

# Reviews



## CrazyTalk Animator 2 Pipeline

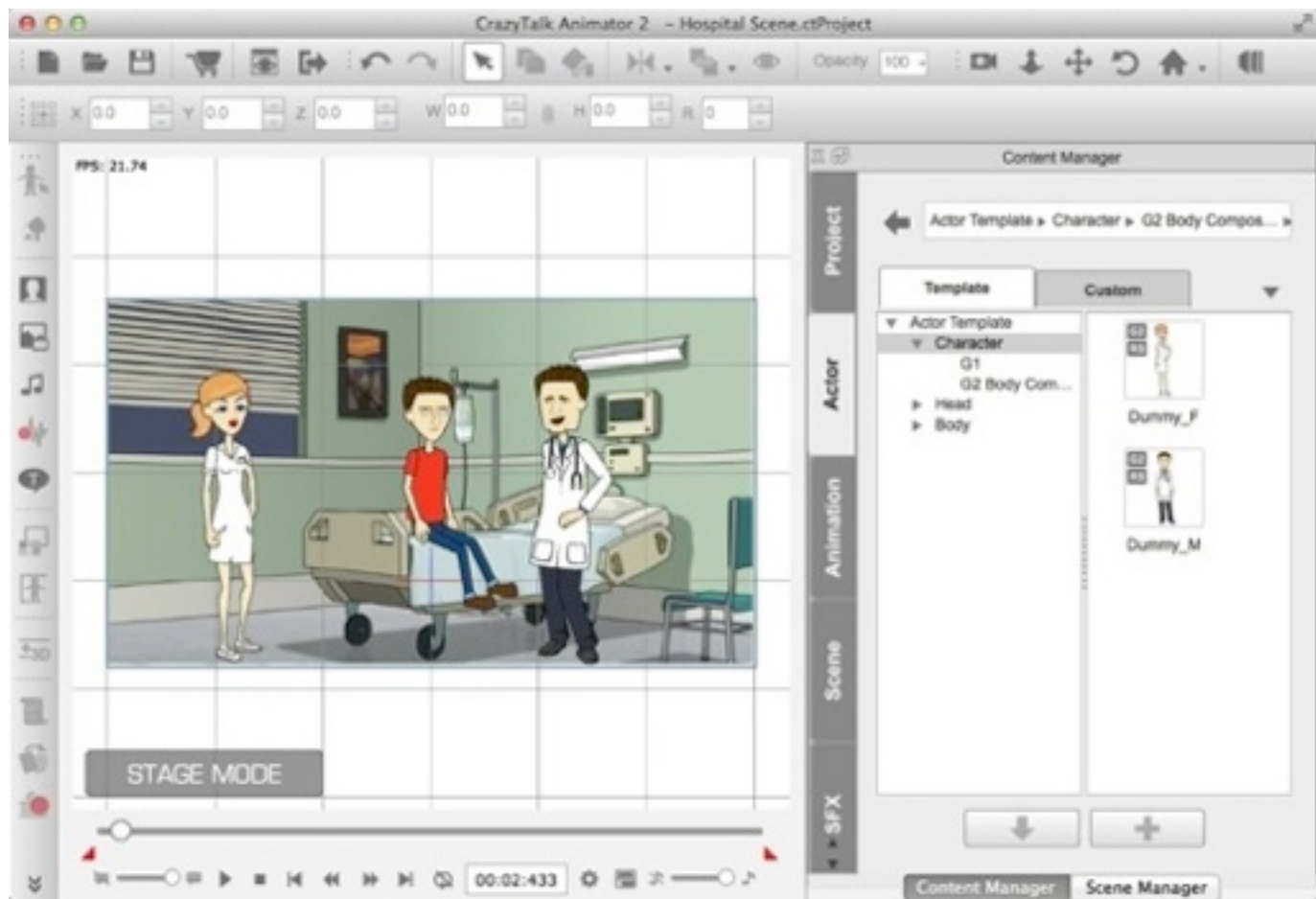
by L. Davenport

For years I have wanted to create animations, but lacked the tools to realize that dream. Plus the idea of hand drawing every frame/cell seemed like an overwhelming task. Now with CrazyTalk Animator 2, my dream has become a reality. CrazyTalk Animator is from the same company that sells CrazyTalk 7. The difference between the two is that CrazyTalk 7 just animates the face whereas CrazyTalk Animator animates the whole body. With CrazyTalk Animator, all you have to do is pick one of the provided “actors” and start animating him/her using one or more of the pre-defined movements - or you can create your own movements. No redrawing your actor over and over again to simulate movement!

There are three versions of CrazyTalk Animator - a Standard, Pro, and Pipeline version. These are similar in features, but differ in that with the standard version, you create your animations from the included (modifiable) characters. The Pipeline version lets you also create your own characters from scratch. This review will be for the Pipeline version. BTW: CrazyTalk Animator isn't a kid's tool. It is a full featured 2D animation program.

### User Interface

When you first open CrazyTalk Animator (CTA), the main window opens up. The largest part of this window is the Preview (work area). This is where you create and view your animations. It also has a square outline that shows the “Safe Area” (the part of the screen that will be



This is the CrazyTalk Animator work area. It shows a scene that I was creating using a background (*that was created by the Smiley Guy Studios and the artists of Odd Job Jack*) and three of the included G3 characters. Off to the right are the Project, Actor, Animation Scene, and SFX tabs that contain all of the content that came with the program plus the “Custom” content that the user creates/imports.

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exported when the animation is complete). This allows you to have objects and characters “Off screen” but ready to enter the stage/safe area.

