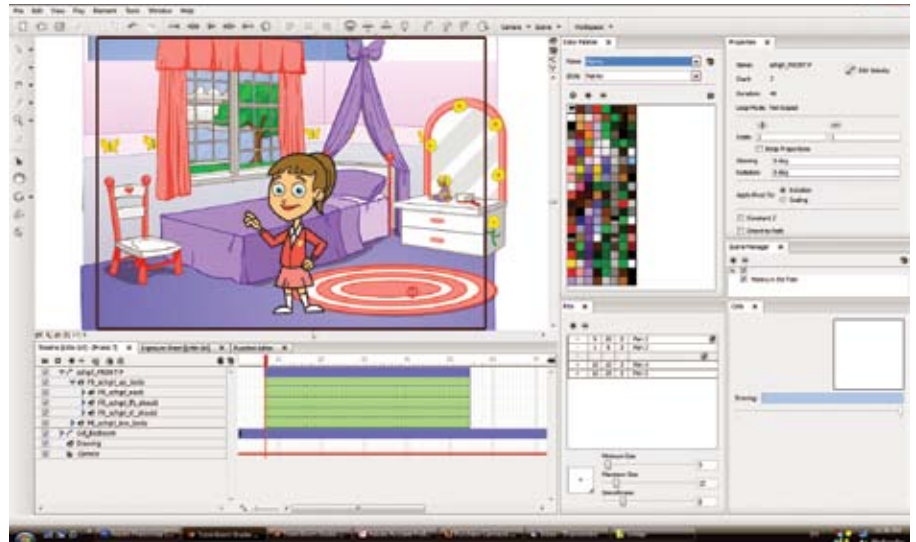
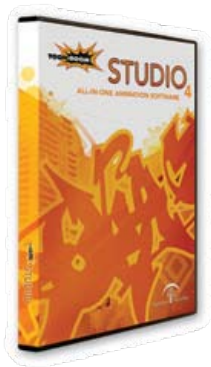


PRODUCT reviews

• Toon Boom Studio 4

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By Scott Schonefeld

Toon Boom Studio 4's animation interface.

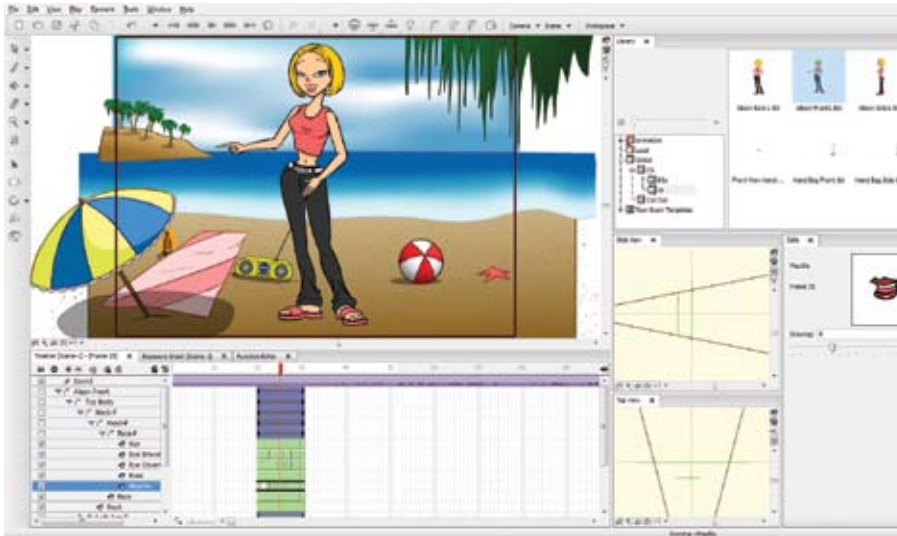
Toon Boom Studio 4 is a software package designed to create animation ranging from a simple Web banner to sophisticated, film-quality animation. Toon Boom Studio 4 follows the workflow model of traditional cell-based animation, and is significantly different from how other Flash-type animation software works. In the pre-digital era, animation was drawn in pencil, painted on clear acetate sheets, and then photographed one by one using physical pegs to mark registration and control movement. Toon Boom Studio 4 has taken this traditional process and brought it to the digital world. Expect a learning curve, but you will appreciate the power of the animation tools. To facilitate learning, the company offers many tutorials and sample projects on their Web site.

