

Toon Boom Studio V2

The 2D cartoon animation app now has a vast array of workflow features...

Price

Download: \$349
(upgrade \$99)

Company

Computers Unlimited

Telephone

020 8200 8282

Website

www.toonboomstudio.com

Features

- Complete 2D animation solution
- 3D scene planning
- Vector and bitmap drawing tools
- SWF and QuickTime export
- Lip-synching tools
- Exposure Sheet and timeline
- Drawing and Sceneplanning modes

System

PC: Pentium II, 233 MHz • 128MB RAM • 100MB hard disk space • Win XP/2000/98/ME

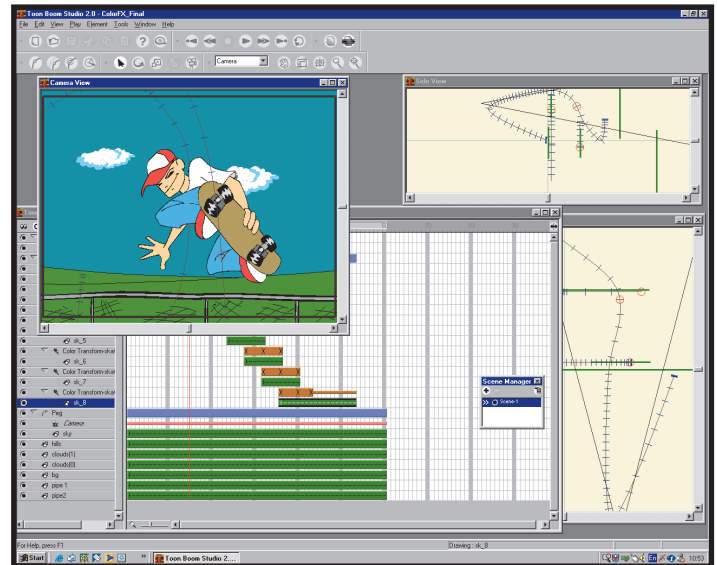
Mac: OS X version expected soon



When *Toon Boom Studio* arrived last year, it offered *Flash* designers an animation feature-set never before available at such a low cost. The app is dedicated to the creation of 2D cartoons and echoes the features of its big brother, the high-end 2D animation app, *USAnimation*. The first release included vector drawing and bitmap editing tools, with onion-skinning and other features echoing the traditional animator's light table.

The app includes an Exposure Sheet for keeping track of all elements in an animation and a superb 3D Scene planning mode where 2D objects can be shifted around in 3D space and then animated; it's a much easier way to create perspective and distance effects than shaping and motion tweening in *Flash*. The package features excellent lip-synching tools. When you import a sound file, *TBS* analyses the file and provides animators with a guide to phonetic shapes. This is handy and time-saving.

V2 brings many improvements, while keeping the main tools the same. It concentrates on making it easier to use and integrate the product in the workflow of *Flash MX* users. The app is divided into two sections: Drawing mode and Sceneplanning mode. The



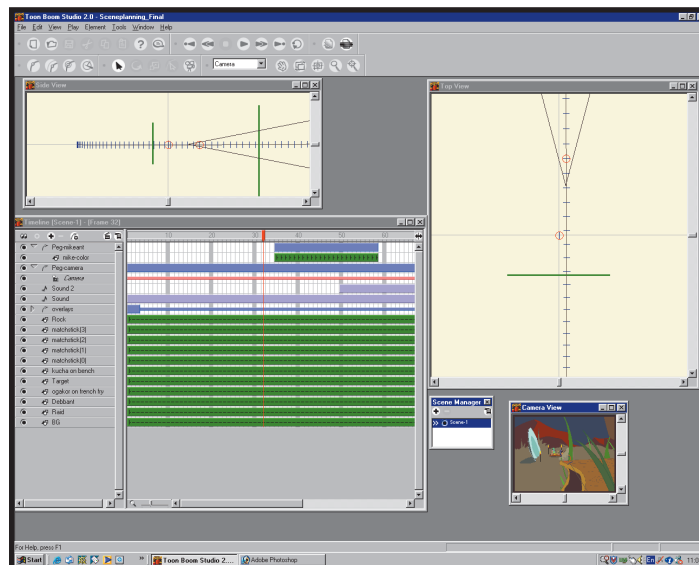
One of the most useful and intuitive elements of *Toon Boom Studio 2* is the Sceneplanning mode, where you can arrange 2D elements in 3D space.

former contains the main Drawing View, Exposure Sheet (for managing scene elements and organising the structure of drawings), and tools for showing and hiding previous drawings (onion-skinning) and all the import tools.

