



Provides: 2D animation

Format: Electronic download or CD

Developer: [Toon Boom Animation, Inc.](#)

Minimum Requirements: Mac OS X v10.4.7, PowerPC G5 or Intel Core processor, 256MB RAM, 120MB hard disk space, Wacom tablet recommended

Retail Price: \$399.99 (+\$10 for boxed version); \$99.99 upgrade from v3 or v3.5

Availability: Out now

Demo Available: [Try before you buy.](#)

Programs such as Toon Boom Studio make me want to quit reviewing software. Although I get to try out and discover more programs than most of my Macintosh using peers, the drawback is that I often don't get the time to really use the software I evaluate outside of the work environment. I can test features, find bugs, and experiment for weeks, but it's almost always without having produced anything of worth.

Such is the case with Toon Boom Studio 4, which is one my favorite Macintosh programs ever. At least, I *think* it is. I don't really know, because every time I sit down to really have fun with it—to create something for entertainment purposes instead of to see if a certain feature really works—my Applelinks or other duties pull me away. If I could retire tomorrow, I would, and I would spend the rest of my days creating cartoons and publishing them to YouTube. Good cartoons. Cartoons you would like.

The amazing thing about all of this is that *I can't draw*. Not a line, not a shade. Even when I used to doodle during those boring high school government classes, it was always of mountain ranges with fighter jets far off the distance, always flying away from my point of view, thereby requiring as little detail as possible. With Toon Boom Studio, that's all I'd need to create a 2D cartoon.

Bear in mind, however, that there are many fantastic drawing tools built into Toon Boom Studio, of course. The company does recommend a Wacom drawing tablet, after all, and it uses it well. New to this version are feather edges, which make it easier to create blurs. This can provide a cool, cinematic effect in which you blur the edges of objects in the frame to draw attention to another objects, such as the person speaking. What would be really cool would be an automated way to fade from a solid edge to a blurred edge—with tweening, for example—so the blurring becomes part of the animation.

Adobe users will be happy to learn that Toon Boom Studio 4 now supports Illustrator layers. As great as Toon Boom Studio's drawing features are, Illustrator's are better. So, being able to draw in Illustrator and bring them into Toon Boom with full layer access is a tremendous help and productivity boost.

Alpha onion skinning is now offered, improving on the already robust onion skinning feature. For those not used to animating their drawings, the ability onion skin both forwards and backwards (seeing the frames ahead and behind of the one on which you're working) is a tremendous asset. An even bigger asset is the lip-syncing feature, which automatically analyses your voice audio and assigns one of the traditional eight mouth positions to the clip. You can override this if necessary, but I never needed to. In my basic tests, I found Toon Boom's auto lip-syncing to be more accurate than many of the cartoons my kids watch, and it was never so far off that it looked obviously wrong.

Toon Boom touts its improved workspace, and whereas claims such as this are usually pretty hollow, it holds weight here. As with Mac OS X's Spaces feature, you can preprogram multiple workspace layouts and easily cycle through them. Set up one that's convenient for you when drawing or tracing, then switch to your animation workspace for that functionality, and move on to another workspace when working on your 3D camera sweeps.

One of my favorite features of Toon Boom continues to be cut-out animation, which allows you to create your animations with cut-out pieces in a paper doll style. Each piece of your subject is a

separate entity with a pivot point around which it rotates. You're not going to get natural looking walking motion with this technique, but it can be a pretty cool effect if it fits the style of your project, and it's quite simple to do. Again, it's the type of technique that allows those of us who can't draw to create animations.

There are far too many features in Toon Boom Studio to discuss here, so I'll send you to [their website](#) for more. While there, you can see many screen captures and animation samples, so I recommend you visit. Here at Applelinks, I want to take a moment to highlight Toon Boom's support system, which is robust. I've always found their online community forum to be helpful, even if it sometimes takes a bit to get a reply to your question. Toon Boom's website also offers Job Connections, which allows Toon Boom animators to post a resume and view job opportunities, while employers can seek animators for their project. As I write this review, five jobs are posted, only one of which is in the U.S. Similarly, of the 13 resumes currently posted, only one is from an animator living in the United States. Have Disney and Nicktoons swallowed up all the American animators?

Toon Boom also posts a comprehensive list of animation festivals and contests, which not only serve as inspiration for your animations, but also as impetus. If it's taking a while for you to complete your project, give yourself a deadline by finding a competition to enter. The potential for cash rewards can be quite effective.

All of this is especially helpful considering there's no printed manual included with the purchase or available separately. Instead, you get a large PDF (over 400 pages) and a wealth of paid support options. You can purchase annual tech support packages at \$49.99 (next day support) or \$99.99 (live support) per year, and there's an online training option, although no price is given for that, of course. But perhaps more useful than all of this are the wealth of e-learning options. There are various [Workout Series](#) packages available for anywhere from \$14.99 (cut-out character rigging) to \$29.99 (two- or four-legged walk cycle workouts), each of which is assigned a difficulty level. If you're looking for some instruction but don't want to pay, the [Tips and Tricks](#) collection provides some basic routines with sample materials, when appropriate. Other tutorials, project templates and documentation are available; some of this is free, some you have to buy, and all of it is useful. For instance, by purchasing the [In the Park template](#), you get the backgrounds, props, characters (with multiple eye and mouth positions) and everything else you need to create an animation without have to actually draw anything. It's a perfect way to learn animating quickly.

What this all comes down to is the fact that Toon Boom is not only creating and supporting a great program, but they're supporting the community the software engenders, as well. They seem genuinely interested in what people who purchase Toon Boom Studio are going to do with it. Sure, they want to make money off of those people, but that's fair, considering the bulk of paid support materials are helping Toon Boom users get up to speed with the program so they can make money off of it.

And even if you don't, Toon Boom Studio is fun to use. There's a learning curve, sure, but it's not insurmountable, and even getting over it can be enjoyable if you've got the time and patience to devote to the software (and the finances, as \$400 is a lot to spend to just "have fun" with a program). Those already proficient with Toon Boom Studio will like some of the new features, but it's obvious with this upgrade that Toon Boom is still looking to increase its user base by making the program easier to use and friendlier towards those with Illustrator experience.

And who knows? Maybe before too long my cartoons of jet fighters flying away over mountain ranges will get their own half hour show on Nickelodeon. I think I'll try to get Patrick Warburton to play the voice of the F-16.

Applelinks Rating



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