

Reviews

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Toon Boom Express

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Have you ever had a yearning to try your hand at animation but couldn't get past the exorbitant prices of most of the animation packages on the market? Or would you like to make Flash animations that can be uploaded to the Internet or emailed to friends? Then take a look at Toon Boom Express. Toon Boom Express is the kid brother to Toon Boom Studio. It has most of Toon Boom Studio's features, but on a limited scale and for a lot less price.

Before we proceed, please watch the two short animations (sitting next to this newsletter on our club CD) called Multiplane Example and Beach Party. I will be referring to them later in this review. They are small SWF files that will play in the QuickTime Player. The Beach party movie contains various element types that we will discuss such as music, Lip-sync (to speech), and motion of the plane element. The Multiplane Example movie gives a good example of how you can move the camera's view through your scene which makes it look like you are flying through high-rise buildings (in 3D space).

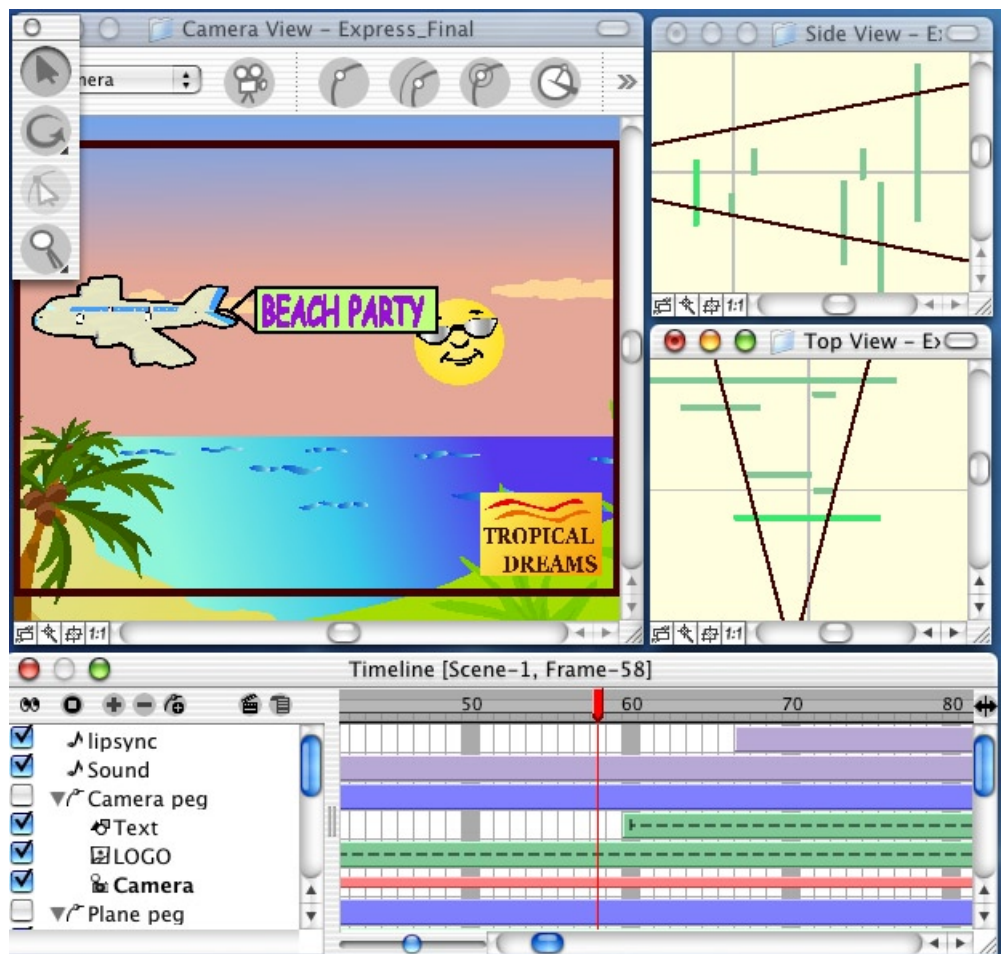
Toon Boom Express imitates the steps used by traditional animators:

Ink and Color: Once you have an idea what your animation is going to be about, you can choose from predefined pen styles or create your own pen styles to draw with. You can specify its thickness and whether it will draw smoothly or roughly. Once you have the outlines, you can color it by choosing from predefined color swatches or use a color wheel and create your own color swatches. These colors can be named so that it will be easy to know which colors to use to keep every thing uniformly colored.

A nice added feature is the ability to globally change the color of an item. Say I don't like the color of my brown alien and want it change it to blue. I just change the brown color swatch to blue. After that, every place the original brown was used would automatically be changed to blue. Quite a time saver.

Exposure sheet: Every time you create an item for your scene such as the sky, a tree, or an animal, you give it its own element column in the Exposure window. Each square in the Exposure window represents one frame in your movie. It works much like a timeline window where you specify when an item appears and disappears in the movie. If it is a static image such as the ground or sky, you can quickly specify how many frames it is to occupy.

