

## Review: Toon Boom Studio

Let's face it - in terms of animation, Flash is rather simplistic. What do you do when your animation skills surpass the capabilities of Flash? Toon Boom Animation may have the solution for you.

**What do they do?** Animation tool with Flash and Quicktime output

**Platforms:** Windows / Mac OSX

**Manufacturer:** Toon Boom Animation

**Website:** <http://www.toonboom.com/>

**Price:** Full version \$ 399.99. Upgrades from \$ 99.99. With a Wacom tablet \$ 499.99.

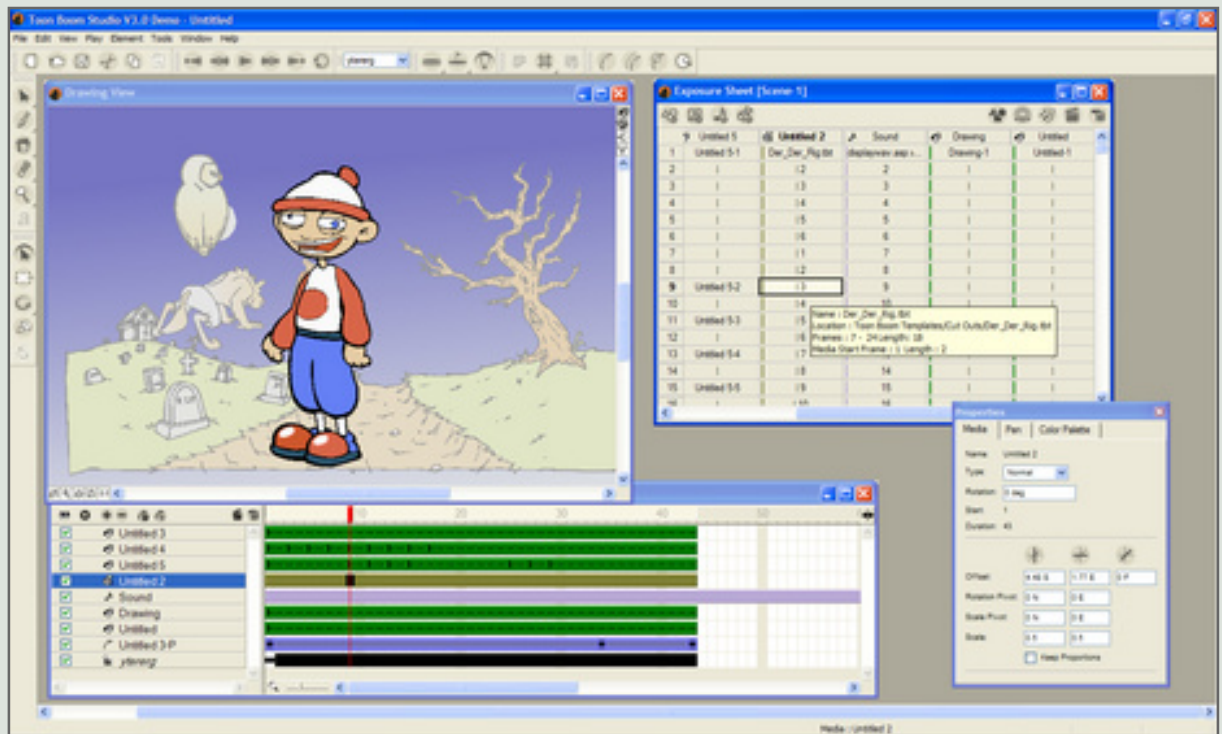


Toon Boom Studio was the first product in a line of tools for animation professionals that featured both Flash and Quicktime export. Created by the company behind US Animation - one of the most complete and expensive solutions used in professional animation studios - Toon Boom Studio was their first software for the wider market. It is now accompanied by a "light" version called Toon Boom Studio Express. Toon Boom Harmony, Opus and Solo are the steps above TBS on the ladder. I originally intended this to be a review of Toon Boom Solo, but I soon figured that was well above my skill level, so I decided to rather review Toon Boom Studio (TBS).

