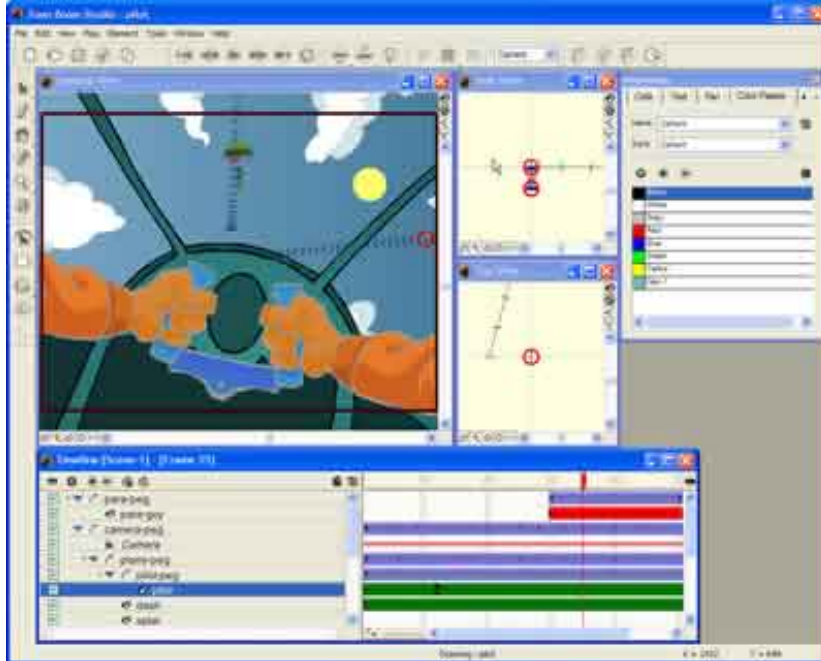


Toon Boom Studio 3

New drawing and animation tools add to Toom Boom Studio's existing capabilities.



It's difficult to imagine now but when Flash first arrived on the scene it was a user-friendly application for creating simple onscreen cartoons called FutureSplash. What transformed Flash's fortunes was the recognition that vector animation was the ideal way to deliver maximum creative impact over the web. Since then Flash has moved on and its animation roots are hardly recognisable, but Toon Boom Studio has taken up the challenge. And some.

However it's important to realise that Toon Boom Studio is a very different beast to FutureSplash based from the ground up on professional animation techniques. The key concepts here are "cels", the equivalent of animators' transparent overlays; the "exposure sheet", by which the onscreen display of cels is controlled; and "pegs" to which cel sequences can be attached and then automatically transformed over time. To animate a bird flying across a scene, for example, you create different cels for each wing position, set up their sequence and time onscreen in the exposure sheet and then attach the bird's wing and body sequences to a peg that you then drag across the screen to animate.

It might sound straightforward but don't be fooled – the end results of animation might look like child's play but producing it is another matter. By the time you're dealing with a cut-out character animation with peg hierarchies for every limb and multiple phoneme cels for lip-synching you really need to know exactly what you are doing. And Toon Boom Studio's overly-technical approach doesn't do much to protect users from the inherent complexity.

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[8\] >>](#)

[\[Dreamweaver 8\] >>](#)

[\[Flash Professional 8\]](#)

[>>](#)

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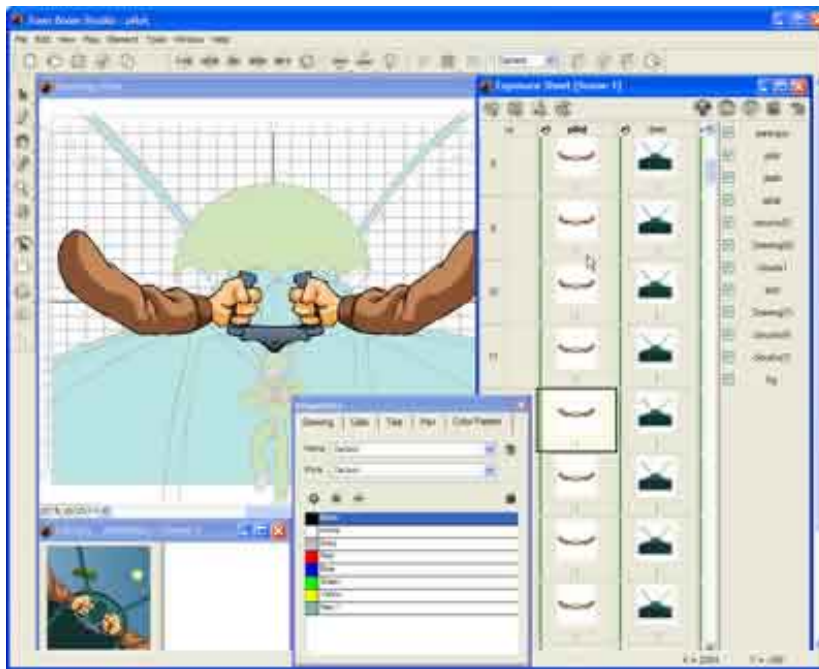
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Toon Boom Studio offers new drawing capabilities

What it does do is offer dedicated users some extraordinary power. This is immediately apparent in Toon Boom Studio's drawing capabilities.

