FrameForge 3D Studio 2

Create 3D storyboards with everything from depth of field to detailed character interaction with version 2 of this easy-to-use pre-viz tool **BY CHRISTOPHER KENWORTHY**

DETAILS

PRICE
• £229* / $399 / €334*
*Currency conversion

PLATFORM
PC / Mac

RECOMMENDED SYSTEM
PC
• Windows XP / NT / 2000
• 500MHz Pentium III processor
• 512MB RAM
Mac
• OS X 10.3
• 500MHz G3 processor
• 512MB RAM

MAIN FEATURES
• Create peopled sets with quick drag and drop
• Position characters with presets or custom poses
• Apply relationships between characters
• Multiple cameras

DEVELOPER
Innoventive Software

WEBSITE
www.frameforge3d.com

FrameForge 3D Studio enables filmmakers and animators to pre-visualise their work. Originally conceived as a way to enable people without conventional drawing skills to create storyboards, the application focuses on the nuts and bolts of directing: camera set-ups, actor placement and lens choice. It's a quick and easy way to test ideas before presenting them to financiers, cast and crew. However, FrameForge is also developing into an advanced pre-viz tool.

Version 2 of the software is a huge improvement on its predecessor, largely in terms of functionality. Everything is easier to use and renders much faster, offering a genuinely quick way to drag and drop characters and sets together to roadtest an idea. All camera controls, such as pan, dolly, crane and zoom, are controlled by clickable sliders, or you can grab the camera in Overhead view and put it where you want. Positioning any of your three cameras takes moments. Actors and props can also be positioned and manipulated just as easily. There's even the option to use a USB joystick to control your cameras and actors.

To a 3D expert, the control of character poses may seem somewhat elementary, but this also means that an average director can, for example, click on an arm, adjust its axis and manoeuvre it into place. You can manipulate expressions in the same way, with sliders used to 'dial in' degrees of anger or a smile. It's never going to look like high-end work, but then it's not supposed to.

For anybody using the software, the trade-off will always be that of time against

● FrameForge 3D Studio 2 makes it easy to create detailed 3D storyboards. Once placed in a scene, the characters' eyelines are matched automatically. Depth of field is applied to blur the background

● Relationships can be applied between two characters, such as shaking hands or kissing, or you can make an actor look at or hold an object

detail. In some situations, you only need to drop an actor in front of a scene and you won't even bother with the additional clothing, expressions and phoneme controls. However, particularly difficult or important shots can still be developed more fully. This level of detail is a welcome inclusion.

NEW RENDER OPTIONS

Perhaps the best improvement in FrameForge 3D Studio 2 is the optically correct depth of field rendering. Choose your lens, pick a point of focus and accurate depth of field blurring is rendered. You can even change the f/stop on your virtual camera. For advanced directors, this is the sort of information you often want to test before getting to a location. Less significant in most real-world situations is the option to render out in cartoon or sketch format.

A decent supply of props and characters is included with the software, but more lighting controls would help, since simple ambience and key sliders are too basic. Also, the Mac version currently lacks Room Builder, although the developer says that it will be released to users free of charge in future. This excellent feature enables scale-accurate sets to be built from scratch.

So how does the software compare to similar packages? Although you could achieve the same results with Poser, FrameForge has far more instant functionality. It's also faster and simpler to use than more expensive pre-viz tools such as StoryViz, or Antics Pre-Viz, which are only required if you absolutely need animated storyboards. If you want the ability to create quick static storyboards with the option to spend time adding detail to complex shots, FrameForge 3D Studio 2 won't disappoint. ●

● Once shots are stored, you can access them in the Storyboard Manager and add arrows to imply character and camera movement

VERDICT

PROS
• Fast render times
• Depth of field rendering
CONS
• More props needed
• Too few characters

RANGE OF FEATURES	8
VALUE FOR MONEY	9
OVERALL	**8**