TOON BOOM CASE STUDY

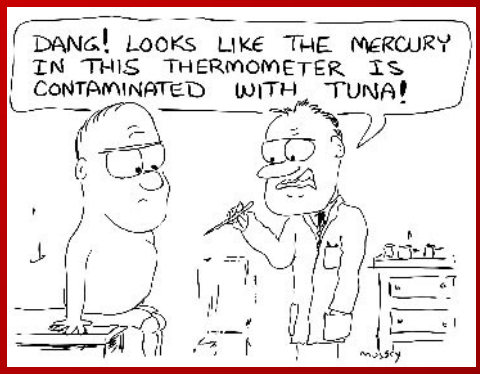
Dr. Steven Mussey is an independent animator and a physician in Primary Care. While a student at the George Washington University School of Medicine, he created several animated movies for an annual presentation in Washington, D.C. This was back in the early 1980s when computers were not yet tools for the artist. He used the traditional and laborious method of painted acetate sheets and movie film. Looking back, he wonders how he ever created the annual five-minute animated movies while studying to be a doctor at the same time.

While an intern and resident, he concentrated on newspaper cartoons and abandoned animated movies for several years. Then, when he saw an early animation program for the PC, Autodesk Animator, he was hooked on computer animation. Though early results looked rather primitive, he realized the potential for creating animation with less pain.

"I also soon discovered the Amiga Computer, which was the only desktop that could output easily to television. The tools were primitive. Many programs were needed to make a sound animation. To assemble a final product, you had to learn a programming language similar to BASIC and type in hundreds of commands."

After creating several lengthy cartoons about the world of medicine, he tried his hand at animating public service spots for the local television stations. Autodesk Animator Pro was used as the primary drawing tool. Sound and final compositions were created in Adobe Premiere.

Still, he was disappointed with the results. "A particularly depressing moment came when I compared the old medical school animations with the computer work. The liveliness was gone when I left film. The computer animation looked sterile."



In addition, working with a bitmapped program created quality problems. Bitmapped drawing programs seem to slow the animation process. Experiments with many bitmapped drawing programs were too labor intensive and had uneven results.

Flash, the traditional standard in PC/MAC animation, seemed promising. "Unfortunately, it is simply too awkward for a traditional animator." His efforts turned back to creating a regular newspaper cartoon and he stopped animating for several years.

"Last year, however, after playing with a demo of Toon Boom Studio on a Tablet PC, I suddenly felt motivated to retry my hand at animation. The vector mapping solved many problems. There is a huge value in working with a resolution independent medium."

"The Tablet PC has also been a wonderful development for artists. It's like carrying around a portable animation workstation."

Toon Boom Animation Inc.• 7 Laurier East, Montreal, QC Canada H2T 1E4 • (514) 278-8666
info@toonboom.com • www.toonboom.com

"Lip sync in Toon Boom is also a huge plus. A local television producer used to joke about the lips on my characters simply flapping with speech, allowing little correlation to realistic mouth movements. It was a real deficiency. With Toon Boom Studio, this becomes very easy. You can even make last minute modifications to dialogue and fix the animation to match the new words. It definitely has cranked up the quality."

"My first project was a public service spot on Aggressive Driving. It had been years since I had attempted any animation of consequence. I really believe the results were fantastic. Airplay here in Central Virginia has been heavy and created a lot of talk."

The first version of the animation, however, had a big problem: It was 60 seconds long and needed to be cut to 30 seconds. "I thought it would be impossible. I processed some of the dialogue to speed it up while maintaining the same pitch and I cut a lot of good animation. Working in Toon Boom Studio, however, I was able to make radical changes without a lot of work. Amazingly, the result looked better than the original. In any other program or medium, the only solution would be a total redo of the entire animation!"

He followed that up with three more 30-second spots.

"Essentially, Toon Boom Studio is a total animation and processing package. I have used Adobe Premiere and After Effects to make some minor color and sound modifications to optimize the final output, but I could easily live without these additional programs."

"I also now use the drawing tools in Toon Boom Studio to draw my newspaper cartoons."

"After becoming so totally familiar with Studio, I wanted to take my animations to the next level. I kept looking at a picture on the Toon Boom website from a recent Warner Brothers feature animation with its subtle shades and thought: I want to do that! Unfortunately, with Studio, I could only get the flat 'Flash' look. To move up to the next level, would cost the kind of money that only a huge studio could afford."

"Then, Solo was announced and I knew it was for me. Here, I could now have the same software used by Warner Brothers and other big names, minus the bazillion dollar price tag. I quickly snapped it up and studied the manual. There are two main manuals which are very well written."

"So far, the most useful features for me have involved shading and setting fields of focus. Also, the ability to blur fast action adds an element of professionalism. The drawing tools are more sophisticated. Scene planning is faster."

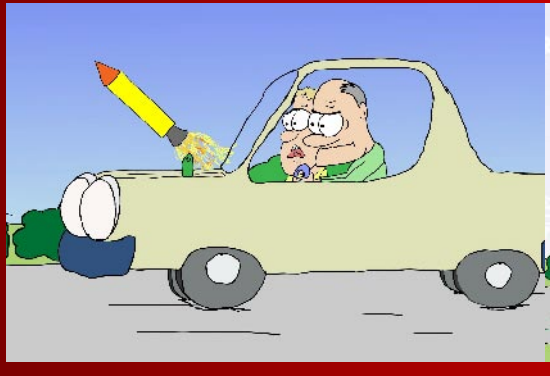
"Learning a new program like this is not always easy. I'm older now and have fewer brain cells, so it's tougher. I read the two manuals and tried not to worry if I hit concepts that seemed to make little sense. The key thing is I knew where to reference when I needed a certain task. Then, I decided to animate a 30-second spot. The program has generally been easier than expected. When I get stuck, I email Toon Boom and within 24 hours a well researched answer is waiting for me. The value of their presence has been huge."

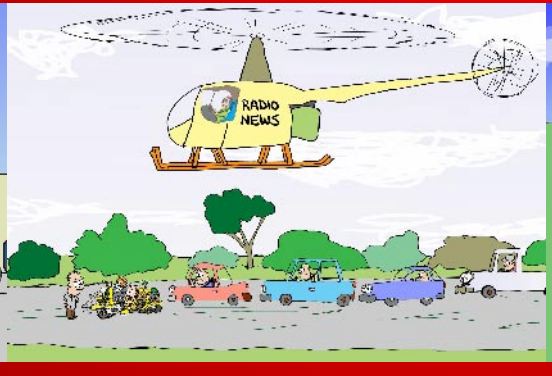
“Programs like Toon Boom Studio and Solo create a level playing field between me and the big studios. Here I am, an independent one person studio, creating projects that would seem otherwise impossible, especially given my budget.”

“Tools like kinematics and morphing should speed output and take away a lot of the tedium of animation.”

“There is a thrill to animation that is not possible with newspaper cartoons. I love watching a scene come together. With Solo, the effects modules create a real sophistication to the final product. Solo lets you add those extra touches that tell you the production values are ‘big budget.’”

“Now, when I compare my computer animations with the old film animations, I can finally say that technology has created a better, livelier production.”





Toon Boom Animation Inc.• 7 Laurier East, Montreal, QC Canada H2T 1E4 • (514) 278-8666
info@toonboom.com • www.toonboom.com