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Toon Boom Studio Explodes Onto the OS X Scene

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Technical Writer

I recently had the opportunity to try out a new piece of software for the Mac, Toon Boom Studio, by [Toon Boom Technologies](#). It is a 2-D animation tool, which creates and opens Macromedia Flash files. The program is brand new to the market, and the MacOS version is strictly for MacOS X. I consider that to be a bold and forward-thinking move on their part. The software is version 1.0, written for an OS which is essentially at version 1.0, so there are a few things that aren't quite as polished as they could be (I also had a pre-release version), but the program seems to do everything that it claims to.

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In Toon Boom, you work in either sceneplanning mode or drawing mode. The two main windows for drawing mode are the drawing window (duh) and the Exposure window. All drawing is done as vector art, so there is the basic complement of vector drawing tools. In order to do some motion work, drawing mode has an "onion skin" feature, which lets you layer your original and derivative cells to let you see a few cells previous for reference as you draw the current cell. You use an Exposure Sheet to layer your cells, which is basically a spreadsheet with the columns being design elements and the rows indicating frames. One cool trick of the program is the "Lip-Synch" feature, which is designed to make it easier to have character's mouth movements look natural for the sound that they're producing (i.e. your animations shouldn't look like a Kung Fu movie).

The Scene-planing mode has a few windows of note. There's a few "view" windows, which show the view that the camera has, a sideview and a top view. This way, your scene is actually laid out in 3D-space (and you can move the camera, to further enhance the 3D experience). There's also a timeline window, which is very similar to the Exposure window of the Drawing mode. The other important window in this mode is the Properties window, whose content shows the numerical values for whatever element is selected, allowing you to change the values there. To make

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gradual changes to elements, you create a "peg" in the timeline, and tell Toon Boom to attach a particular element to that peg. Then, in the properties window you define what attributes are changed, how drastically & over how long.

Toon Boom can export images as single drawings, animation sequences, or full scenes in Flash's swf format for use on the web or further manipulation with other flash-compatible tools. When exporting in swf format, the file retains full characteristics and symbol assignments.

I expect the product to mature quite quickly, once it hits the streets and feedback starts pouring in. As my copy was pre-release, there were a couple features that were either not ready yet or incomplete. The response that I got to comments on most issues, however was that they would be complete by the 1.0 release date. One feature which will not be ready for version 1.0, but will be in version 1.1 is fading. I got around the lack of fading by using an external program to alter the opacity of my image for the faded frames. Of course, that has the byproduct of having the fade be an entirely separate image...taking up space in the file or bandwidth for the download. As with all things X, I there will be some growing pains, but Toon Boom has gotten off to a good start.



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