

## Narrative Animation in Flash

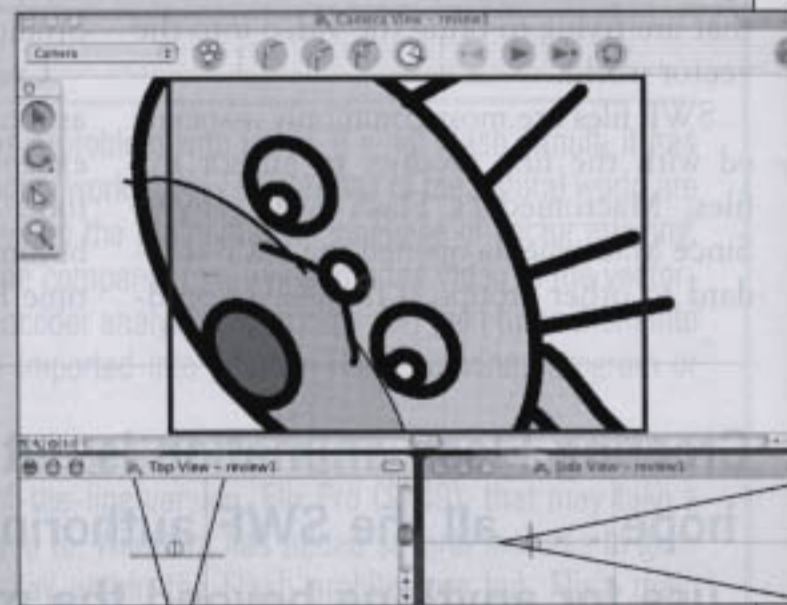
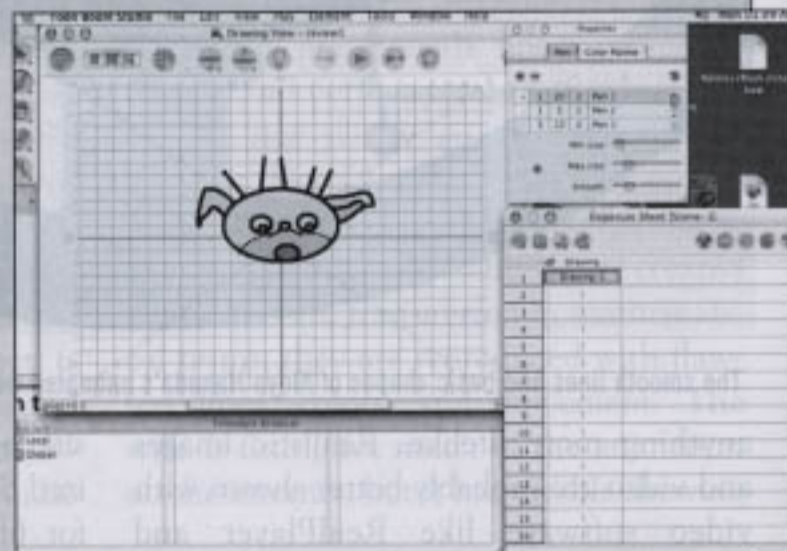
Until recently, Macromedia's Flash program has had to juggle several personalities, since it is used to create everything from banner ads for websites to episodic animations attempting to mimic television. But since Macromedia disclosed the Flash standard to the world, in addition to inexpensive Flash knock-offs, several new programs have been released that solve particular Flash weaknesses. For instance, Flash's interface was never particularly friendly toward narrative animation. To address this problem, ToonBoom Technologies, the creator of US Animation, the leading software for professional cel animation, introduced ToonBoom Studio (\$374) a product designed specifically for people creating narrative animation in Flash.

ToonBoom applied its expertise in creating tools for traditional animation to the Flash process, and the result is a powerful system for creating narrative animation for the internet and even video.

ToonBoom Studio breaks the Flash process into a workflow that mimics traditional animation. Characters, background items, and actions are drawn and sequenced in one part of the program and then these elements are imported in another part that simulates a traditional multi-plane animation stand. One impressive ToonBoom Studio tool includes an automatic dialogue synchronizer that analyzes audio and matches it to the mouth movements of characters.

Although ToonBoom is optimized for telling stories with Flash, it will not be an easy tool for many animators to learn to use. Like Flash, ToonBoom Studio will probably seem alien to traditional animators. Unfortunately, there are no books available to provide training in ToonBoom. And while there is in-depth electronic documentation shipped with ToonBoom Studio, it only provides information about the program, without really guiding a new user through the process. If you plan to use ToonBoom Studio for your animation, expect at least a few days of experimentation and frustration while learning to use the program.

Despite its steep learning curve, ToonBoom Studio is a vast improvement over Flash MX for creating narrative animation. If storytelling is your goal with Flash media ToonBoom wins out over Flash MX or its competitors because it eschews the confusing tools and paradigms of interactivity and programming and focuses squarely on delivering tools for telling stories. In addition, animations created in ToonBoom can be easily transferred to regular video. Instructions for transferring animations to iMovie and other video formats can be found on ToonBoom's website.



ToonBoom Studio's interface is designed especially for creating narrative animation.