Various tools line the top and left side of the main window, A timeline crosses the bottom, and the Content and Scene Manager tabs sit to the right of the main window. The Content Manager groups together all of the content that comes with the program plus the custom content and animations that you create. The Scene Manager lists all of the characters and objects that you have added to the current project.

## Adding objects

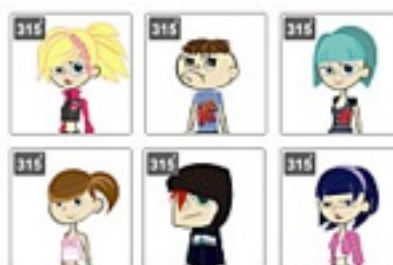
You can import objects into CTA. These include: Actors that you have created, props, image layers, backgrounds, text, and effects. The supported file types are (BTW: some are PC only formats):

- Image: BMP, JPG, TGA, PNG, Gif, SWF
- Others: popVideo (Reallusion’s file format)

## Actors/Characters

An animation would be very boring if there weren’t some sort of person, creature, or object moving around on the screen. Enter stage-left, the actor. CTA comes with a good selection of G1 and G2 actors. FYI: G1 stands for Generation 1, e.g. actors that were created for the previous version of CrazyTalk Animator. They are basically flat 2D actors that only have one view or body angle. G2 actors were created for the latest version of CTA. Each one comes with 10 different angles that you can rotate their body to. This means you can switch between the 0, 45, 90, 135, 180, 225, 270 and 315-degree angles plus the top, and bottom views. With these 10 angles, the actors are able to perform both 2D flat motions and 3D dimensional motions.

Don’t misunderstand. Though they are called actors or characters, they don’t have to be living representations. You can also animate objects. For example, you can give an umbrella eyes and a mouth and have it talking and hopping all over the screen. There is even one stock actor that is composed from vegetables!



These are a few of the available G1 actors. They only have one direction or angle.



These are a few of the G2 actors. They can be rotated in 8 directions plus be viewed from the top and bottom.

