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**TOON BOOM STUDIO
1.0****Rating:**★★★★**Pros:** Strong drawing and import features; lip-sync analysis; dynamic 3-D stage; excellent support.**Cons:** Tedious loop creation; no audio scrubbing; no type tool; minor inaccuracies in printed manual.**Company's estimated price:** \$374; download, \$349**OS compatibility:** Mac OS X**Company:** Toon Boom Technologies 514/278-8666, <http://www.toonboomstudio.com>**Toon Boom Studio 1.0****Dynamic, Fun Application Adds Fuel to the Animation Fire****By Galen Fott**

While Macromedia Flash's vector-based animation lets users produce files that are small enough to be easily distributed on the Web, Flash's technical interface is alien territory to traditionally trained animators. Toon Boom Studio is an innovative new program that can help animators find new audiences on the Web.

Toon Boom Studio sets out to be an entire animation studio, and the extent to which it succeeds is remarkable. The Drawing mode provides polished vector drawing tools, a flexible painting system, an automatically generated lip-sync reference, and an exposure sheet for working out the timing of elements--and that's just part of the program.



This inventive program runs only in Mac OS X, and its dynamic combination of old- and new-school animation provides challenges: many traditional animators will have to become accustomed to working in 3-D space, and experienced computer animators will discover that the quality of Toon Boom Studio's output depends greatly on the drawing ability of the user.

To the Drawing Board

Toon Boom Studio's Drawing mode has digital versions of all the amenities found in a traditional animator's workspace, down to the rotating light table and 12- or 16-field grids. There are simple shape-drawing tools, but if you're an experienced artist, you'll want to head straight for the responsive pencil and brush tools. Using a digitizing tablet with Toon Boom Studio's brush tool gives you pressure-sensitive control over line thickness. (A Wacom driver is included on the CD.) As you animate a sequence, the customizable onion-skinning system lets you view prior and subsequent drawings--an invaluable reference tool.

And if you'd rather work with old-fashioned pencil and paper, Toon Boom Studio has you covered: the Import And Vectorize command takes a scanned drawing saved in BMP format and faithfully converts it to vector art. If your idea of drawing involves a Bézier pen tool, you can import Adobe Illustrator 8 files. The program also lets you import bitmap graphics, which are useful for creating backgrounds.

Each element is stored in its own column in the Exposure Sheet, where you can easily adjust timing, frame by frame in individual cells. Creating loops, such as walking cycles, is a straightforward but somewhat tedious process--you must repeatedly paste a sequence of cells until you've reached your desired length.

Once you've got your 'toons in order, it's time to add the boom: the program lets you import MP3, AIFF, WAV, and PCM audio files. One of the program's most intriguing features is the Show Lip-Sync command, which analyzes sound files and generates reference drawings showing the proper mouth shapes for spoken dialogue. The results are generally good, particularly if you're working at a low frame rate for the Web.

Making a Scene

The program's Sceneplanning mode lets you work multiplane magic as you position and animate your elements, giving you three views--Camera, Top, and Side--of the virtual 3-D stage. Drag an element downward in the Top view, and you'll see it move simultaneously closer in the Camera view. The well-designed Timeline lets you animate elements by attaching them to pegs. You can then set keyframes for these pegs to animate their position, scale, and rotation. Most impressive here is the level

of sophistication Toon Boom Studio provides when it comes to adjusting motion velocity. Clear, easy-to-read graphs let you ease into and out of movements naturalistically.