### Installation and startup

Installation is straightforward. Just download, execute and off you go. I'm really no animator, but I thought it'd be best just to dive in. When you start the program, the workspace is divided into three panels. Drawing View, Exposure Sheet and Timeline.

Tools are arranged as in other programs - in a toolbar on the left. There's a row of menus and important buttons at the top. Two of these control the Onion Skinning that let you view X frames



before and after your current drawing as a "ghost". That way, you can easily see what your current frame should look like. I turned it on and started drawing. As I was drawing, my first drawing was added to my

Exposure Sheet. To add another, I clicked the second "layer" in the Exposure sheet and I got a new clean canvas. After repeating this a few times, I had an animated face in all its ugliness.

## Features

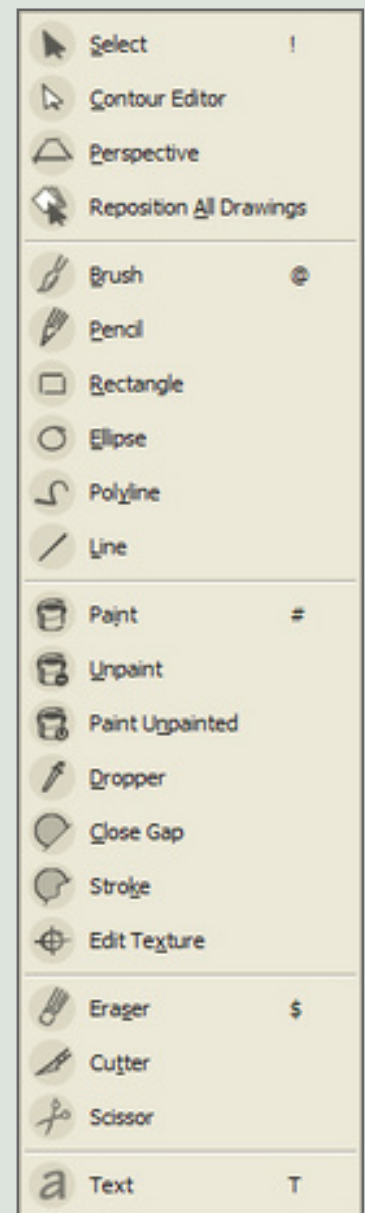
My initial test was traditional "Cell Animation" where each frame is drawn from scratch. The resulting object can then be placed on stage just like a MovieClip can in Flash. This form of animation is extremely work intensive. A more efficient way to do animation is "Cut-Out Animation". Take a drawing and break it into (body) parts and link these parts up in a hierarchy. The fingers should follow the hand when the hand moves and the hand should follow the arm and so on. TBS has a system of "pegs" that you use to group objects this way. If organized properly, you'll end up with a character that's really easy to animate.

My only problem is that I'm really not good at drawing. If you have the same problem, you can do like me and download some clipart from [toonboom.com](http://toonboom.com). Using the clipart proved to be a little problem as I couldn't find an intuitive way to import it. I searched the built in help files for the word template and soon found that I should open the Library panel and drag stuff from there more or less like in Flash. In TBS you drag stuff to the timeline, not to the canvas. Pretty easy once you find the Library panel. It just wasn't visible in the default panel layout.

The help files are extensive, well organized and as opposed to the ones you find in Flash, they are also richly illustrated. They are organized just like in Flash with a Contents tab, alphabetical index and a search function. With the templates imported, I could really start playing with the program. The video tutorials on [toonboom.com](http://toonboom.com) are good and got me started right away.