## Modifying Your Actors

### Content Manager

CTA comes with a library of ready-made complete actors and body parts. You can use the actors as-is, or mix-and-match their body parts. There are:

**Characters** (complete actors with interchangeable hair and clothes):

- 14 G1 Characters (or modifications of the same actor)
- 11 G2 Characters (this includes a G2 Reference Guy - made up of connected square blocks, and character made up from vegetables)

**Bodies** (clothed and unclothed):

- 13 G1 bodies
- 10 G2 bodies

**Heads:**

- 9 Sprite-based (more about Sprites later) heads
- 3 Morph-based heads
- 1 Hybrid head

In addition to the actors and their interchangeable body parts, the Content Manager Library includes a variety of Props. This is everything from shoes and clothes to backdrops, chairs, tables, etc. Everything you would need to get started in creating your first scene (what good is it to have a moving actor if all it is doing is moving around on a white background? BORING!) Also if you look around the Internet, you can find various sites that have background and other props that can be use with CTA.



This is the same actor, except I switched out the shape of his jaw line, his hair, eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth to give him three different looks.



You can further modify the look of your actor by changing its body proportions.

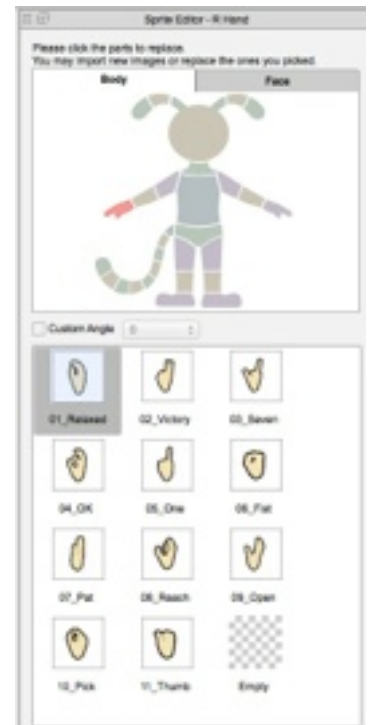
## Sprites

Most of the CTA actors and props are sprite-based. This means the actors, their body parts, and the props are all composed of one or more sprites - that are interchangeable.

Definition: A sprite is a group of different media files that make up your character's different body parts. The different Sprite media formats are (BTW: some are PC only formats):

- Image: .jpg, .jpeg, .bmp, .gif, .png, .tga.
- Video: .swf, .avi, .wmv, .mpg, .mpeg, .mpe, .flv, .rm, .rmvb, .mp4, .asf, .asx, .wm
- Reallusion Specific Format: .popVideo

When you want to change a sprite, you simply call up the Sprite Editor, select the body part you want to replace (from the silhouetted dummy), and then choose a replacement sprite. BTW: The screen shot shown to the right, shows all of the replacement sprites for the actor's right hand.



**You can use the Sprite Editor to replace any part of your actor's body. In this example, I am replacing the actor's right hand.**

## Head types

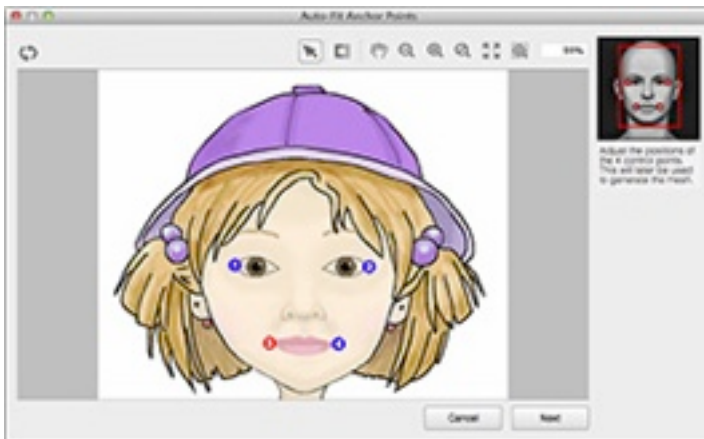
There are three types of heads: Sprite based, Morph-based, and Hybrid (a combination of the previous two). We have already talked about Sprites and how they are interchangeable, so let's talk about Morph-based heads. These are heads that were brought into CTA from a photo or other image.

