

move to a new frame. Oh, and a test render of a few minutes of footage? Go grab some lunch.

To me, this takes much of the fun out of using the product. If Digital Anarchy can deliver faster output, then ToonIt could be quite successful. The price does take the edge off—it's only a few hundred—plus it works with most of the NLEs and compositing programs you probably al-

ready have. I am in the preproduction stages of a new narrative podcast series, and I had pondered the concept of doing it completely in animated form. I just had not seen any good solutions out there. Now, after working with ToonIt, I think it could possibly work. And any program that really gets me thinking creatively about its various uses is a promising one. □

# Autodesk Combustion 2008

**Reliable compositor gets a color-correction boost.** REVIEWER: FRANKLIN MCMAHON



**The Color Warper tool, new to Autodesk Combustion 2008, provides complete control over all aspects of the hue, tone, and contrast of all colors in a scene.**

Autodesk Combustion has always been one of my favorite desktop compositing programs. In my experience, it's well built for real-time results, expertly using OpenGL to provide a fast and responsive creation environment.

Combustion has always had a large toolset. It combines 3D compositing, painting, dazzling particle effects, top-notch time-remapping, vector shapes, image stabilization, rotoscoping, text animation, and HD and Flash output—to name a few. It gained the Diamond Keyer in its last version. Ported over from Autodesk's Flame system, the keyer offers professional-level control for just about any keying job. Combustion 2008's main new feature is another new operator derived from the Flame system: Color Warper. It is slightly disappointing that Autodesk is not adding any ground-up new features built specifically

for Combustion, but it is encouraging that the company is moving chunks of its high-end programs into the reasonably priced Combustion.

Color Warper is a powerful tool that provides complete controls over just about anything you want to do hue-wise in your image or clip. As with any other operator in Combustion, you simply choose it and apply it to a level. The Color Warper offers color correction, color matching, and even a color keyer to key areas out based on hue.

With the Color Warper, you can set up different sections of your clip and adjust them independently within one operator. Say you want-

ed to change the tone of your entire clip to a colder icy-blue shade, but you wanted to select a car in the video and pump that up to more of a green shade. You can independently alter the two elements without having to key out or move the additional element to its own separate level. Currently, you can have up to three separate regions

## bottomline

**Company:** Autodesk

[www.autodesk.com](http://www.autodesk.com)

**Product:** Combustion 2008

**Assets:** New version adds powerful Diamond Keyer and Color Warper tools to an already robust feature set.

**Caveats:** No ground-up new features.

**Demographic:** Anyone needing a desktop compositing program with plenty of color control.

**PRICE: \$995 (FULL); \$199 (UPGRADE FROM COMBUSTION 3 OR COMBUSTION 4)**

a white pixel—or a group of pixels), and Combustion locked into the exact color temperature. I then moved that hue onto the new footage with a single click.


All color controls are easily accessible in the Color Warper operator—including gamma, offset, hue, saturation, and contrast. The changes are made via interactive color wheels, and the response time via OpenGL is fast and accurate. There are also separate controls for black levels and white levels, with additional controls for highlights, mid-tones, and shadows. In addition, all of this works with the built-in vector-scope as well as the histogram within Combustion.

I really do love the new color options in the program—easily worth the reasonably priced upgrade. But especially for potential new customers, it's important to look at the big picture: where Autodesk is taking the program.

New product info for Combustion 2008 was slim even as the product began shipping. A basic paragraph on the website outlined the new Color Warper features in a few bullet points. For many of its new releases, Autodesk provides online video tutorials, PDFs, etc. If the big update for the new version is a piece of Flame moved to Combustion, it appears that at the moment, not a lot of ground-up development on the program is happening.

That same kind of question came up last year with the Maya acquisition. In fact, I anticipated the latest 3ds Max 2008 update to be basic; instead, it turned out to be quite substantial and impressive (see my review at [digitalcontentproducer.com/desktoppost/depth/autodesk\\_ds\\_max](http://digitalcontentproducer.com/desktoppost/depth/autodesk_ds_max)), proving that Autodesk can balance similar products aimed at different markets. But the present moment for Combustion is crucial. Autodesk has customers moving to its other compositing program, Toxik, as well as to competing software such as Nuke, Motion, and even Shake—as well as to After Effects. If the long-term plan for Autodesk is to add an existing part of another program to Combustion every year or two, then the future does not look particularly bright.

Chris Vienneau, Autodesk product manager for Toxik, Combustion, and Cleaner, says that his first major effort after taking over management of Combustion was to focus the revision around things that the product does well already—and in this case, that was color correction. The product is not at “end of life” or “end of development,” he says, but beyond service packs and other immediate development, Vienneau can't confirm or deny a long-term plan for the product. He says that if customers support and buy the product, that's the best indication that the product will continue over the long term.

I repeat that Combustion is one of my favorite programs, and that's why I want to see the software not just survive but thrive. Of course, Autodesk may be brewing something completely new (Apple stopping development on Shake to potentially work it into a next-gen compositor is a prime example of that), but I would like to see Autodesk give the program the push it truly deserves. Time will tell. 

on the same level via one instance of the Color Warper operator, which should be a good number for most composites. Of course, all the Color Warper parameters are keyframeable, so you can easily create color events that happen over time.

Color Warper does a great job of matching hues across different source materials via its new match feature. I recently worked with some footage that was shot with a warmer tone per the client's request. We needed to go back and do some pickup shots on a separate day, recreating the same feel. Back in post, I was able to bring both days' clips into Combustion and drag out a selection of the video from the first shoot (you can choose single pixels—say, track a