up process even more.

Weakness: Somewhat high price tag, no included support.

Rating:

Intended Function: 5

Ease Of Use: 4

User Interface: 3.5

Documentation: 2.5

Features: 4.5

Uniqueness: 5

Value: 4



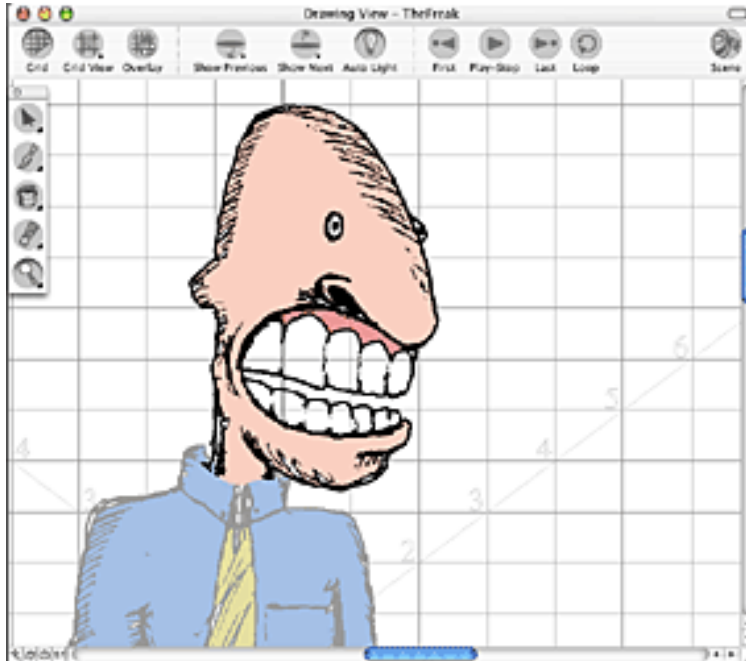
Available At:

[Toon Boom](#)

Reviewer:

Jeff Foxx is an art director for a multimedia and web development company. He also never wears a suit.

bitmap. Results are far better than several of the standalone conversion tools. The vector image allows for smaller file size in your final animation. The only downside, is that the vectorized bitmap is often so complex (consisting of thousands of points and lines), that it can slow down your final animation if played in the Flash Player and cause syncing to get off between animation and audio.



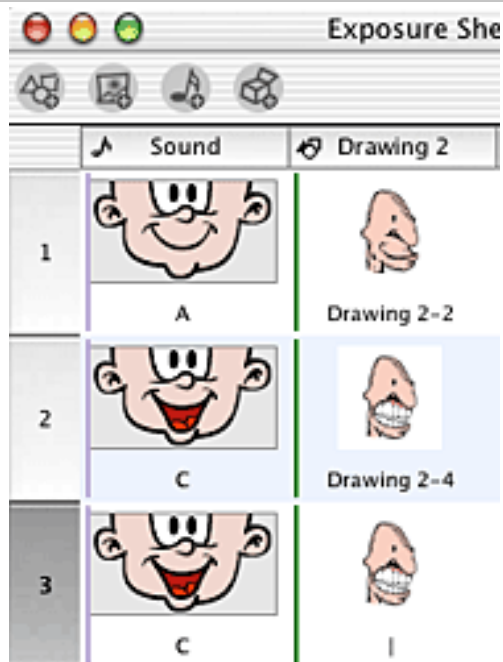
Toon Boom's drawing tools allow you easily sketch new drawings, or touch up imported ones.

Scanner TWAIN Import.

For those who don't have a tablet, you can now draw your scene on paper and scan directly into TBS. This saves a lot of time in scanning in an external application and importing, and combined with the bitmap vectorization feature, makes for a quick easy workflow.

