

Crazy Talk
Photo Animator

Crazy Talk

by Reallusion

Guide Rating -



Techno-children rejoice. A new animation toy of capital coolness has reached maturity. This program creates talking heads that can read text files in your choice of voices, or lip synch to sound files of your own voice. These talking pictures, complete with animated emotions, can be placed on your desktop and fed a text file to read aloud, can be sent via email to speak directly to your grandmother, or can be placed in HTML on the Web to interact with visitors like you

Crazy Talk invites users to import a photo of a face... you, your old boyfriend, your gerbil. It resizes, lets you crop just the mug, and places a handy wireframe over the top. You align the elements of the wireframe using familiar graphic tools, nothing too fancy. Crazy Talk then substitutes *fake eyeballs!* That's right! To facilitate animation of this single image, Crazy Talk places cool fake eyes into your picture which you can adjust for size and color, including the iris and the cornea! This is almost as much fun as watching your dog recite Shakespeare. Likewise, the interior of the open mouth is simulated with a user-adjustable graduated fill.

Next you type text for the face to speak, or record a voice reciting a few choice words. If you use the text file method, you are given a requester with many bells and whistles for adjusting the synthetic voice to suit the character. Like the wireframe step this is quite easy and intuitive. On the downside, synthetic voices sound really synthetic reading text. That's what gave me the idea to attach one to the synthetic green guy. This is the option that downloads quickest on the Web. That little text file is tiny. The MPEG-4 file for audio is a bit bigger.

If you choose to use a .wav or .mov sound file, you can import the file of your choice, or like I did here, hit the record button and make your own sound track on the spot. The software analyzes the sound and produces an instant list of facial movements to provide lip synch. Then the real fun begins.

Highlight some words or a section of the sound waveform. Right click and a list of emotional expressions appears. Choose one and adjust the intensity with a slider. You can preview and accept or edit the result. You can add facial gestures to every word or sound if you wish. You can set them to be quite subtle or cartoonishly exaggerated.

You have many choices for saving your resulting animation. If you and your recipient have Outlook 98 or higher, you can send your animation in the body of an email. It will open and play upon being selected by the recipient. (The first time, a small player will download automatically.) You can associate a URL with the image so that a click will open the target Web page. From within the program you can include your animation as an attachment to letters from email clients other than Outlook, or you can export it as a .exe file and attach that to Web based email letters. You can also convert it to .avi or .rm movie for Web posting and/or streaming. These formats are much larger though. Better to dress up in costume and film live video.

You can also address the functions of the animation player with Javascript or Visual Basic. With these methods you can make your character interactive, allowing Web visitors to change the text and expressions on the fly for example.

Despite the early hour, I predict that Crazy Talk will be one of the best animation toys of aught three.

<http://animation.about.com/library/weekly/aafpr010903crazytalk.htm>