Alongside its core line-based path tools, shape-based brushes and interactive paint tool, Toon Boom Studio provides dedicated functionality for automatically and interactively closing gaps, for filling shapes created by multiple lines, for quickly painting multiple zones, for unpainting and so on. In addition you can define set pens and fills to ensure consistency and fills can be retrospectively changed wherever they appear. Toon Boom Studio also offers the ability to import Illustrator AI and PDF files along with basic scanning and raster-to-vector conversion so that you can make use of external drawings.

The existing drawing power is impressive but the latest Toon Boom Studio 3 adds a number of useful tweaks such as the ability to handle gradients and textures with the Reposition All tool, and to display invisible strokes over painted regions. More significant is the introduction of two major new tools. The Cutter tool now lets you divide regions with a freehand stroke – essential to the setup of cut-out based character animations. The new Text tool is even more regularly useful both for creating scene props, such as posters and newspapers, and also in its own right, most obviously when creating animated banner ads.

Of course where Toon Boom Studio really shines is in its ability to bring its drawings to animated life. To help you draw consistent in-between cels in your exposure sheet, Toon Boom Studio offers onscreen grids, flexible onion-skinning and a drag-and-drop light box for viewing the current cel in the context of other selected elements. You can also control each cel's onscreen exposure and set up cel cycles, for example to replicate walking – though this could be simpler.

Toon Boom's real animation power begins to come apparent when you attach your cel sequences to a peg. Once done, you can drag, rotate and scale the peg to animate your objects with Toon Boom automatically interpolating all the necessary in-between drawings. You can then set the

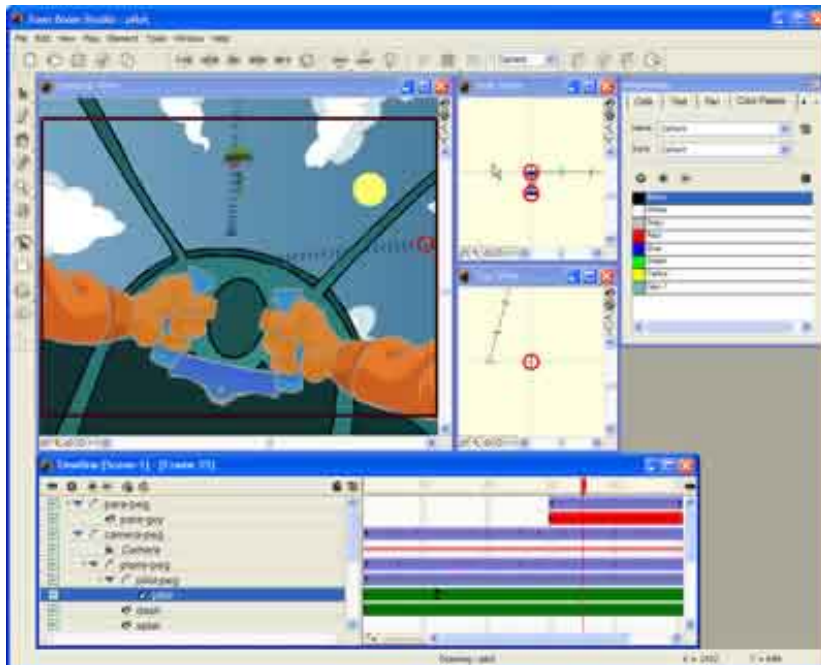
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animation's start and duration by dragging each peg's trackbar in the Timeline. For maximum control you access the Function Editor to graphically control how properties change over time – essential for creating the illusion of realistic movement.

Again Toon Boom Studio 3 adds a number of useful tweaks to its existing peg-based animation system such as highlighting parent pegs when a child element is selected and visual timeline indicators to show the presence of keyframes and whether a segment is tweened or constant. You can also now quickly modify individual keyframes thanks to the introduction of single cell selection in the timeline and you can also set an option to create linear function effects by default. And again Toon Boom Studio 3 adds two important new tools: a Skew option and an all-encompassing Transform tool that lets you set up scaling, rotation and skewing effects simultaneously.



Scene planning makes complex 3D animations simple.

