



ANIMATION

Preproduction Gets an Interactive Boost at Cartoon Network



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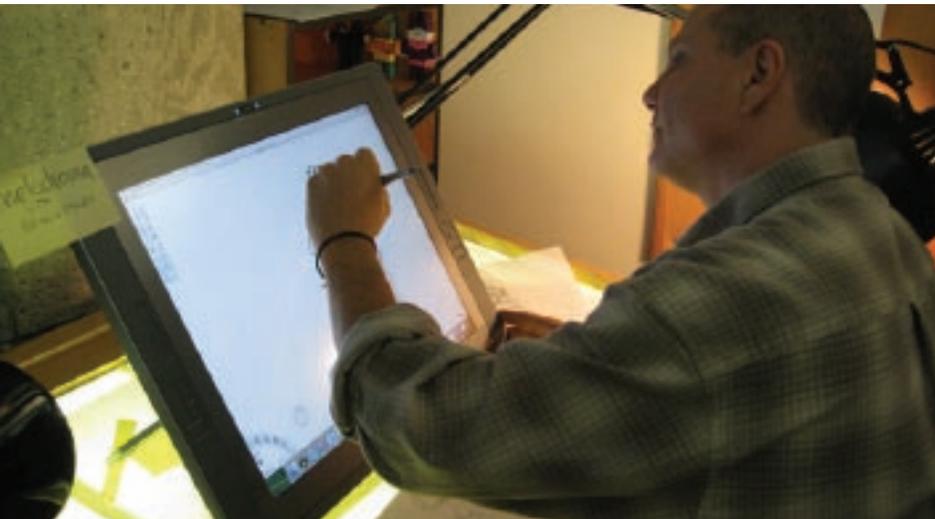
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Director of
Production
Technology

Animators at Cartoon Network feel like they are working with traditional media when working with a Wacom interactive pen display. Working directly on screen with the Cintiq offers the animation staff ways to explore and experiment that ultimately help build job satisfaction and speed the collaborative and creative processes.

Not that long ago, animators sketched their creations on paper and then ran to the copy machine to scale things up or down. Fixes, revisions, or creating alternate versions were time-consuming chores. Big mistakes meant starting over completely.

But it seems like a lifetime ago, says Antonio Gonella, Director of Production Technology at Cartoon Network Studios. Ever since he introduced Wacom® Cintiq® interactive pen displays to the studio’s animators, productivity and employee satisfaction have risen significantly. New storyboard versions can be created on the fly, experimentation is painless, and animators love being able to draw directly on the Cintiq’s screen.

Everyone at the studio has become “Cintiq-centric,” Gonella says, and the Cintiq is being integrated into all aspects of preproduction at Cartoon Network Studios (actual production is done overseas). Depending on how many shows are in production, between 80 and 220 artists work at the facility. Current shows in production with the Cintiq displays include “Transformers,” “Chowder,” “Foster’s Home for Imaginary Friends,” “Flapjack,” and a “Powerpuff Girls” special (just completed).



Storyboard development is a snap with the Wacom Cintiq 21UX and the opportunities it opens up for digital collaboration help speed production.

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First introduced to the Cintiq eight years ago when he worked at a major Hollywood studio as a color supervisor, Gonella was well aware of the potential the interactive pen display brought to the user upon his arrival at Cartoon Network. “I immediately shared my past experience concerning what artists could achieve with the Cintiq. There’s no question the Cintiq provided immediate workflow improvements over the traditional desktop pen tablet with its more intuitive nature and ability to provide huge productivity gains.”

Fortunate to have had a front row seat to the Cintiq evolution, Gonella reports that artists first used the Cintiq to clean up rough drawings in Adobe Illustrator. That quickly changed as artists began to appreciate the new workflow possibilities of drawing directly on the Cintiq’s color-accurate LCD monitor, and the natural response of the digital pen.

“The next step was to start using Wacoms for storyboarding, which is exactly where the Cintiq shines here at Cartoon Network,” Gonella continues. “The impact has been significantly measurable, because storyboards are mechanically intensive. Not only did the Cintiq significantly speed up the process, it also freed up a lot of the artists’ time to make creative decisions.”

As soon as the Cintiq 21UX interactive pen display was released, the studio ordered them for all the artists. This also started a migration of design-oriented staff in other divisions of the studio to Cintiqs as well, Gonella notes. “Now our Cartoonstitute development group, a marketing division called Cartoon Network Enterprises, and Creative Services staff are all using Wacom Cintiqs.”

“We here at Cartoon Network are pretty early adopters, but now the Cintiq is penetrating the Hollywood community,” he says. “We’re starting to see the workforce coming from other studios where they have used a Cintiq — or if they haven’t, they would like to use one. It’s such a great tool. I really like accommodating the artists, and anything that makes the work experience more enjoyable for them is a huge plus.”

Gonella says new users usually have a revelatory moment after playing with a Cintiq for a while and seeing what it can do.

“There’s a moment with the artists when they say ‘aha’ and they let go and let it become all it can be, realizing the potential of their computer,” he says. “For instance, all of our assets are tracked in databases, and we give the artists access to those databases. Using the Cintiq, they can look up reference rolls very quickly. The storyboard people can just take a production background and drop it into their panels, which helps across the board, because it is on-model and far more accurate.”

But the ultimate compliment is the number of Cartoon Network artists who’ve bought their own personal Cintiq. “The artists get exposed to it here because we provide it for them,” Gonella says. “Then they go home and realize they can’t work efficiently, so they end up buying one for home, too. I see it happen all the time.”