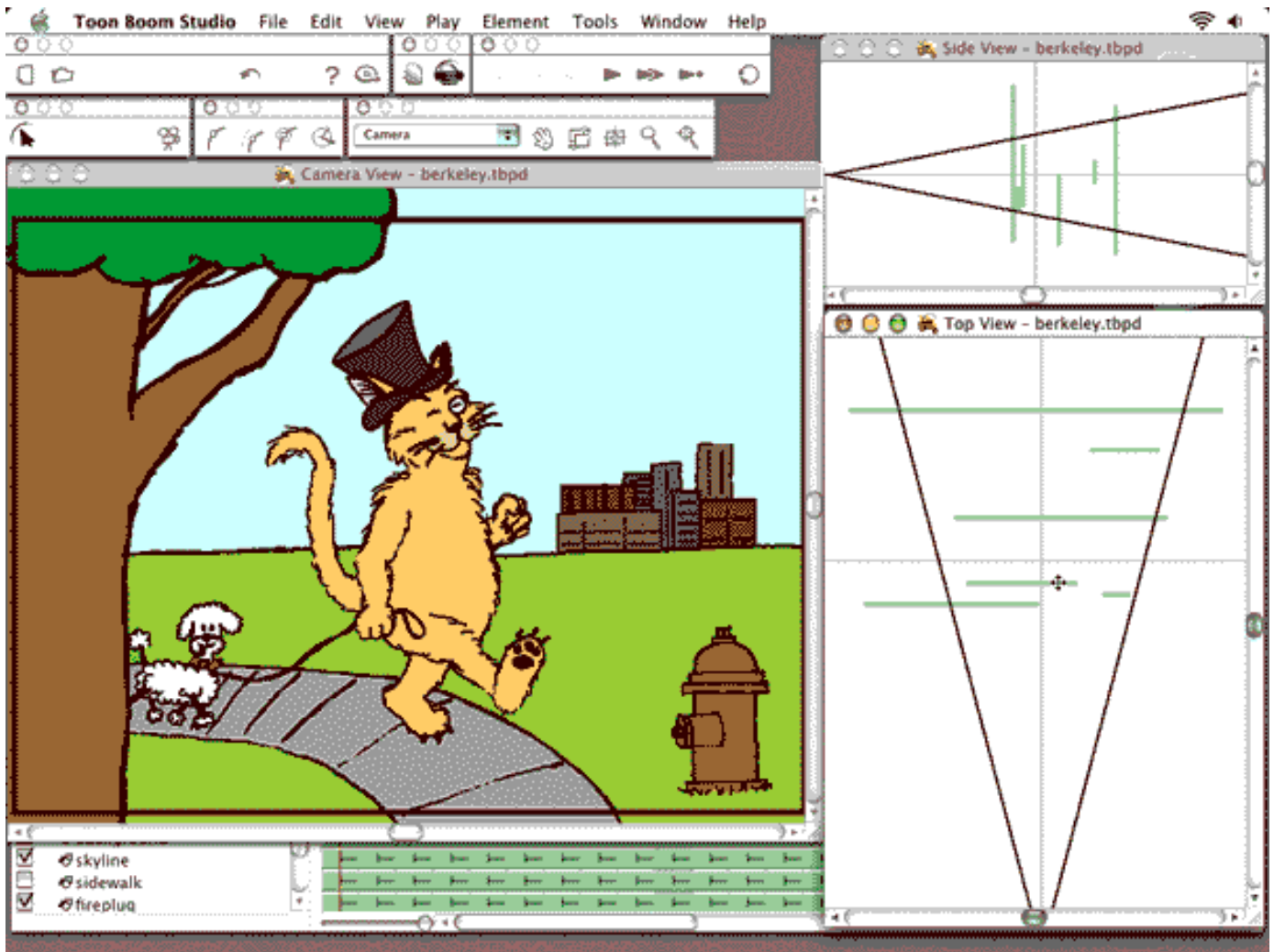
The Scene Manager palette is the key to organizing your work in Toon Boom Studio. Every scene has its own Exposure Sheet and Timeline, which simplifies the organization of large numbers of elements. It's also easy to reorder scenes in the palette when you want to

experiment with different sequences. And should your animation masterpiece give rise to sequels, you can save some elements, such as drawings, pegs, and animated cameras, as templates that you can import into subsequent projects.

