

[home](#)[news](#)[reviews](#)[tips](#)[subscribe](#)[win](#)[about digit](#)[latest issue](#)[Home](#) » [Reviews](#) » [Toon Boom Studio](#)

07 Feb 2002 | 23:05 GMT



Digit TV



Project: Wipeout Fusion.com



Reader's FORUM



Digit Buyer's Guide

Digit poll

What technology will rock in 2002?

[DVD authoring](#)[Web 3D](#)[Web video](#)[3D game tools](#)[CGI movies](#)[DV movies](#)[VR movies](#)[Other](#)

Toon Boom Studio Mac | PC

Toon Boom, www.toonboomstudio.com

Toon Boom, 001 514 278 8666

\$349

One of the criticisms levelled at Macromedia's Flash – the Web animation tool rather than the format – is that it's more of a finishing tool than a truly artistic one. Although great at building interactive animations and Web sites, it's less hot at doing what it made its name at – drawing and designing Web cartoons. Macromedia has tried to address this by bumping up the integration between Flash and its own vector-art tool FreeHand – but now there's a tool that really shows how it can be done. Enter Toon Boom Studio.

The package and the eponymous company behind it may garner a few scratched heads from Web creatives, but the name is well respected in the world of traditional animation. Toon Boom's central offering, USAnimation, has been around for some time (it's now on version 5) and is used in major animated movies by everyone from Disney to DreamWorks. Its cost (many thousands of pounds), however, has kept it out of the reach of the Web market. Now, with the launch of Toon Boom Studio, everyone has a chance to play with what they've learned over the years.

Working in Toon Boom Studio is split between two collections of windows and palettes that you flip between using buttons at the top right of the screen or a keyboard shortcut. These is a Drawing mode for creating



[view results](#)

elements and Scene planning for animation.

Dope sheet

Drawing mode combines inking and painting (drawing the outline and then filling in the middle in animator parlance) with a dope sheet (here called the Exposure sheet). Not something for chemically enhancing your work like it sounds, this is the traditional animator's wall planner for managing assets and pre-comp layout. Although less integral to laying out your work than in traditional animation (as this is mainly done in TB Studio's scene-planning mode) it still forms the basis of your scene, combining Flash's symbols library with a sketchpad.

The drawing tools in themselves are not that spectacular – the usual collection of brushes and shape tools. What makes them great is their implementation. As well a Flash-familiar onion-skinning system using the metaphor of a light table with layers of cels, you get support for pressure-sensitive Wacom tablets and even the ability to bring in bitmaps and convert them to vectors. You can also work with unfinished elements, which is great for team-based projects. An unlimited number of colour palettes are on offer – with an unlimited number of colours per palette – and you can even name your colour pots to make the whole process easier.

Mouthing off

One of the drawing mode's best features for animators producing pieces with characters is the lip-synching feature. This includes the ability to listen to sound files of the human voice, automatically identify each phoneme (separate speech sound) and show you the appropriate mouth shape. You can then copy from this in your own drawings. This works incredibly well as long as you keep things simple by placing different speakers in different sound files and using clear, enunciated vocals (which most Web animations do anyway). Integral to this is the ability to work with multiple sound files, so that the lip-synching tool can tell the vocals from the background music, for example.

Scene planning mode is where you animate your creations. This is the part of Toon Boom Studio that looks most like Flash, though no more than it looks like Adobe After Effects or LiveMotion. The timeline, properties palette and viewing windows all work as in Flash – though the camera metaphor lets you see the area immediately around the final output view.



Subscribe now!

Contact Digit

International
Digit Poland

Get eDigit FREE
Sign up for
twice-weekly news

Design events
Listings of shows & expos

Opinion articles
Views and hot topics

IDG.co.uk

Webcreate.co.uk

Macworld.co.uk

PCAdvisor.co.uk

What will be new to you are the top and side view windows. At its most basic level, this lets you see how your elements layer up. However, you can also make elements move in all directions, shifting behind and in front of each other as you wish. A perspective system makes objects larger and smaller, and faster and slower, to give a realistic sense of scale. Motion paths can be worked on in the camera view window or in the properties palette with full access to bézier motion curves. The palette also allows precise manipulation of all of each element's properties.

The software can't work in true 3D, though. All elements, including the camera, have to sit parallel to each other, giving an effect similar to a Victorian child's-own theatre. Even so, this is a step up on all other packages used for Web animation except After Effects – which can now do true 3D.

TB Studio outputs small file sizes, with controls over the level of JPEG compression on bitmaps. However, they're not as highly compressed as those exported from Flash itself, though they're better than the output of LiveMotion or After Effects. You also get an extensive export report that breaks the scene down frame by frame.

Legacy free

Being a new product with no legacy, TB Studio only runs under Windows 2000 and Mac OS X, and can only output Flash 5 and QuickTime 4 files, though MP3 and streamed audio are supported on top of the standard PCM and ADPCM. Its import filters are more open – able to work with version 4 and 5 Flash files, Adobe Illustrator, many bitmap file formats and WAV, AIFF and MP3 format audio. The software's newness does have its downside, though. Some features, such as Undo, don't always work as they should – and some, such as Save as, don't exist at all. However, there are generally fewer bugs than we usually find in a v1.0 piece of software.

Although TB Studio is aimed primarily at creating static Web cartoons and animation, I can't help but wish it could get involved in other areas of Web design. Combining its creative tools with Flash's interactivity and ActionScripting would be fantastic, but unfortunately the Studio only exports encased SWF files. You can get round this to some degree by exporting each element separately and re-layering in Flash – but this is time-consuming, and doesn't allow for much editing.

From the well thought-out keyboard shortcuts to the extensive list of

extra features that were added in response to the public beta release, you can tell that a lot of effort has gone into creating Toon Boom Studio. If you needed a reason to upgrade to Mac OS X or Windows 2000, this is it.

A great tool for creating Web cartoons and animations with export support for Flash and QuickTime – though interactivity is needed.

- Neil Bennett

[Privacy Statement](#)

All contents ©IDG 2002 | webmaster@digitmag.co.uk

Hosted and supported by [BTA](#)