## Face Creator

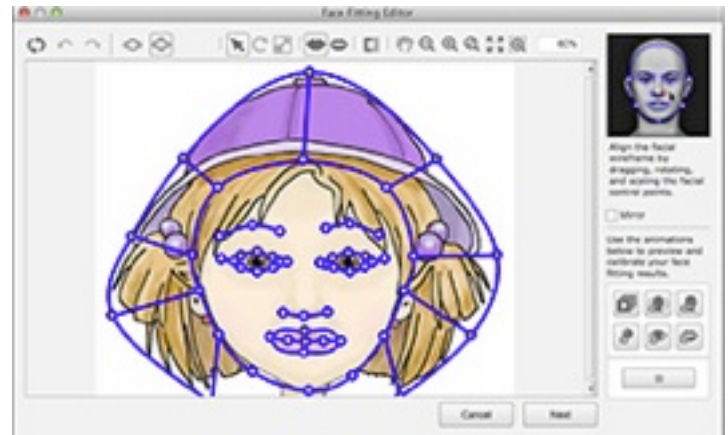
You need bring your photo or image (of a face) into CTA using the Face Creator so that you can have its mouth move while it speaks, roll its eyes and have facial expressions.

When you click on the "Create Face" button, an "Image Processing" window appears. After choosing your face photo or image, Face Creator steps you through the process of identifying the locations of the eyes and other parts of the face.

After the Face Fitting process, your face is placed on top of a stick-figure body. But before proceeding, it's a good idea to modify the face further. There are buttons that let you replace the eyes with movable eyes and add teeth so when you actor speaks, he/she won't look like a toothless-wonder.



**CrazyTalk Animator needs to know where the eyes and mouth are located on your actor (especially helpful if it isn't a human). So you start by placing four dots at the corners of the eyes and mouth.**



**Once the facial features are located, a wire frame and extra dots appear for fine tuning the outline of the face, eyes, mouth, eyebrows, and hair. Buttons (to the right) let you test the head, eye, and mouth movements.**

## Teeth

CTA's content library has around 30 different types of teeth that you can choose from. Everything from white or yellowed teeth to gold capped, vampire, and animal teeth. Do you want your actor to have braces? No problem. Need decayed and missing teeth for a zombie? Again - no problem.

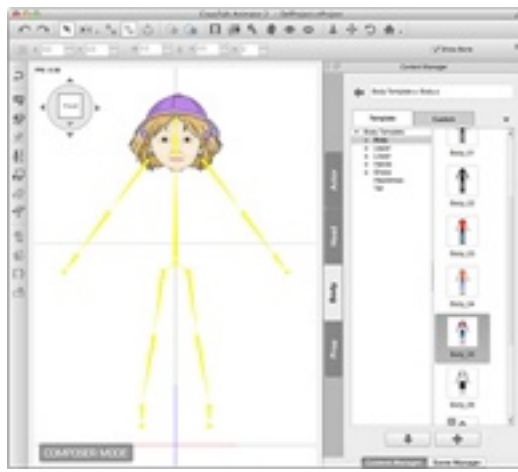
There are preferences that let you change the rotation and size of the teeth (to match the rotation and size of the face). You can also change the teeth's Brightness, Hue and Saturation.



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## Vivid Eyes

What is one of the first things that you notice when you meet a new person or look at a photo? The eyes. They tell you a lot about the person - is she happy, sad, energetic, etc. So CTA lets you replace the eyes of your image-based face with "Vivid Eyes". VividEyes are divided into six layers - the Iris, White of the eye, Eye light (sparkle in the eye), Eye Shadow, Eyelash, and Makeup. Each of these has its own set of parameters that you



Once you have imported your new face, CrazyTalk Animator places it on top of a stick figure - waiting for you to add a body to the head.