The screen that appears when opening the application allows the selection of project format with common screen sizes and frame rates. Once a

project is completed, the animation can be exported as a Flash, Quick-Time, AVI, or digital video stream. The interface offers a field grid for creating artwork, as well as the drawing and animation tools required to build projects. Tutorials and support materials can also be accessed from this initial screen. The workflow process is set for creating initial drawings for objects, creating scenes, animating objects and characters, and rendering the final animation to the desired format. Once the project format selections have been determined, the default Toon Boom Studio 4 interface looks similar to that of other graphics software packages. Drawing and animation tools are at the top and left side of the interface. Tool properties and palettes are located on the right side of the screen. Dominating the work area is a drawing layout grid and a timeline and exposure sheet (the traditional animator's timeline) for composing and coordinating anima-

tion elements. The many tabs available for making option selections might be a bit intimidating to a new user. However, the tabs make the creation process easier once the different palettes and property controls are learned. Higher screen resolutions can be utilized to make room for tool properties and multiple-view windows.

Creating a single animated object or character is the first step in a project. The simplest way to make an animation includes using the drawing view to draw lines and shapes using the available graphics tools. Simple animations can be produced fairly quickly by moving from frame to frame, adding drawings to each successive frame. The onion skin mode is useful in this animation process so that a faint "ghost" view of what has been drawn on the previous or next frames are visible, making it easier to match movement between frames. There are also graphic tools designed to aid in creating artwork across frames,



Animators can create detailed lip-syncing by importing and matching lip movement to audio.

matching gradient fills in shapes across multiple frames, and closing any gaps in shapes as well. One tip in creating elements is to make sure to select both the outline and internal fill of objects before manipulating them; otherwise, the user will discover that only the outline or fill is affected since the program treats them as two separate items. Animated elements can be saved into user or global libraries for present and future projects. Libraries of pre-made backgrounds, props, characters, and other elements ship with the software, and additional libraries are available from the Toon Boom Studio Web site.

Powerful animation tools are available to combine separate elements, allowing the user to create a complex unit by using both sophisticated animation and traditional animation features of key frames and pegs. In Toon Boom Studio 4, the pegs are digital markers that control the movement of animated elements. The pegs may

have motion paths, scaling, rotation, or other transformations attached, allowing for the set up and control of an animated scene by using keyframes. In addition, by using a process called “tweening,” Toon Boom Studio 4 creates all of the animated movement between the keyframes to create the animation so that the user does not have to animate each frame individually. The software excels in creating smooth tweening animation between keyframes so that all of the actions blend together. More complex visuals can be created using multi-plane effects where a virtual camera moves in, out, or across the elements to add a 3D feel to the scene. Another powerful animation tool is designed to create lip-sync animation for characters by importing a character audio track and then analyzing the speech. The result is a frame-by-frame lip chart showing the mouth movements to draw onto the character so that it appears the character is speaking the lines.

In summary, Toon Boom Studio 4 is a great animation tool for creating multimedia projects that utilize animation in the classroom. But the user must consider the time investment when deciding whether to use this program. If the instructional goal is to create the occasional animation for video or presentation, Toon Boom Studio 4 may not be the right software for the job. Tutorials and help files aid users in learning the software, but in my opinion some of the tutorials need revamping for clarity. Toon Boom Studio 4 would serve as an important student multimedia production tool in classrooms that are dedicated to the quality investment of time and originality. Also, this software would be a great addition to any visual arts program because the software offers all of the necessary tools for creating original artwork. Students can draw directly into the program with the use of a digital tablet. If a student’s imagination is to become a reality using animation, then Toon Boom Studio 4 is the tool of choice.

Toon Boom Studio 4

Toon Boom Animation, Inc.
\$399.99
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As a former middle school art teacher, he was recognized as district and regional teacher of the year, and state technology teacher of the year by IBM/Technology & Learning.