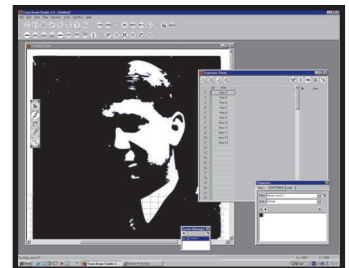
The creations of cartoons begins at the drawing stage, where a host of tools

enable the creation of sharp vector graphics. New to V2 is a gaggle of minor tools for speeding up the drawing process. We criticised the first release for having no tool to close gaps in drawings (apart from doing it by hand in an often fiddly, lengthy process). If gaps aren't closed, objects won't fill. *Toon Boom* now addresses this, adding Auto Gap Closing to the app.

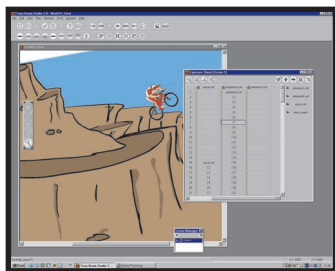
Other inking and painting enhancements include the ability to paint and fill objects with bitmap textures. Bézier tools have been added in the form of the Polyline tool, as have other standard vector tools such as the Cutter (knife), the ability to group



The timeline and multiple Sceneplanning views will be familiar to *Flash* and 3D artists.



The ability to import Adobe Illustrator 5-10 files proves extremely useful indeed when wanting to animate drawings that are a little more complex. The ability to vectorise bitmaps is also a boon.



The Exposure Sheet helps you organise and keep track of all scene elements.

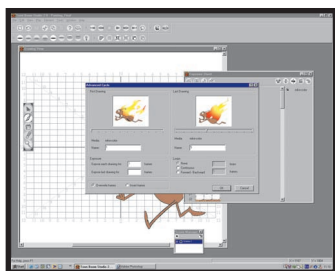
objects and smaller, handy things such as being able to draw objects out from the centre.

The Exposure Sheet has been tweaked; most notably by improving the Cycle and Advanced Cycle editors. The former enables you to quickly set up a cycle of drawings, aiding in the animation process. The latter is much the same, only it enables complex cycles of drawings, jumping between labelled images.

The lip-synching tools have been suitably tweaked. You can now map drawings to the lip chart generated when *TBS* analyses a sound file. This is another great time-saver; Toon Boom has clearly listened to its customers' gripes. The added ability of being able to scrub sound in the Sound Editor helps with the lip-synching process.

V2's import features have been updated. The app supports native AI 5-10 files as well as PDFs. Its vectorise function (similar to *Flash*'s Trace Bitmap) enables you to create vector artwork from imported bitmaps. Colour tweens and streamed sounds now remain when importing an SWF file. The new Library stores all animation elements and you can import templates, sound files and the like from both Sceneplanning and Drawing modes.

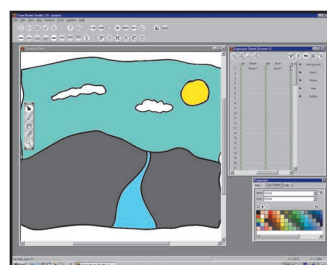
Template functionality has been improved, enabling you to easily create and edit re-usable elements. This is, again, a time-saving, workflow-orientated feature.



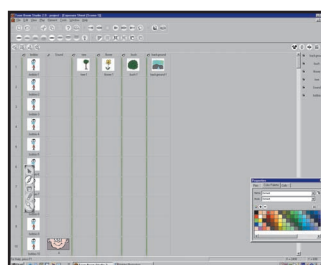
You can repeat a sequence of drawings by creating cycles. The Advanced Create Cycles feature enables you to jump between drawings, creating more advanced animations. Colour tweening is also supported now.

Animation from start to finish

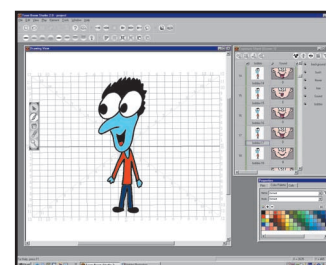
Create an animation with zooming cameras and lip-synching, in just six steps...