I have replaced my character's simplistic eyes with CrazyTalk Animator's VividEyes. Notice how they improve the look of the actor.



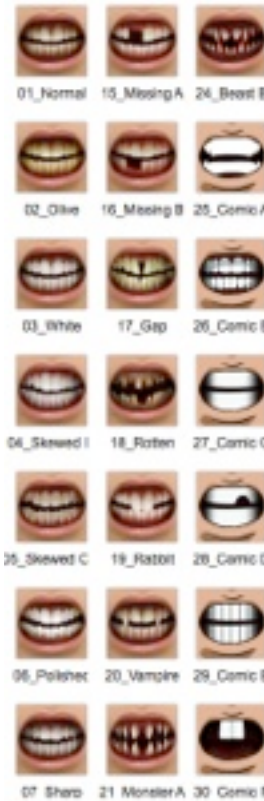
This is my finished Actor named Alice.

can modify the get the exact look that you want.

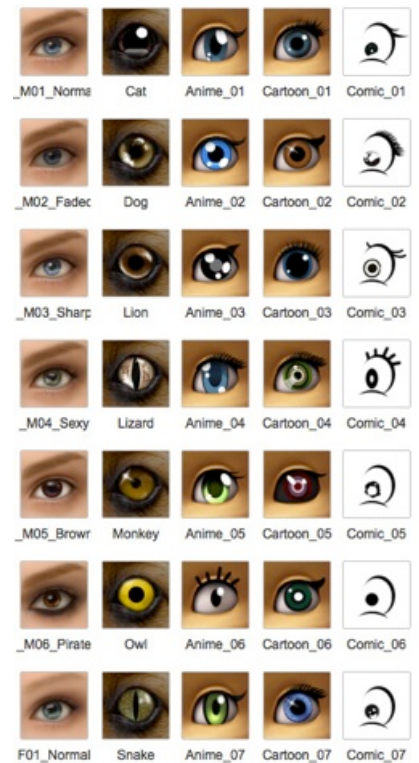
There are five Vivid Eye Template groups: Animal, Anime, Cartoon, Comic, and Human (enough styles to cover all of the different types of imported images). Except for Comic (which is only black and white), all of the other template groups come with a variety of iris shapes and colors.

Once you have added Vivi Eyes and teeth, it is time to save your head to the Custom Library so you can use it over and over again.

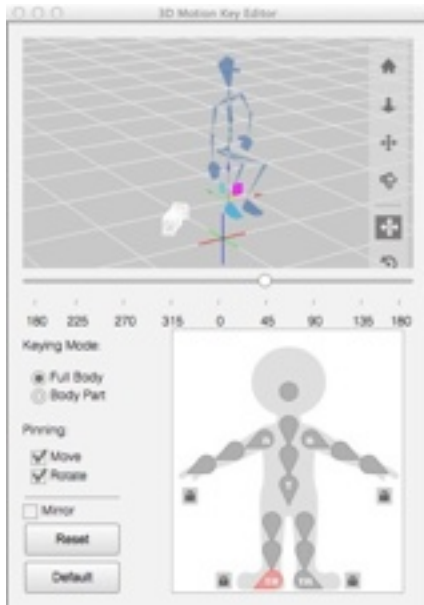
You can stop here, or continue on with adding a body to you head to create a complete character. This is accomplished by simply double-clicking on one of the pre-defined bodies in the Content Library.



This screen shot shows 21 or the 30 available teeth that you can add to your actor.



There are five different types of Vivid Eyes that can be applied to your actor: Normal (human), Animal, Anime, Cartoon, and Comic. Once applied, you can make them roll and move around just like real eyes.



This is the 3D Motion Key Editor. I used it to place the young man (in the first screen shot) in a sitting position.

