

CrazyTalk gives voice, facial expressions to your photos

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CrazyTalk lets you animate the faces in your digital photos.

There are dozens of genres and packages from which to choose: Pure image editors, digital picture viewers and catalogers, album makers and others that are just hard to define.

Tops in the "hard to define" category is CrazyTalk (\$39.95, www.reallusion.com/crazytalk). It's not really a photo-editing tool at all. Rather, it allows you to animate pictures of people you photograph with your camera. In other words, it lets you create your own Max Headrooms.

The premise is simple. You take a head — a man, a woman, a robot, a dog, etc. — from CrazyTalk's image gallery and supply your own words, either in the form of a digitally recorded .wav file from your PC or a text file using Windows' text-to-speech converter. CrazyTalk animates the image so it appears to be speaking the words.

This isn't one of those Jay Leno tricks where a pair of superimposed lips are the only thing moving on an otherwise static head. CrazyTalk's animation engine maps dozens of points on the human (or other) face: eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, cheekbones, lips, chin, nose, and points in between. Its fitting editor even allows you to map a wireframe model to your own photographically stored face.

The result is an entire face that moves and even appears to express emotion. Now this isn't *Shrek*-like technology, and the folks at Pixar have nothing to fear. But for the casual home user who'd like to send an animated greeting to Aunt Martha — with your head or anybody else's — CrazyTalk is a lot of crazy fun.

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http://www.usatoday.com/tech/techreviews/products/software/2003-01-13-spotlight-crazytalk_x.htm