Audio And Lip Synch Improvements

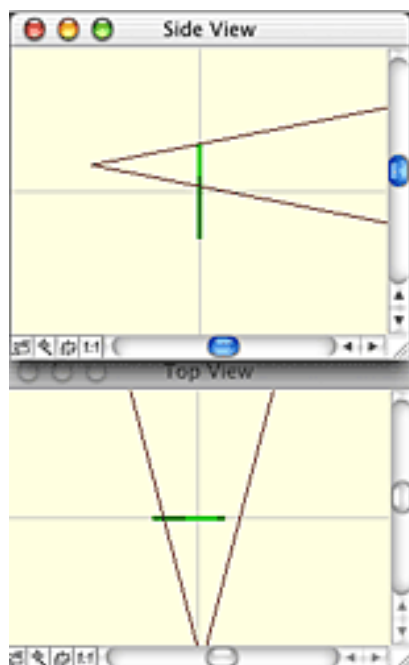
Version 2 now lets you scrub through audio, which is helpful to insure everything is synching with your audio and animation. Lip synch mapping has been improved as well. As in version 1, TBS analyzes your voice audio file and creates a map of facial expressions to match. Then, you simply draw each frame of your character to match the facial expressions of the default TBS character. But version 2 makes it even easier, by allowing you to simply map a series of facial expressions in your character to those of the default character, and TBS will fill them in for you automatically. This saves tons of time in matching up lip synch frames.



The improved lip sync features in version 2.5 make adding voice to your characters a breeze. Simply mimic the mouth shapes of the generated character with your character.

Export Options A-Plenty

In addition to SWF and Quicktime, Version 2 adds new export options. You can now export your animation as QuickTime with alpha channels and sound, AVI (who uses those?), and image sequences. But the biggest news is you can now export as DV Stream. This is great news for users of iMovie, which can import natively the DV Stream file.



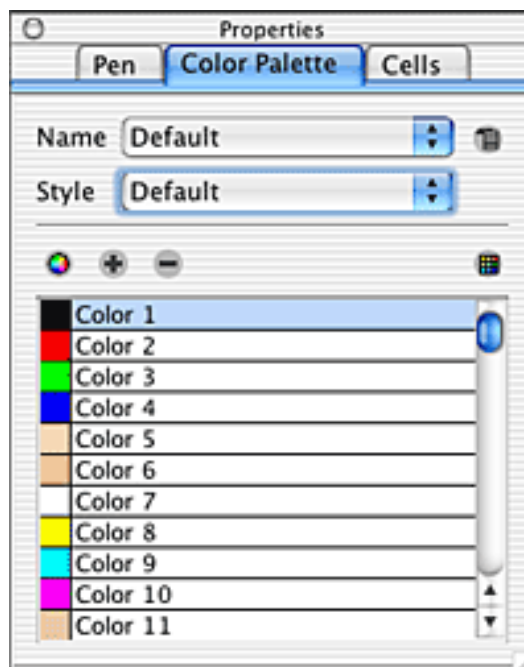
Tools like the side and top views allow for 2-D animations to take on more three dimensional qualities.

The Bads

My only major complaint with Toon Boom Studio is that it doesn't come with

support. At \$374, it should come with some kind of limited support period. Especially since the concepts and methods used in Toon Boom Studio are unique. Instead, users must purchase support at \$50 for a year. A printed manual will also cost you an additional \$50. Granted the application is simple to use, so support and a manual may not be necessary.

The user interface, while attractive and neat, is a bit unconventional and takes a while to learn. There are some quirks, like selecting a color, that almost seem designed to slow you down. Toon Boom requires you to define a palette and add colors to your palette before using them. One good thing about this method is that if you use a color, and decide later you wish you had made it a shade darker, you can easily adjust it, and it will adjust all of your drawings that use that color. But compared to other drawing programs, it seems cumbersome.



The color palette is a bit cumbersome. Especially if you are drawing new objects and have to build a new palette from scratch.

Final Thoughts

At \$199, Toon Boom Studio v. 2.5 is a pricey upgrade from previous versions. Older versions are very capable, and there are few added features in this new version that can't be done with older versions. Still, the ease of use that this version brings to the process makes the upgrade worth the price. It is especially valuable if you rely on Toon Boom Studio to produce professional animations and you would benefit from the time-saving features added in this update.

If you are a hobbyist interested in dabbling in Web cartooning and the \$374 price tag is just too daunting, you might consider Toon Boom Studio Express which allows you to get your feet wet for only \$144 and comes with the ability to upgrade to the full version of Toon Boom Studio for \$230 if you

decide you need the extended functionality.

[Return to the Toon Boom Studio reviews index](#)

     **Excellent**     **Good**    **OK**   **Poor**  **Worthless**

[Alphabetical Index](#)

[Category Index](#)

[Reader Opinions](#)

Copyright ©1995-2004 Mark Starlin