## 3D Motion Key Editor

One of the ways to position your actor is by using the 3D Motion Key Editor. Its bottom half has a silhouette of a human shaped dummy with all of

the linked bones/joints represented by small teardrops. When you click on one of the linked joints - say the knee joint - that joint becomes active in the stick figure that is standing in the 3D View (located at the top of the window). Then by using the X, Y, Z axis arrows you can bend and move that joint. Notice (in the previous screen shot) that I used this process to make my actor appear to be sitting (as seen in my first screen shot).

At the middle of the window is a degrees slider (from 0 to 315) that you can use to rotate your G2

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actor. Notice that my sitting actor is pointing at the 45 degree angle.

## HumanIK Motion Engine

CTA's core motion engine uses HumanIK. So when you move one body part - like the hand that is reaching for something - CTA will automatically calculate the pose for the rest of the body.

You can also instruct CTA to "Lock" or "Pin" body parts so they don't move with the rest of the body. This would be handy for instances (such as climbing a ladder) when you want one hand and one foot to remain pinned to a ladder step as you raise the body to the next step.

## Motion

CTA includes a variety of 2D and 3D motions that you can add to your actor. The 2D and 3D motions are divided into six categories: Move, Idle, Talk, Perform, Dance, and Working. So if you want your actor to cry, simply double-click on the "Cry" motion. Instantly your actor will raise her hands to her eyes and her body would bob up and down. It's that easy.

## Puppet Editor

In addition to coming with pre-defined motions, dances, etc. CTA, also lets you manually create your facial and body motions using the Body or Face Puppeteering Panels. These panels contain real-time puppeteering controls with easy-to-use facial expression commands.

## Speech

In addition to making your actor move around the screen, you can also make him or her speak. CTA is set up to automatically lip-sync to audio that you import or create using CTA's "Create Script" tool. You can leave the lip-syncing set as-is or fine-tune the mouth shapes for the individual words using CTA's "Lip Editor".

There are three ways to add dialog:

- You can type the dialog into CTA's "Text to Speak" editor and have one of Apple's default voices vocalize the text.
- You can bring in pre-recorded dialog. BTW: You can even bring in a song and have your person or animal sing the lyrics.
- You can use CTA's Record tool to record your voice as you speak - provided you have a connected microphone.

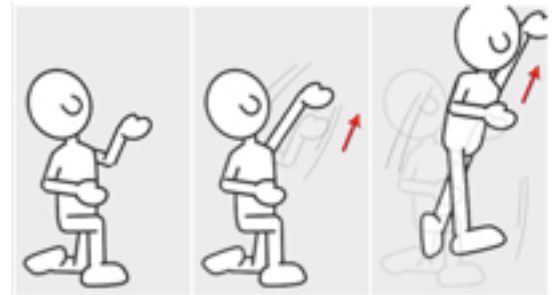
## 3D View

There is an option to view the work area (or Stage) in 3D. This way you can rotate the stage to see the Z-depth relationship of each object or character that you have placed in the stage. This also lets you drag these items back and forth to place them in the exact location (in relation to the others) that you want.