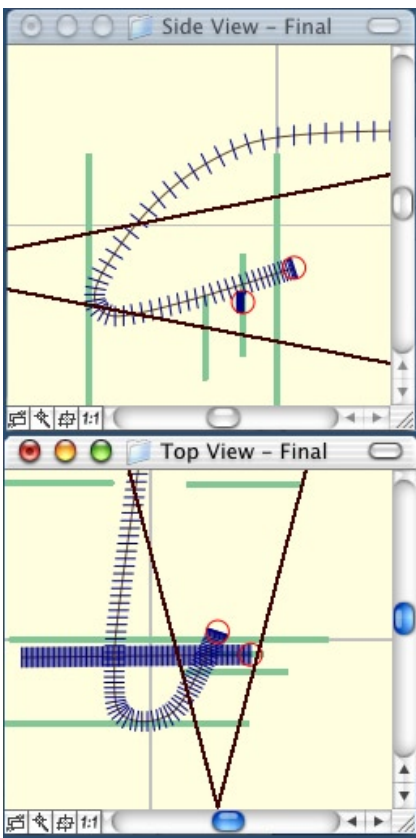
Besides drawings, you can add sound or media elements into your exposure sheet. Toon Boom Express supports AIFF, MP3, and WAV sound files and SWF movies. These SWF movies can be brought in as a series of animation frames or just linked to so it stays outside the animation. This is helpful in keeping the overall size of the Toon Boom Express animations down.



Toon Boom Express' Camera, Side, and Top views (with the camera turned on) along with the Timeline. The Timeline window shows all of the animation's elements and which frame they are to appear in. In this illustration, the top two are sound elements; one for lip-sync and the other is for music that plays throughout the animation. The following are the Camera Peg (with its attached elements) and the Plane Peg.

Draw window: Your elements can either be scanned images or drawn directly within Toon Boom Express. Scanned images can't be edited so they must come in fully colored or can be used as a template for you to trace over and then discard. All drawings are converted to Vector images which hold their form and clarity when resized.

Onion skinning: If you have watched animators rough-out their animations, you would see them at a light table with three or four pages of very thin onion paper gripped between their fingers. On the light table is the first frame (cell) they are working on and each consecutive page contains a drawing that is several frames (cells) further into the animation. By flipping back and forth through these pages they can make sure that their person or animal is moving in a lifelike way and is in proportion to the previous page. Toon Boom Express does



These are the Multiplane Tutorial movies' Side and Top views with the motion and camera pegs turned on. The green lines represent the locations of the buildings, cars, etc. shown in 3D space. The horizontal blue line shows the motion path of the guy (boy) who is walking between the car and the garage (please compare it to the Multiplane movie found on this CD). The curved blue line is the path the camera will travel as it moves through the scene (it pulls away from the boy and then moves forward as it makes its way up and over the garage and through the tall buildings).

the same thing. But instead of flipping the see-through onion pages, it gives you the option of seeing up to three of the previous or next frames at the same time-like you were looking through tracing paper.

To speed things up, Toon Boom Express allows you to save animation sequences as templates. This way you can quickly re-use these sequences in other parts of your animation. This preserves all of the scene elements and 3D placement in the screen. You can also use copy and paste to simplify the process of making your person or animal walk or run. Simply create the three or four frames that show him walking and copy and past it over and over as you move its location across the screen. This is a nice feature since you only have to draw the item once for the whole movie or group of frames.

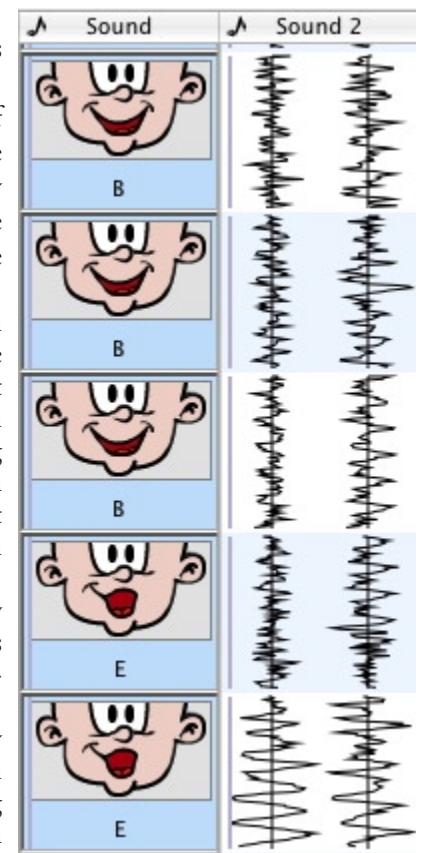
Lip sync: When you add a sound track to your movie, Toon Boom Express can draw it as a Wave form in one of the Exposure window columns. This is helpful when you want to synchronize explosions or Lip Sync speech. If you turn on Lip-sync, Toon Boom Express will analyze the talking and draw a column of faces in the Exposure window. Each face will have a mouth position that closely resembles what is being said. You can then match these mouth positions in the face of the character you are animating.

