



3D Painting and Texturing!

ToonBoom Studio

Creating explosive animations with inexpensive software
by Stephen Schleicher


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The lone figure stands silently on the precipice of the building ledge surveying the city below. Off in the distance an explosion! The superhero springs into action to foil another dastardly deed. Could this be the opening to the next Batman installment? Typical Saturday morning fare? No, it's Flash animation created with ToonBoom Studio.



Unlike other Flash creation programs, which want users to use basic shapes or clumsy tools to create animations, ToonBoom Studio treats Flash animation creation very much like traditional animation. In fact, those familiar with ToonBoom Technology's other offering USAnimation, might see this program as a "lite" version or a stepping-stone to the more advanced features found in the higher end application.

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In traditional animation, frames seldom start as perfect line drawings for every character,

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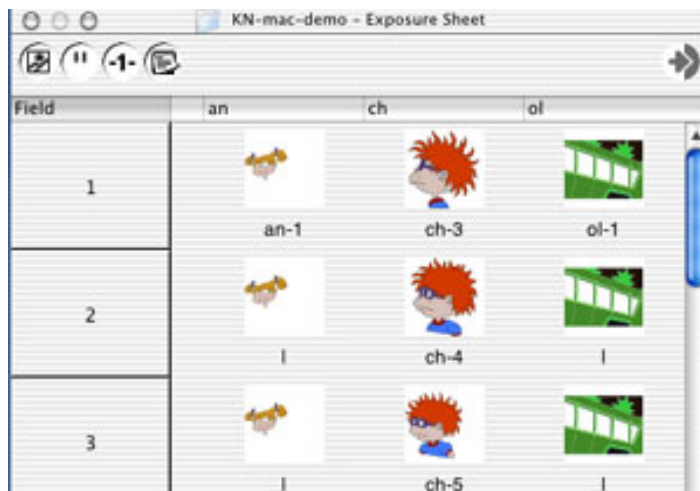
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background, and special effect. Instead the animator will create rough drawings that give the general shape and motion of the subject. These keyframes or key poses are then handed off to the in-betweeners and clean up artists to finish the work. ToonBoom Studio let's you do the same thing. Instead of trying to draw, erase, and correct mistakes in side the application, ToonBoom Studio allows you to import files from other sources. These could be drawings that you sketched out on paper; scanned, and then imported as bitmap files, or they could be drawings or shapes you created in Adobe Illustrator. There are some advantages and disadvantages of these two methods. The obvious advantage is it allows those content creators without access to a graphic tablet, like the Wacom Cintiq, or Intuos2 to create their drawings and scan them into a program like Adobe Photoshop. If you have an auto feed scanner, scanning many pages are a snap. If you have created logos or characters, or have had a client provide you with the proper artwork in Adobe Illustrator, then you are set because ToonBoom Studio uses vector files for animation. Vector based files are an advantage in ToonBoom Studio because you don't have to draw your subject to scale; you can increase or decrease size without affecting resolution.

