



June 4, 2008 - By [Joel Durham Jr.](#)

iClone 2.5 Studio Review

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You're not [Pixar](#), and you won't be any time soon. If, however, you're curious about creating your own 3D animations, from simple seconds-long clips to full blown machinima films, iClone 2.5 is definitely worth looking into.

iClone, from [Reallusion](#) is designed with one main purpose in mind: to make it easy for anyone, from the most experienced Spielberg to the clumsiest little Uwe Boll, to make movies with their computers. The software suite provides backgrounds, avatars, natural looking motions, and a ridiculous number of customization options—and it ties everything together with a wealth of tutorials to get would-be directors started quickly.

From concept to final rendering and output, iClone 2.5 blasts you through the process quickly and effortlessly. There's a *lot* of stuff this package has to brag about, and very little about which to complain. [Continued...](#)

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Feature Bonanza

The seemingly simple task of outlining the feature list for this review is daunting; there are enough features within the iClone package to turn this piece into a book.

At its core, iClone is an animation suite. Its primary goal is to allow users of any experience level, and even with relatively modest computer hardware, to script, storyboard, animate, render, and finalize a film, of any length, done in 3D graphics. iClone will not turn an amateur movie maker into [John Lasseter](#), or [Brad Bird](#), but it just might send the right creative mind down the path to 3D animation glory.

From the moment you get an idea for a piece of animation until you're ready to distribute the finished product, iClone has options to make the task easier for you. For a massive list of features, and a comparison between iClone 2.5 Studio edition (reviewed) and iClone 2.5 Standard edition, visit [Reallusion's proper page](#). Here's the abbreviated version.

iClone lets you create your actors, or avatars, however you like. With its second generation avatar engine (dubbed G2 Avatar), it allows you to use one of the included sample actors or to create your own, and customize it in a whole bunch of ways:

- Character motion and posing is ultra-realistic, as is cloth, thanks to the G2 Avatar system. You can create realistic, custom clothing that moves and acts naturally for any of your actors.
- You can change your avatar's figure, making your actors fit, strong, fat, or frumpy.
- You can do a startling amount of customization on the actors' faces, from the size of the eyeballs to the pointy-ness of the chin.
- With the G2 Avatar engine, grainy or blurry close-ups aren't a worry as it allows 1024x1024 pixel textures.
- You can change other things, like skin tone, height, inner and outer clothing, gestures, and much more.

And that's just the avatars. Other features include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Ambient lighting and realistic shadows for your avatars and other items in the animated world you create.
- Special effects can be edited to your heart's desire, including particle-based, light-casting stuff, fog, and more.
- Voice recording using your PC microphone, lets you and any other voiceover actors actually import your voice into the film. No subtitles necessary.
- You can sync music tempo of imported music with your characters' movement. Just be sure to get the rights to any tunes you don't create yourself before you post your machinima to YouTube!



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That's a rough overview of the many, many features iClone has to offer. Note that there are only a few—but a very significant few—differences between the \$80 Standard package and the \$200 Studio edition. Features included in the more expensive package include things like integration with CrazyTalk (a Reallusion software app that lets you animate mouths in sync to recorded voices); automated motion retargeting to make motion look more realistic by doing away with foot slip over ground textures, some advanced particle special effects controls, the iClone Animation Timeline Editor for more friendly real-time scene shooting, iClone 3D Studio Max plug-in for character, accessory, and background editing in 3DS Max, a motion editor, and a few other odds and ends. [Continued...](#)

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The Friendly Starts Here

The crux of a user friendly application is the interface. If it's too complicated or lacks intuitiveness, newbie users will be instantly turned-off. Meanwhile, if the interface is too simplistic, the software package might lose its audience as users become experienced and seek out more functionality.

iClone handles both scenarios gracefully with a clean, intuitive interface that presents just about everything the software has to offer within a few clicks of the surface. The primary element of the interface is an icon bar across the top of the window through which you choose which aspect of your film to work on: actors' faces or bodies, scenery, special effects, exporting the project into a self-contained film, and so on.



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A Tools drop-down menu presents even more opportunities to get your hands dirty, with offerings including head and body customization, motion, backgrounds, and more. To the right you'll see an area displaying templates, customization options like specific eyes, teeth, body types, or color palettes, depending upon which of the interface's tabs you click.

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Making Movies



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Using iClone 2.5 to create 3D motion pictures is as easy as reading a tutorial and following along. The online help file is gigantic and incredibly well-organized, and guides you through the process of filmmaking. The primary tutorial is easy to find, and practically takes your hand to lead you through your first movie.

It tells you, for instance, how to create a 3D head that's ready for facial animation. Thanks to a number of emotion presets, getting your characters to perform with gusto is simple.



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Next, you'll finish the process of creating a 3D character. You can customize the body any way you like, and when you're done, you have an actor ready to tackle anything you toss at it—without telling you to talk to its manager.

You then learn to animate the character. You can use preset gestures and animations, like dancing, standing idle, kicking up heels, and so on, and customize them to your liking.

Add music, dialog, and a background. Also tweaking the lighting effects and camera angles. Add special effects that, while not quite worthy of *The Matrix*, are still pretty darn good. When you're done, you can tell iClone to export the scene in a number of different ways. [Continued...](#)

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Final Thoughts

iClone is customizable throughout the entire filmmaking process, and the actual exporting of the scene you've created is another highly tweakable process. You can choose from four varieties of file format: AVI, WMV, RM, or MP4. Then, you can adjust a myriad of settings to change the size of the playback window (iClone even goes up to HD resolutions like 1920x1080!) and render quality. You can add antialiasing, tweak bitrates in formats, and more.

The goal in all that is to give you an animation that you can do with what you please. Obviously, you're not going to post a 1080p video on your Web site, or email a 120MB animation file. Tweak it as you like, then export it. iClone renders movies incredibly quickly, which is a good thing for amateurs who don't want to wait 90 minutes per frame for Shrek-worthy animation.

The biggest question when it comes to iClone isn't whether to purchase it; if you're a budding director who wants to attempt to make a few movies, it's well worth it. The big question is, which version? Studio edition gives you compatibility with other programs and a lot more control over certain aspects of the scene customization, but does the difference justify a \$120 charge on your credit card?

That really depends upon how deeply you're going to get into the program. If you become a machinima nut after creating a few segments, you'll want as much iClone power as you can get, but if the meticulous process of creating movies turns you off, you'll want to be out as little dough as possible.

Regardless, iClone is a fantastic way to get a jump into the world of 3D animation, allowing you to create films of any length with actors you control, sets you create, and dialog and stories that you write. If you dream it, iClone can help you do it.

Product:	Reallusion iClone Studio 2.5
Company:	Reallusion
Price:	\$200
Pros:	Very intuitive; superb feature set; customization available for just about every aspect of the animation process.
Cons:	One little bug.
Summary:	This is an overall terrific package allowing all kinds of creative, 3D animation for all levels of animators.

Making Movies

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