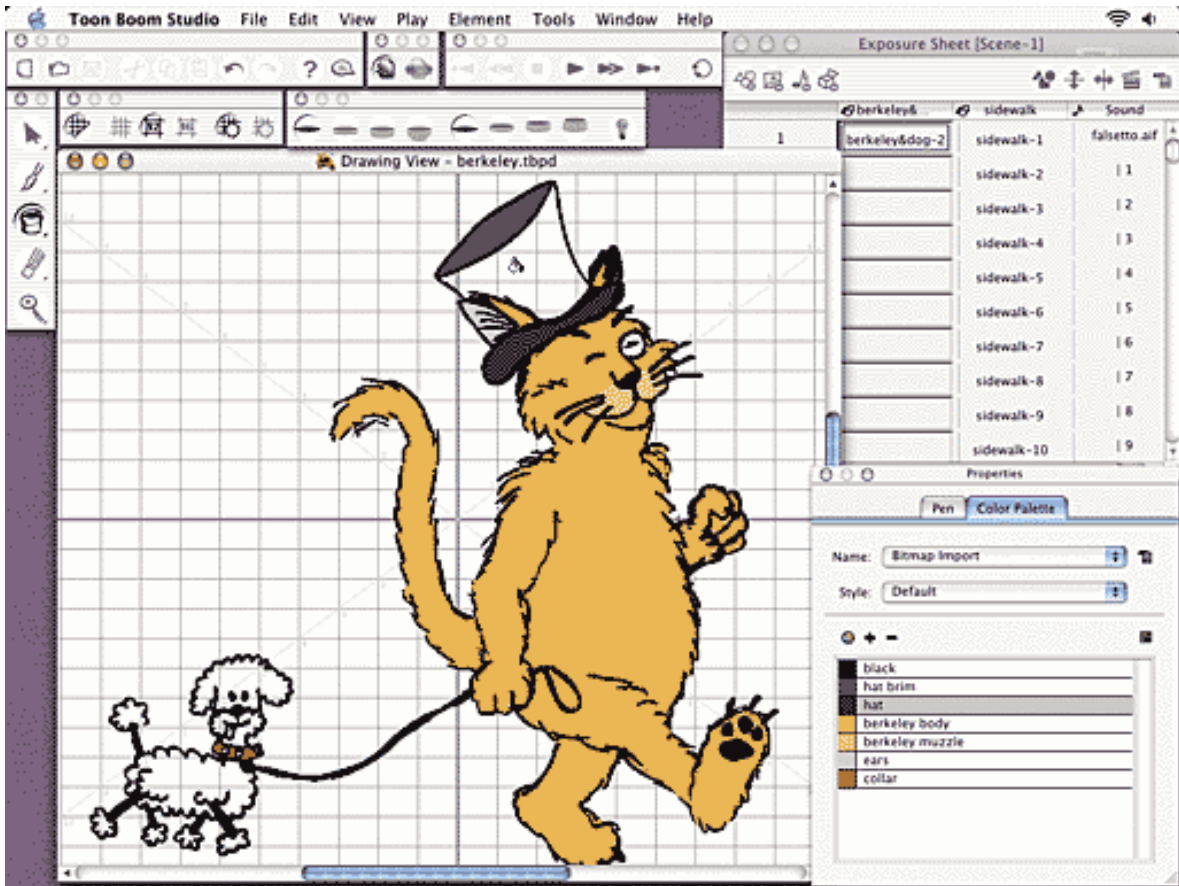
This program covers a lot of ground; fortunately, it ships with exceedingly helpful, friendly documentation. From its tech support and Web site to the program's interface, Toon Boom Technologies does all it can to make sure you master its product and (more importantly) enjoy using it.

Macworld's Buying Advice

Toon Boom Studio is packed with innovative, detailed, well-thought-out features that make it easy and fun to use. Any program this far-reaching is bound to have room to grow, but if you want to create hand-drawn play-through animations for the Web, Toon Boom Studio is the ticket.m



Scene Ya Real Soon: The Camera, Side, and Top views, in Toon Boom Studio's Sceneplanning mode, help you move your characters through a 3-D world.



I Tawt I'd Ddaw a Pwetty Hat: With a single click, Toon Boom Studio's Paint tool adds color to an area.

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