

Wacom Cintiq used by Cartoon Networks

Wacom Cintiq Digital Pen Technology Gives Preproduction an Interactive Boost at Cartoon Networks

November 16, 2008 - 13:14

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's 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," 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).

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."

Gonella says new users usually have a revelatory second 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."

More Information at www.wacom.com. Image and Video Courtesy of Wacom.