TBS has all the basic tools that Flash has such as basic shapes, pencil, brush, fills, dropper, text, eraser, perspective and selection tools, so Flash compares well with TBS in this aspect. The main difference is in the way you work in the two programs. In Flash, you work off a timeline that consists of clips nested inside each other. In TBS you work with sets of panels that belong together. Initially you'll want to work using the Drawing layout with a canvas, inks, timeline and the animation frames in the Exposure Sheet. When it's time to compile all your animated snippets into a movie, you switch to the Scene Planning layout and get the Scene Manager, Camera views and adjustments in addition to the timeline. Here you'll add props and animate the cameras.

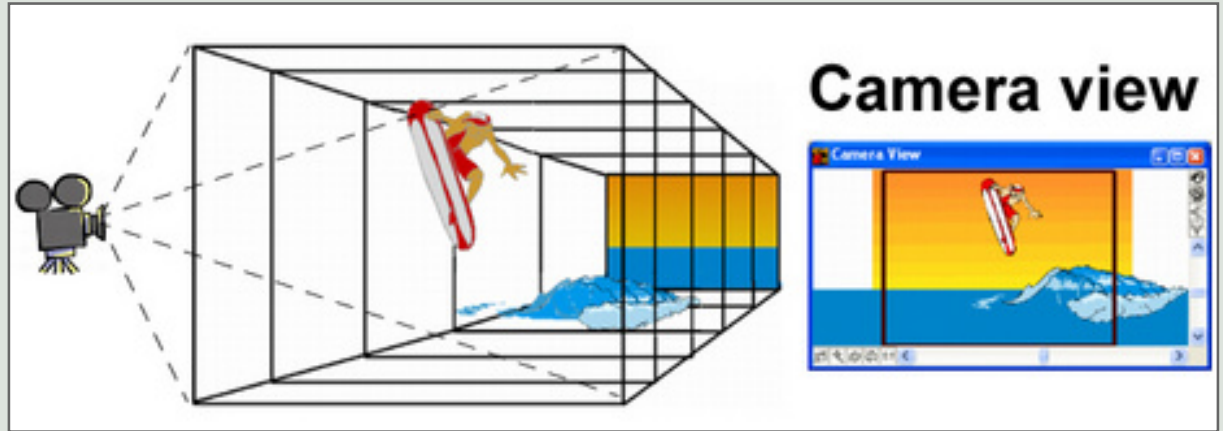
The Scene Planner is one of the most unique features in TBS. If this existed in Flash, one could really understand why the Stage is called just that. Imagine that every one of your Flash elements was cardboard cutouts arranged on a theatre stage. What if you could take a camera and create camera moves such as panning, zooming and tilting? Or what if you could just grab the camera and run around the stage for a "flying effect"? With TBS you can do just this using the Multiplane Camera. It's a bit tricky to use the first



time, but once you get hold of this, it'll enable you to make some impressive scenes. You are not limited to use just one camera either. You can easily set up multiple cameras and toggle between these.

Another great feature is the Lip Sync feature which analyses the contents of a sound element and generates a lip chart

based on the eight animation phonemes (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and X, which represents silence). You can refer to these as you draw the shape of you character's mouth. This will save you hours of work if you do lip synched animations.