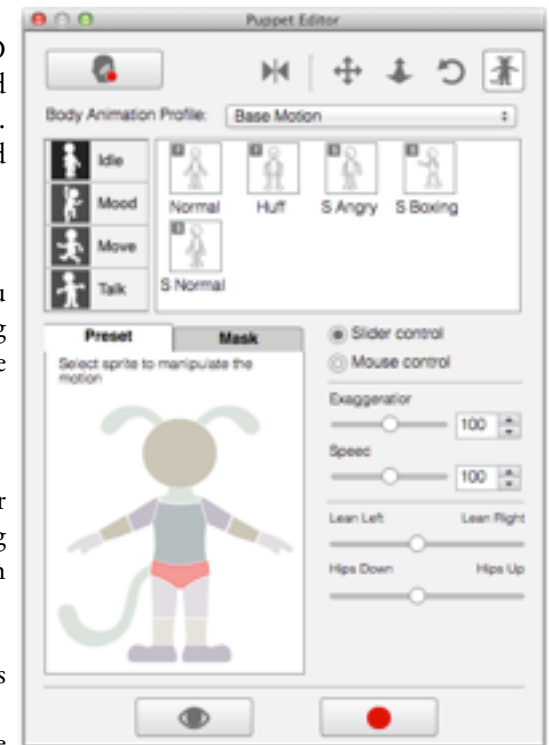
## Camera

You can customize your camera views with pan, zoom, and rotate tools. You can also create perspective orbit effects by changing character angles and moving props in Z-depth order.

Since your objects are layered in your 3D stage, you can create a camera move that will approach and then pass your objects (like moving through a group of trees). Just like you were filming in the real world.



You can specify whether your movement will only effect the chosen body part or effect the Full body.



You can manually create your facial and body motions using the Body or Face Puppeteering Panel



Both of these images are of the same scene. The one on the left is the normal front view, whereas the one on the right is the 3D view. You can use the 3D view to reposition your actors and props within 3D space (using the XYZ axis arrows).



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## Text

You can add text to your animation using one (or more) of the three available text styles: Comic - for adding cartoon style text bubbles; Realistic - for adding text to signs etc; and Subtitle for adding onscreen subtitles. Using the timeline, you can sync the text to the audio so they appear and disappear at the correct times during the animation.



**You can add text bubbles (of varying styles) to your animation.**

## Timeline

CTA comes with a Timeline that you can use to edit animation keys and clips for actors, props, cameras, image layers, sounds, music, etc.

There are Motion Tracks for every item in your scene. For instance there are three Master Tracks for you character's head alone: Voice Clip, Facial



**You can use the Timeline to edit animation keys and clips for actors, props, cameras, image layers, sounds, music, etc.**

clip and Face Motion tracks. The Voice clip track stores the voice file and the lip movements and the Facial Clip track stores the facial expression clips for the head, face, and Eyes. The Face Motion track stores the Face Transform and Face Sprite tracks.

So as not to overwhelm you with tons of tracks, CTA gives you the ability to expand and collapse the tracks out of view.

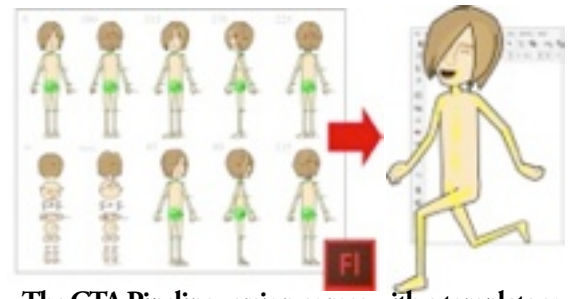
## Create you own multi-dimension actor from scratch (CTA Pipeline version only)

The CTA Pipeline version was created for professional animators to import custom actors created using an external 2D or 3D tools.

Not only can you import custom sprites to replace body parts, but you can also create your own multi-dimension characters via a SWF format template that comes with the Pipeline package.

The Pipeline edition also includes tools so you can fine-tune layers, offsets, and joint masks for optimized results. When completed, CTA will automatically turn your creations into animation-ready, multi-dimensional characters for you.

You will also be able to expand your motion resources library with iClone iMotion files, and even import popular industry formats like FBX/ BVH from any 3D motion tools via 3DXchange.



**The CTA Pipeline version comes with a template so you can create you own multi-dimensional actors.**

## Export

CTA can export your animation as a MOV file with these available video Codecs: H.264, MPEG-4, Photo JPEG, Apple ProRes 4444, Apple ProRes 422, and Lossless. You can also specify the Frame size (from 720x480 to 1920x1080) or set whether it as full frame, widescreen, standard or high definition. You can also save your animation as a frame-by-frame image sequence with alpha-channel ready Targa or PNG formats. Image size up to 3000x3000, or save it as 3D Stereo Output with Convergence Distance for viewing with red/cyan glasses or other 3D glasses.