Using the Transform tool with the Motion tool you can set up effects whereby an object or character scales appropriately making it look as if it is moving forward or backwards in the scene. However with Toon Boom Studio such manual setup is unnecessary. Instead you can take advantage of the program's most impressive capability: scene-planning. Using the Top and Side views you can position objects in relation to the scene camera and then set up peg-based motion paths so that animated elements appear to move through the scene.

Scene planning really does make adding 3D-based realism and impact to your 2D cartoons a snap. Especially as Toon Boom Studio 3 now lets you save and reload your own dedicated scene planning working environment based on multiple views or simply swap between Top and Side views in the main Drawing window. Best of all you can animate your camera through the scene to create realistic pans and tracks in next to no time – eye-catching effects that would be a logistical nightmare for traditional animation.

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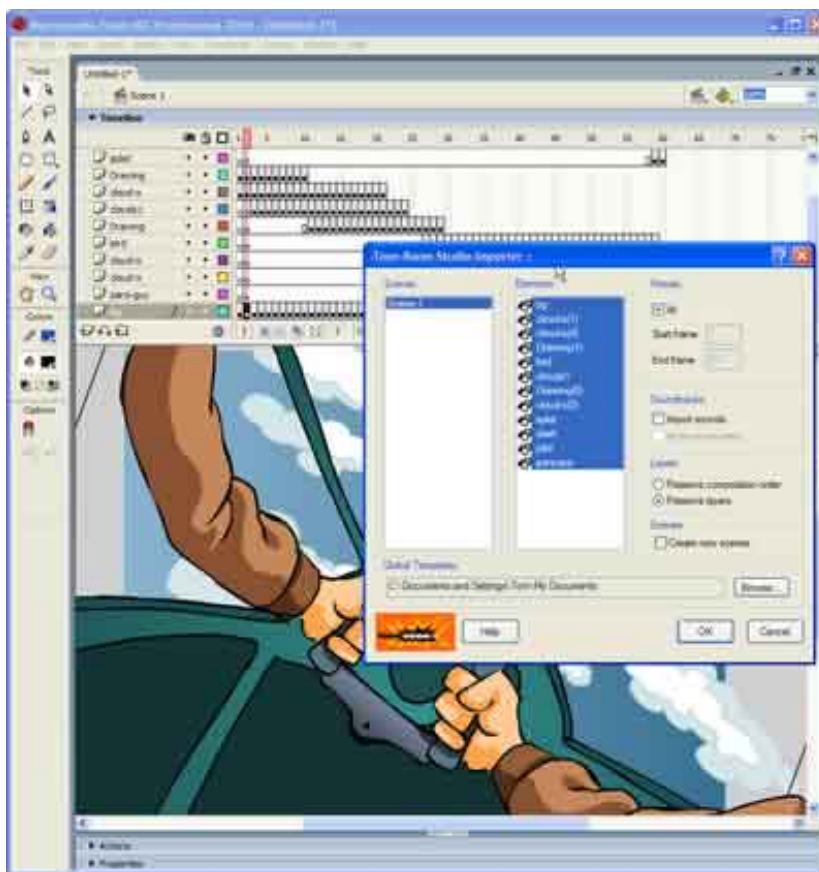
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And that's not all. With colour transformation effects you can change colours over time, for example to give the impression of night approaching or a blush spreading. And with mask-based effects you can selectively reveal elements over time, for example to create the effect of a torch being shone around a darkened room. Most impressive of all is Toon Boom Studio's Lip Synch Generator which analyzes an imported sound file and automatically assigns one of eight lip cels accordingly. It's a good start but you'll almost certainly want to fine-tune the generated lip synch sequence which is where version 3's timeline-based sound scrubbing comes in.

Once you've finished your animation you're ready to export it. Options here include AVI, DV Stream, Image Sequence and QuickTime but for the widest playback and smallest file sizes the obvious option is Flash – especially as Toon Boom Studio 3 now offers even greater compression of its player 6-compatible SWF output. Alternatively, if you own Flash MX or later, you can import your entire project using the dedicated Toon Boom plug-in importer which translates all cels to symbols and all sequences to their own layers. Once imported, you can take advantage of Flash's other capabilities most obviously to graft on programmability and interactivity and to compress file sizes even further.



Toon Boom Studio works hand in glove with Macromedia Flash.

These days the spread of broadband access and Flash-based video means that vector animation no longer has the central importance it once had. However the impact that a successful web animation can offer is still extraordinary - and Toon Boom Studio 3 is the most effective way of creating one.

Ease of Use	3
Features	5
Value for Money	4
Overall	4

ratings out of 6

Tom Arah

Feb 2006

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Thanks very much, **Tom Arah**

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