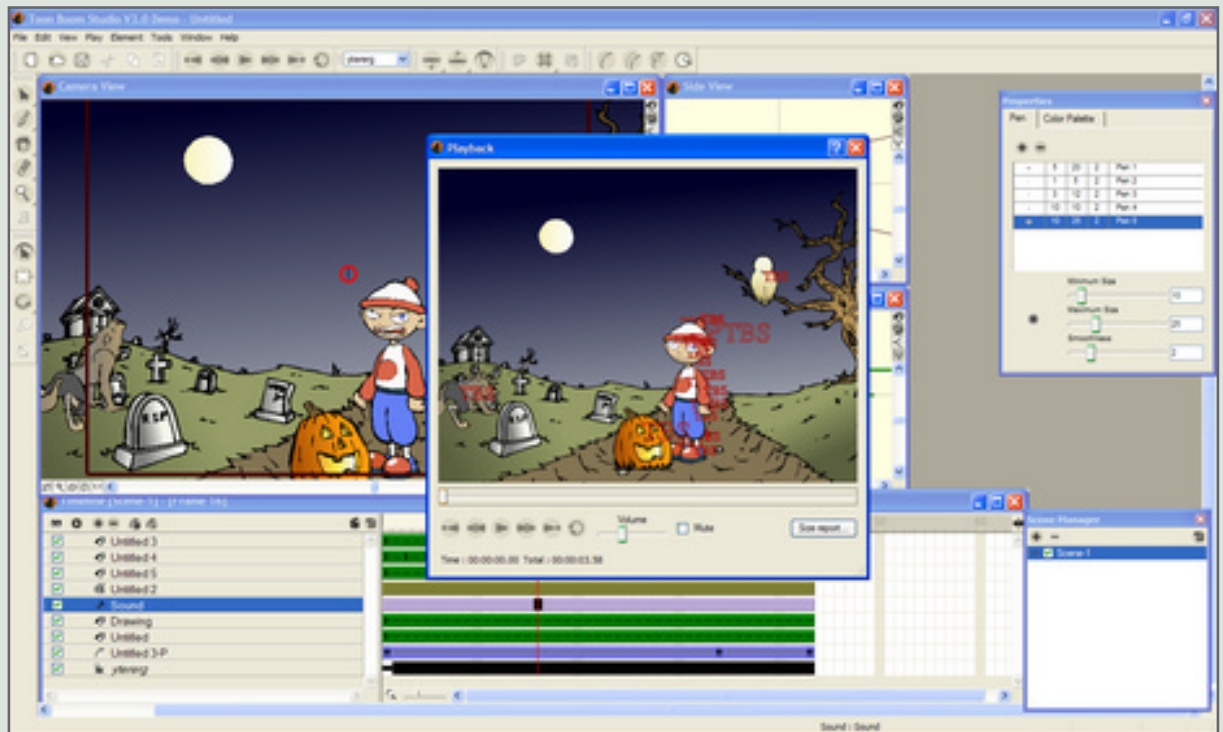


It may seem from this review that using TBS is "a walk in the park". It's not. Unfortunately, animation is a lot of hard work and so is learning new software. Once you know it, TBS will speed up the process,

but expect to spend some time reading help files and viewing tutorials. Only when you have learned the software, can you reap the benefits in the way of shorter production time and maybe even better looking animations.

### Ease of use

I found the UI a little different from the standard conventions, but the program as a whole rather intuitive. If you have experience from either Flash or other timeline based programs, you'll feel at home here. Most of this review; I just explored and found things where I'd expect them to be.



One example: When I right clicked the Exposure Sheet, I saw an option to add more columns. I added "Image" and when I right-clicked it, I found an option to import images from a Twain-source. I selected my webcam, grabbed a few frames and added them to the timeline. By tracing the images, I could do rotoscoping. Pretty sweet. You can of course select plain ordinary image files and that's probably what you would do if you had scanned sketches you wanted to trace and then animate.



Make sure you have a Wacom tablet though. The vector tools of TBS are not much more advanced than the ones in Flash and drawing with a mouse really does not work. TBS supports pressure sensitive tablets so you can draw artwork with varying line widths and other features. The settings are stored in a separate pen-panel so you can easily swap between these.

## Support

Toon Boom Animation has several support options ranging from free forums and a FAQ, to paid live support via email or phone. On [toonboom.com](http://toonboom.com) there are video tutorials to get you going and other resources such as clipart.

## Summary

This is a truly great piece of software that runs circles around Flash when it comes to animation. It's not really revolutionary (compared to Flash) but the workflow in TBS is much better suited for animators and the Scene Planner and Lip Sync are great timesavers. If you're an animator looking for a better tool, Toon Boom Studio is well worth checking out. In terms of animation tools, this is by far the best Flash replacement we've seen.

[Read more / download trial version here](#)

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