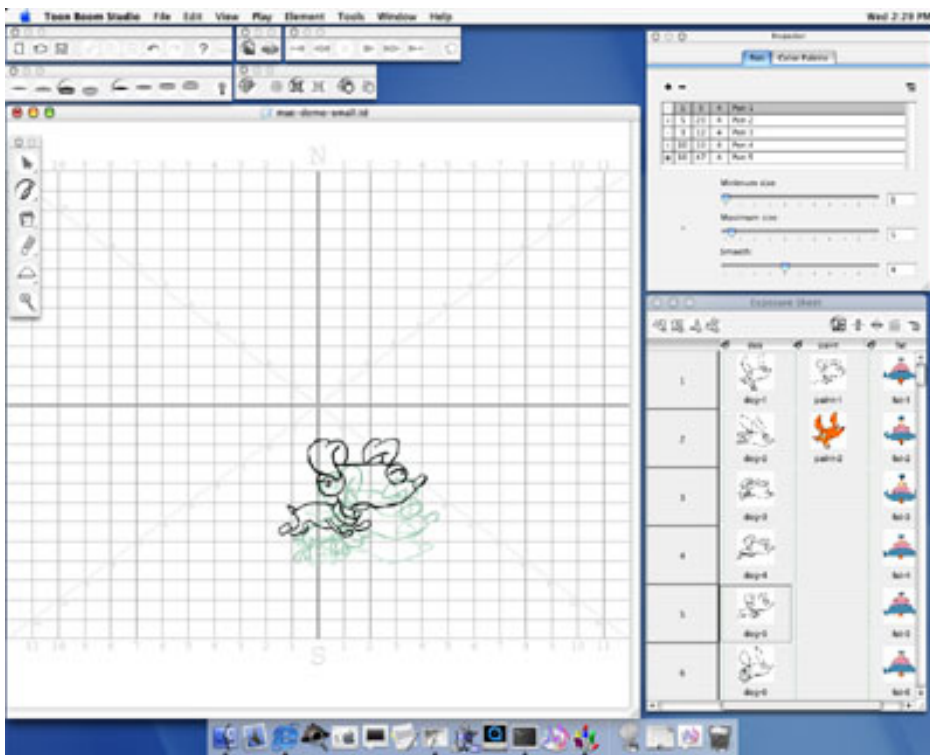
As a rule of thumb, when importing scanned art, you don't want to draw or scan in every single frame, instead you want to only scan in rough keyframes.

To help manage all of the various files you may be using; line art, scanned and converted vector images, flash movies, sound files, etc. ToonBoom Studio uses an Exposure Sheet to help you easily track where you are at various stages of design.

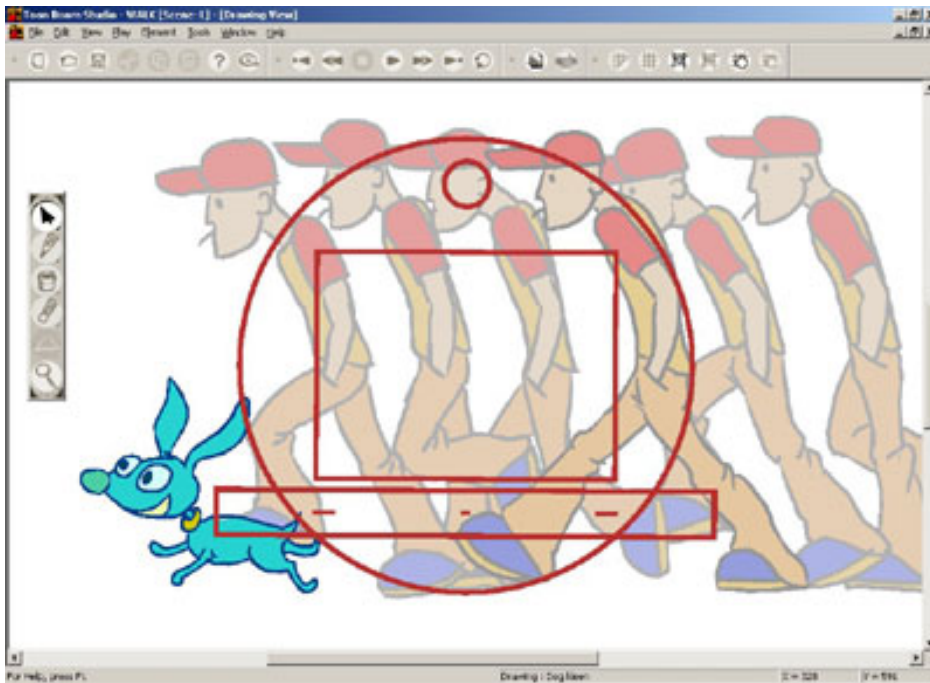


ToonBoom Studio's Exposure Sheet helps the animator keep track of all the elements used during the production process, whether for a TV show or website animation.

Obviously if you don't have a scanner or graphics tablet, you are at a bit of a disadvantage, but again borrowing from traditional animation, ToonBoom Studio has incorporated a lightboard into the animation creation process. This drawing area allows you to rotate the canvas to accommodate your own drawing style. The vector-based drawings that you end up with have their own handles that can be manipulated and tweaked (size, stretch, rotate) to create an animation.



In order to see previous frames, onion skinning has also been included to allow create precise drawings of the subject in action and to do the necessary in-between frames to create smooth motion.