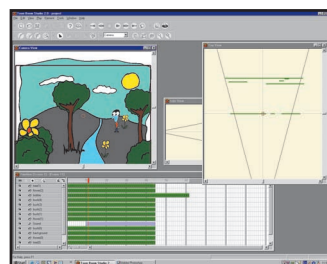
1 Begin by drawing your artwork. We have created a main character, some background elements, such as trees and bushes, and a background set. Make sure you name all your elements in order to avoid massive confusion later.



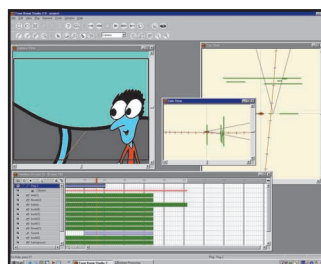
2 Take a look at the Exposure Sheet. Click on the Add Sound Element button at the top of the Exposure Sheet, choose Cel 10 in the sound column that appears and right-click and browse to import a sound file. Notice how *TBS2* shows the waveform. Right-click on a sound cel and choose Show Lip-sync. *TBS* automatically generates the phonemes.



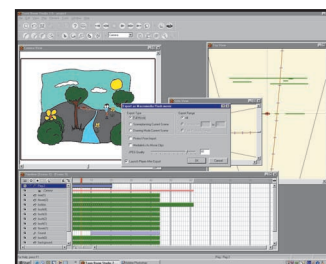
3 Select your character and hit Copy. Right-click in the cel underneath (in column 2) and choose Paste New Object. Adjust the mouth shape using the drawing tools, taking reference from the phonemes in the sound column. Do this for all your drawings. You can add blinking effects if you so wish by drawing closed eyes on certain drawings.



4 Switch to Sceneplanning mode. Adjust the character's position to the back of the camera. Open the timeline and click on drawing 2. Adjust the exposure of your background elements by right-clicking on them and choosing Set Exposure. Right-click, select Clone Element and repeat. Arrange your elements by dragging them above and below each other in the timeline.



5 Create a new Peg element (go to Element>New>Peg Element) and drag the camera onto the peg. Go to Tools>Motion. Now by using the Direct Selection tool you can move the peg and the camera will follow. We're going to zoom in on our character and then watch him deliver his lines. Notice that when you update the Top and Side views, the camera view updates in real time.



6 Test your animation by hitting the Play button on the main toolbar and make any adjustments you need to the peg motion. To export your movie as an SWF file, go to File>Export>Macromedia Flash Movie. Alternatively, use *Flash MX*'s *TBS* Importer to import your project and add interactivity.

These new features add up to what is a pretty thorough drawing and element-building environment. Additions may seem minor, but in terms of day-to-day workflow they are enormous. When combined with *Illustrator*, it makes one powerful tool.

Sceneplanning

The Sceneplanning mode's upgrade brings the ability to copy and paste the qualities of control points or keyframes, and the ability to nudge motion points on pegs with arrow keys for more precision. It has colour tweening and the ability to create clip masks, which show and hide elements over time using pegs.

With these new additions, the 3D Sceneplanning tools are given a welcome boost and are still intuitive and easy to pick up. *Flash* users will

love them because they simplify a task that can take a whole load of planning and tweening in *Flash*, and 3D artists making the switch over to the realms of 2D will find the multi-viewport and multi-camera environment familiar and easily-navigable.

The comprehensive *QuickTime* export features will be of more use to the pro wanting to combine 2D elements with live footage in an NLE. Unfortunately, you can't add any sort of interactivity within V2. This should have been addressed; basic goto and play actions could have been included. However, the inclusion of the *TBS* Importer in *Flash MX* enables you to add complex ActionScript to your *TBS2* SWF creations, if you have *Flash MX*.

If you're into 2D animation and cartoons for the Web, *TBS2* is the way to go. Those unfamiliar with 2D

animation techniques may find it a little tricky. *Flash* users who need an efficient way to produce entertaining, pro-quality cartoons will love it. **CA**

Verdict



Speed	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Documentation	★★★★★

For: Good drawing tools • Excellent Sceneplanning tools • Good import options

Against: Can be a little fiddly to get to grips with