If this review has peaked your interest, I suggest that you first check out a couple of YouTube videos such as the: [CTA Demo reel](#) and a video showing the [creation of a street scene](#).

There are three different CrazyTalk Animator 2 versions		
Standard	Pro	Pipeline
Use Content	Modify Content	Custom Content
The Standard edition is suitable for a user without prior animation experience, as they can simply use the content library without detailed customization.	The PRO edition is designed for animation enthusiasts that need precise timeline editing and custom media importing for content modification.	The Pipeline edition is designed for animators and studios, that already work with Flash and other 3D tools. They can import custom characters and motion files from iClone and external tools via 3DXchange.
<b>Check out Reallusion's <a href="#">Comparison web page</a> for a list of the differences between the three versions.</b>		

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If you are still interested, I suggest that you download the demo and take it for a test run. Then decide which CTA version would best suit your needs.

## G2 Power Tools vol. 2: Mega Presenter

(CrazyTalk Animator content pack)

If you purchase CrazyTalk Animator, you may be interested in expanding your content library with one of Reallusion's content packs. Let's take a quick look at their G2 Power Tools volume 2: Mega Presenter. It is full of props, clothes, backgrounds scenes, and special effects that work perfectly with CTA.



The "Walks of Life" content package contains clothes for: Business, Construction, Police, Medical, Airline, and Sparty. It also contains a variety of shoes and occupational props for police, construction, airline, and hospital.



This is a nice complement to the Walks of life G2 Body Composer Kit 2 for it provides six editable scenes and equipment that match the "Walks of Life" character outfits.



This is a special effects package that contains everything you need to highlight demos, presentations, slides, infographics and more! It includes dozens of eye-catching effects, comical in style, all animated to help you tell the difference between a boring presentation and a CrazyTalk one! - BTW: Why they would include gun shot holes in a presentation SFX package, I do not know. But if you want them - they've got them.



The Motions in this pack are designed for three popular presentation scenarios: Presentation, Interaction and Situation. They include everything you need, including: waving your hands to greet someone, checking a list of items, nodding at a suggestion, jumping up a success ladder, or cheering for your favorite team!

## The Skinny

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**Evaluation:** I like that CrazyTalk Animator 2 has some of the same tools found in CrazyTalk 7, e.g. the Face Fitting tool. This helped expedite the learning process in this one area. CrazyTalk Animator takes the pain and drudgery out of drawing every cell of your animation. Now with ready-made actors that have interchangeable parts, along with the pre-defined motions, it is a snap to create eye-catching animations. And for the higher-end users who want to create their own actors from scratch, the Pipeline version is a must-have.

**Minimum System Requirements:** Mac OS X v10.7 or later, Dual core CPU or higher, 2 GB RAM or higher recommended, 5 GB free hard disk space or higher recommended, Display Resolution: 1024 x 768 or higher, Graphics Card: Nvidia GeForce 8 Series or higher /ATI HD 3000 Series or, higher Video Memory: 512MB RAM or higher recommended

**Recommended System Requirements:** Mac OS X v10.7 or later, Dual core CPU or higher, 4 GB RAM or higher recommended, 10 GB free hard disk space or higher recommended, Display Resolution: 1440 x 900 or higher, Graphics Card: Nvidia GeForce 9 Series or higher /ATI HD 3000 Series or higher Video Memory: 1 GB RAM or higher recommended

**Pipeline version additional requirements:** Adobe Flash or some other program that can use the SWF templates needed to create new actors from scratch.

**Company:** [Reallusion](#)

**Price:** CrazyTalk Animator Standard: \$49.95  
CrazyTalk Animator Pro: \$179.95  
CrazyTalk Animator Pipeline: \$299.95  
G2 Power tools vol. 2 - Mega Presenter content pack: \$69.95

[Available Trial Copy](#)