A big plus for ToonBoom Studio is it allows the user to copy portions or all of the subject in one layer and paste them into another page/layer. Then by using the handles of the vector art, the animator only has to change a certain area or section of the subject to quickly create new poses or complete in-betweens. This idea is very similar to the style that Hanna/Barbera used when creating such classics as The Flintstones. The upper portion of a character's body might be static while the legs were animated on another layer. It not only saved time in those days, but also a tremendous amount of ink and paint.

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ToonBoom Studio

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Speaking of ink and paint, once you have traced over - or cleaned up - your scanned images (or drew your own inside ToonBoom Studio with a graphics tablet), and are satisfied with the motions, it is time to paint your cels. One thing I really like about ToonBoom Studio is the ability to create a color model for characters or scenes. For example, let's say you are animating a lumberjack and you give him a brown hat, red checked shirt, blue pants, and tan skin. In ToonBoom Studio, you would create a palette for the character and assign colors that are associated with those items. If the lumberjack goes outside at night the colors would not be the same as the daylight palette. By duplicate the palette and changing the colors to darker shades, two color models are created in a short amount of time. To paint the cels, simply highlight the color in the palette and use the paint bucket to fill in the appropriate area. ToonBoom Studio also includes gradient and transparency settings to create subtle shifts in shading or to create highlights on the subject.

Seems pretty simple, you can do the same thing in almost any 2D graphics program, but how many will let you change a whole series of frames instantaneously? In the lumberjack example, let's say you have drawn and colored 300 frames, and the client comes in and says the color of the pants is all wrong and it needs to be purple (the client is always right). With ToonBoom Studio, all you have to do change the color in the palette and it instantly changes all of the areas in all of the cels that have that particular color. Very handy.

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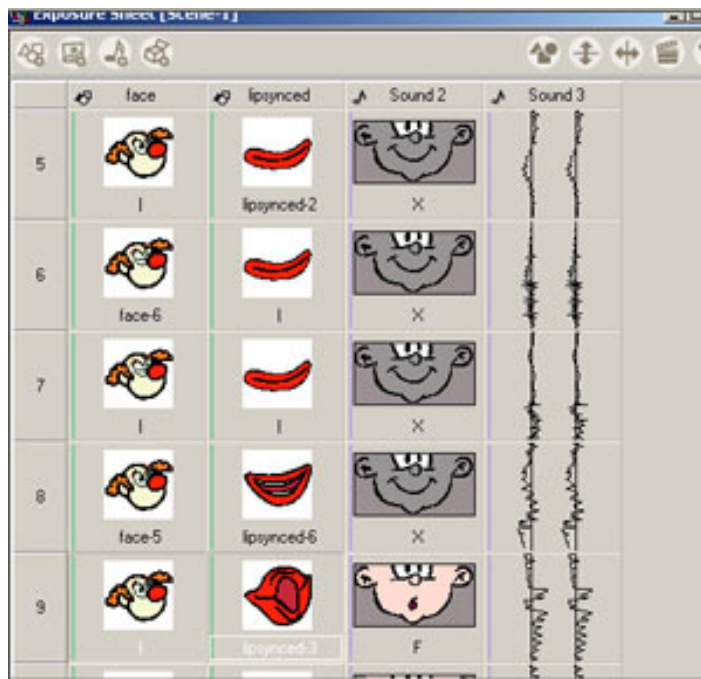


