



**Digital Anarchy ToonIt's main Roto Toon filter, shown here in Adobe After Effects, is one of four effects included with the plug-in. Its vast array of tweakable parameters is shown on the left side.**



sal application that plugs into Adobe After Effects (AE) and Premiere Pro, and Apple Motion and Final Cut Pro. The software also works with Premiere Pro and AE in Windows. I tested it on multiple machines and in multiple programs using Mac OS X Leopard and Windows Vista, both of which are supported.

The program comprises four filters, each one unique and dedicated to specific tasks. Roto Toon is the one you will use the most. It flattens the shading detail for a cartoon look, while allowing various parameter adjustments such as outlines, simplicity, blur, dot size, soft strength, anti-alias, and halftone. This mode has so many options that it's helpful to sit through some of the video tutorials on the Digital Anarchy website. One or two settings tweaked a certain way can make the difference between a blurry clip and a great-looking cartoon.

# Digital Anarchy ToonIt

**Adaptable plug-in offers alternative to rotoscoping for animation.**

REVIEWER: FRANKLIN MCMAHON

When I initially heard about ToonIt—the software plug-in that simulates a cartoon feel similar to the effects seen in movies such as *Waking Life* and *A Scanner Darkly*—I couldn't help but feel slightly blasé. "Here we go again," I thought, "another sub-par, Photoshop-like filter that just does fancy posterization." However, when I actually started using the plug-in, I began to see the breadth and depth of its feature set. More importantly, the results were much better than those of cartoon filters I have tried in the past. The program has a lot going for it, and it comes from Digital Anarchy, a company that has produced an array of great plug-ins.

One of the best aspects of ToonIt is that it works on dual platforms and in multiple programs. On the Mac side, it's a univer-

The second filter is Outlines Only. This offers superior edge detection, and it essentially transforms the clip into a sketch. The Goth Toon filter is higher-contrast. You have control over the mid, high, and low tones, but this effect is leaning much more toward the dramatic. Finally, the Blacklight Edges filter makes scenes pop like a neon sign, with a very hard, stylized look.

One general parameter worth noting is noise creation, which is called stippling in ToonIt. Typically, you try to take noise out of your clip when you are producing a cartoon look, but boosting the noise can create some interesting and unique effects.

One of my first tests was to apply ToonIt to some HD footage I had shot for an intro to a new show I had just produced. The video was a girl swaying back and forth in front of a fan on a blank wall. The shot was evenly lit, and it was simple enough that it worked well within ToonIt. I tried the plug-in first in Final Cut Pro, then in Premiere Pro on a PC, finally settling on After

Applying a filter and tweaking parameters is much quicker, but you are still left with that “filter” look, in which the footage still looks a little too real and not as if it exists in an alternate, animated dimension.

to wait 12 seconds to 13 seconds before you see the frame effect applied.

There are some fixes to this problem. First of all, the fast mode in the plug-in does a quicker render job (about double the speed) at the risk of skipping calculations. In my view, this produces inferior results. What I have been doing is knocking down the resolution in After Effects, previewing, and working at half- and even quarter-resolution while setting up the clip. Then, once I get the clip the way I want it (as far as I can tell at a lower resolution), I apply these final test settings to the full-res clip—and go get coffee while ToonIt renders. It’s not perfect, but it does make my whole workflow much snappier. The problem is that most of the parameters generate subtle changes, most of which are impossible to see at a lower resolution. The developer is working on a fix, however, and most of the updates in the next version will address speed issues. As we go to press, the website has announced version 1.1, which is set to ship soon and will “dramatically speed up rendering on a multiprocessor machine.” The update will be free to registered users.

Is ToonIt a candidate for purchase? That really depends on your needs. Even though this is one of the best cartoon filters I have seen, it still can’t approach the high-end look of commercials and movies that employ the familiar roto-scoped-cartoon look. Most of the problem can be attributed to the very fact that you are applying a filter; committing to painstaking frame-by-frame roto-scoping invariably generates superior results. However, few production houses can commit that kind of team and resources. Applying a filter and tweaking parameters is much quicker, but you are still left with that “filter” look, in which the footage still looks a little too real and not as if it exists in an alternate, animated dimension. Helpful tutorials on the website deal directly with these challenges, and it’s very interesting to see how different settings can create dramatically different looks.

ToonIt’s rendering speed is a definite challenge. Because there are so many options in the filters, you will naturally want to experiment creatively. However, your enthusiasm may be doused rapidly as you watch a render bar after every tweak and

Effects on a Mac. The software performed identically in all three programs.

One of the first things I noticed was the software’s render speed, or perhaps its lack thereof. Render speed was a separate bullet point on the press information I received, and it’s also a separate section on the website. The software does render slowly. The website notes—and my findings are pretty much in line with this—that for SD footage, each frame takes about 2 seconds to 3 seconds to render. For HD footage, you can expect 12 seconds to 13 seconds of rendering per frame. So, if you are in AE and working in HD, and you jump to a different frame to look at it, expect

## ▶ **bottomline**

**Company:** Digital Anarchy  
[www.digitalanarchy.com](http://www.digitalanarchy.com)

**Product:** ToonIt

**Assets:** Faster than roto-scoping, results are much better than those of other cartoon filters, works in multiple programs, reasonable price.

**Caveats:** Footage still looks a little too real, long render times in current version, multiprocessor machine needed to exploit the rendering improvements in the upcoming version 1.1.

**Demographic:** Production houses and content producers who want to create animated footage without committing resources to frame-by-frame roto-scoping.

**PRICE: \$295**

# THE FMX-42 PROFESSIONAL FIELD MIXER FROM AZDEN



Having 4 Balanced XLR line/mic inputs with individual level and pan controls, the FMX-42 provides switchable (per channel) 48V phantom power and limiting, professional quality VU meters for accurate level setting, master level control, 1k tone generator, 2 Balanced XLR outputs (line/mic switchable), stereo mini jack output for DV cams, and a headphone monitor with level control.

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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 is one of my favorite desktop compositing programs. In my experience, it's well built for realtime 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