ebPainter 3.1
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ros: Great for less ambitious cell animation
 style Web banner ads and other animation
uses in QuickTime or GIF formats.
Cons: Not the tool for high end work, although it
 does sync nicely with Totally Hip's LiveStage
QuickTime toolset.
Categories: Web Design
Developer: Totally Hip Software, Inc.
 <http://www.totallyhip.com>

There is quite a bit of competition between animation tools aimed at the burgeoning
Web design market, and the good news is this enables software developers large and
small to produce applications that tackle seemingly limited requirements in a range of
ways.

Some do it by adding animation modules to otherwise non-moving graphics tools like
ImageReady and FireWorks, others by developing stand-alone programs such as
GifMation <http://www.boxtopsoft.com> or PhotoAnimator <http://www.extensis.com>.
Web Painter by the aptly named Totally Hip people is a stand-alone animator that
follows the traditional cell animation role model.

TRAD OR FAD?
Cell animation is how animation was made before the era of Toy Story and A Bug's Life,
drawing and painting on stacked-up layers of transparent plastic film, 25 of them per
second of film. It is how Disney, Warner Brothers and Hanna-Barbera brought to us the
joys of Bugs Bunny and Mickey Mouse. Cell animation is probably the best way of
learning how to animate, even though 2D animators are turning to the computer as well
now. As Web designers we seem to be lumped with learning new skills all the time,
given how the Web is becoming another form of multimedia, but we simply do not get
the time to acquire those skills in the traditional ways. A software package as intuitive to

use as Web Painter is a major asset therefore.

Web Painter maintains its cell animation analogy in its Layer window where each frame of your finished animated GIF or QuickTime movie is equivalent to each cell, and every cell can have up to 32 layers. That is more than enough for any animation, even the most complex. You choose your frame rate when creating a new document (the default is 10 frames per second) and that determines the final length and size of the animation.

This is a little different to the way more usual Web animation software does it, as they require you to choose a delay for each frame or for all of them, but it is the way traditional cell animation is done. One cell, or set of layered cells, is equivalent to one-twentyfifth of a second. So if you want a fast-moving animation, you set the frame rate higher, and vice versa for a slow-moving one. Simple!

HE HIP WAY
Web Painter is an excellent way of skipping the lengthy trad learning process and jumping straight into whipping up a quick animation or several in under half an hour. You can do it all within Web Painter in a way you cannot in say Photoshop or Illustrator, due to its combination of vector drawing and bitmap painting modes. You can even use your favourite Photoshop filters by dropping them into its Plug-ins folder.

There are some oddities about Web Painter version 3, but Totally Hip are committed to improving the program on-goingly, especially seeing as how it is bundled free with their intriguing LiveStage QuickTime multimedia authoring software. There must be some great things in Totally Hip's future, as rumour has it they were approached in a friendly buy-out bid recently by Macromedia, themselves no slouches in developing excellent Web design software.

Foremost is that text set as bitmap does not come out anti-aliased but instead hard-edged and that means you get the jaggies. Choose your fonts well. There is an oddity also in the way it allows you to set type. When in vector mode you can only use TrueType fonts whereas using the bitmap type tool lets you choose either TrueType or PostScript typefaces. I would prefer to set my type in vector mode using anti-aliased

PostScript fonts, thank you.

However, by not anti-aliasing text and objects created in vector mode, your animations will be kept smaller in size. That is important especially for banner ads where many host Web sites set out very tight standards in ad dimensions and download time. For instance, InfoSeek specifies 468 x 60 pixels and up to 15K, whereas CNN/FN Online sets its spec as 468 x 60 pixels and up to 8K.

MORE TRANSITIONS THAN YOU CAN SHAKE A STICK AT
Transitions are a real Web Painter forté and it comes with a considerable set of them, more than any other product in its class. Explode through Iris all the way to Matrix Wipe. There are also thousands of royalty-free GIF animations on the CD-ROM, that you can learn from and use in your Web pages.

Web Painter is a great way to get a handle on animation for the Web, especially banner ads, for those who do not already own programs like ImageReady or FireWorks, or more high end software like After Effects. It has some oddities but these are minor compared to what you get for the price, and they will no doubt be ironed out soon as Totally Hip keep improving Web Painter and its sister product LiveStage in tandem.
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