Timeline/Pegs: As mentioned above, the timeline window shows you when all of your elements appear and disappears but it also lets you set pegs. Pegs let you plot a path for elements. There are motion pegs and camera pegs.

Motion Pegs: Say you have drawn a sequence where a monkey is waving its arms and moving its feet. Without a motion peg it would look like it was waving its arms and shuffling its feet without moving from its location. But if you attach all of its elements to a motion peg, it would look like it is running across the screen. The only caveat to this is that the Toon Boom Express version only supports two Pegs (whereas it is unlimited in the Toon Boom Studio version). So you

	car	Garage	dog	guy
1	car-1	Garage-1	dog-1	guy-1
2			dog-2	guy-2
3			dog-3	guy-3
4			dog-4	guy-4
5			dog-1	guy-5
6			dog-2	guy-6
7			dog-3	guy-7
8			dog-4	guy-8
9			dog-1	guy-9
10			dog-2	guy-10
11			dog-3	guy-11
12			dog-4	guy-12
13			dog-1	guy-13
14			dog-2	guy-14

The Exposure window shows which cartoon or sound elements appear in each frame of the animation. This screen shot shows that the unchanging car and garage pictures appear from frame 1 to 14 whereas the dog's pictures rotate every four frames and the guy's pictures every 14 frames as they walk across the screen.



In the Exposure window's thumbnail view you can see your audio as a wave form and see Lip Sync mouth representations of your words.

can only animate two items with pegs- whether they are people, cars or camera movements. But all is not lost. There is a work around for this in that you can always manually copy and paste your monkey or car sequence and move it to the next location and so forth (thus making it look like moving across the screen).

Motion with pegs is very simple to implement. When activated, you are given a small line that has a red box at either end. The first box is the current location and the second is its final location. When you drag it across the screen, your monkey, car, whatever, will move in that direction during playback. You can even drag the movement peg around a tree, thus causing your monkey or car to circle the tree. You can even use a motion peg to slowly move clouds across the screen. If you want to get extravagant with moving all sorts of things around your screen, then it is advisable to purchase the full Toon Boom Studio with its unlimited pegs.

Camera pegs: You can use one camera peg to create camera effects such as tucks, pans, and zooms. This really makes you feel like you are in a 3D world. You need to move up to the Studio version if you want to have multiple camera pegs.

3D Scene Planning: Items drawn in Toon Boom Express are drawn in a 3D space. The Top and Side View windows let you grab a small representation of each element and move it up/down/back or forth. This option lets you quickly move items in front of or behind others.

One nice feature of Toon Boom Express's 3D space is that it keeps your elements in perspective when you move them towards or away from the camera. Say you create a row of mountains. The further away from the camera you drag them (such as towards the horizon), the smaller they appear on the screen. Likewise with your animated objects (such as the monkey), it increases or decreases in size depending on whether it is moving towards or away from the camera. Toon Boom Express will automatically draw it smaller and smaller. This saves you from having to re-draw the element over and over as it shrinks.

You are limited to only one scene and a 1000 frames with the Toon Boom Express version. For most cases, this is adequate. But if you are going to have a long or complex animation, you are once again advised to move up to the Studio version.

When you export your animation, you are given the option of saving it as a Macromedia flash movie (SWF file) or as an iMovie. Unlike the Studio version, the Express version does not give you the option to save as a QuickTime movie. But a simple work-around is to use a third-party application to convert the SWF file to QuickTime. For example, instead of saving it as a SWF file, you could save it as an iMovie file, bring it into iMovie and then save it as a QuickTime movie. The advantage of saving as a SWF file is that the overall size remains fairly small compared to the same thing saved as a iMovie or later converted to a QuickTime movie. This is especially helpful if your animation is destined for the Internet-where smaller is better (for download or viewing purposes).

Since your saved SWF file is compatible with the Macromedia Flash program, you can import the SWF file into Flash for further manipulation.

Other uses for Toon Boom Express could be: creating an animated game, animate instant messages on cell phones, create animated invitations or announcements, or add animations to videos or photos. 🇺🇸



Onion skinning lets you see up to three drawings before or after the current drawing. This helps you keep everything uniformly sized and is especially helpful when you are trying to make your figure walk or run.

The Skinny

Evaluation: Toon Boom Studio Express gives you all the tools necessary to create animated cartoons. It is easy to learn and fun to play with. (If you want to see what can be done with the program, check out the [Toon Boom web site](#). They have many short animations submitted by students and amateur animators.)

Though the Express version's capabilities are limited, I would suggest purchasing it rather than the Studio version. If you later find out that you need more functionality, you can always upgrade to the Studio version. The combined price of Express plus the upgrade is the same as if you purchased the Studio version in the first place. So you have nothing to loose in starting with the Express version, which is a lot cheaper and may be adequate for your needs.

Requires: Power Mac G3 (G4 recommended), OS X 10.1 or higher

Company: [Toon Boom Technologies](#)

Street Price: \$144

Upgrade to Toon Boom Studio: \$230