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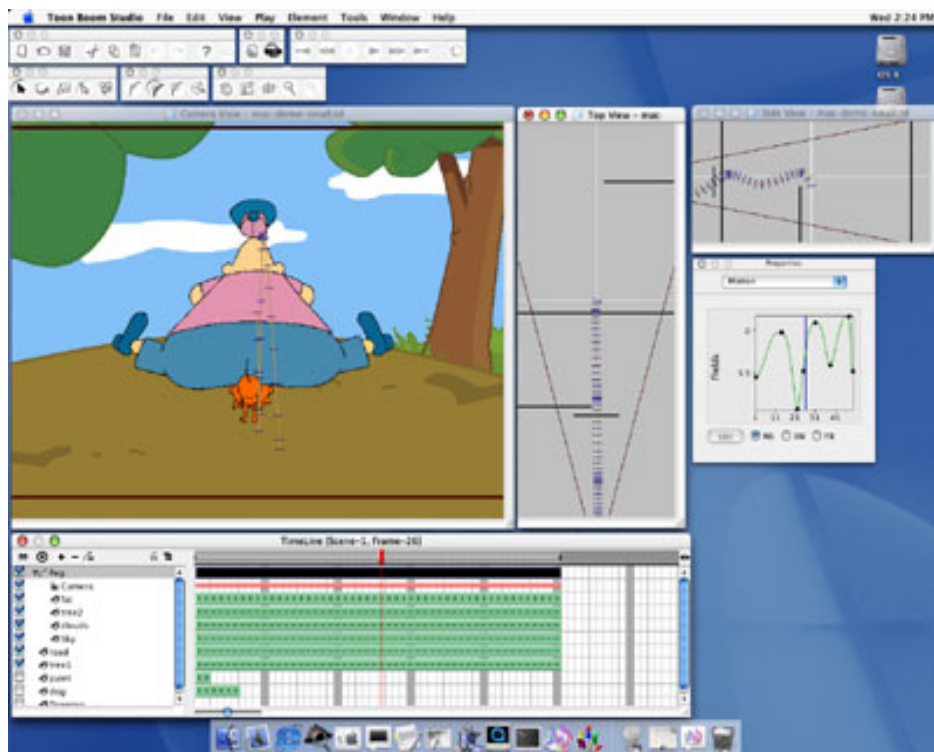
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One other major plus for this program is the Sound Editor. With it, you can import a sound file, make some simple edits, and most powerful of all, automatically generate a phoneme track for you. This allows you to draw your phonemes to match the appropriate mouth shapes, and then have ToonBoom Studio place them into the animation for you. What's more, since phonemes are somewhat universal, you can use the Sound Editor for any language. Again, this may sound like a cheap way to animate, but it is a huge timesaver and does produce very usable results.



Once all of the animated elements are complete, it is time to lay everything out in the Scene planning part of ToonBoom Studio. While similar to a multiplane camera, Scene planning allows you to position all of the elements in 3D space, create moving camera effects, and use a peg system to parent various layers to one another and move them as a group through a scene. At first it may seem like a lot to take in, but coming from a 3D background, a few moments is all it took for me to get everything working. I used

ToonBoom Studio on my Sony VAIO laptop, and also ran the 30 day demo version on my Mac OS X machine. The functionality and ease of use is the same on both platforms, but for some reason I felt more comfortable using it on the Mac.



When everything has been laid out accordingly, all you have to do is export the animation. I mentioned earlier that ToonBoom Studio is excellent for Flash creation, but you can also export your animation in QuickTime format. An exported QuickTime file can easily be imported into an editing application such as Apple's Final Cut Pro, Adobe Premiere, or Media100 i. The latest version of ToonBoom Studio allows export to iMovie for OS X users, and as of a few days ago, ToonBoom Studio also allows you export directly into Macromedia's Flash MX with the TBSi plug-in.

Unfortunately you cannot export an alpha channel with the animation if you plan on doing any compositing, but if the animation background were set to pure white, it would be easy enough to pull a luma matte. Also, the maximum frame size for export is 640x480. While these may seem like disadvantages, remember that ToonBoom Studio is designed with the website animator in mind and not necessarily the video person. If it were, then why would there be a package like USAnimation?

ToonBoom Studio definitely has a place in animation houses that are creating content for the web and multimedia presentations. For \$349.00 it is worth the asking price. ToonBoom Studio is a fun application, but drawing every single frame can get a little labor intensive for some, and while ToonBoom Studio does create Flash animations, if you want to add interactivity, you'll need the full Flash package. Those who have a traditional animation background or experience using higher end animation programs will have not trouble using ToonBoom Studio to create the next action packed webisode of their cartoon hero. I give ToonBoom Studio a Strong Buy Recommendation.

If you'd like to try before you buy, be sure to visit the [ToonBoom Studio site](#) to download the fully functioning 30 day demo for either the Mac OS X or Windows platform.

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