Using Moviestorm to create storyboards

A practical guide

Information in this guide is given in good faith, but no warranty is made or implied as to its accuracy or completeness. Updates to the Moviestorm software may render some of this information obsolete.

Note that all screenshots are taken from Windows versions of the software. Mac versions may differ slightly.

This brief practical guide to creating storyboards with Moviestorm is divided into four sections:

- **Animatics and storyboards**
  Explains the basic process for creating a storyboard from Moviestorm and the key concepts of *animatics* and *storyboards*

- **Two types of animatic**
  Explains two different approaches to animatics and how to choose which is right for you

- **Creating your animatic: filming and editing**
  Explains how to generate your animatic with Moviestorm

- **Converting your animatic into a storyboard**
  Explains the final stage of the process

ANIMATICS AND STORYBOARDS

Although Moviestorm is primarily designed for creating videos, it is also a useful tool for creating detailed storyboards.

This requires a slightly unusual technique. Normally when making a movie, you start by producing a traditional 2D **storyboard**, often hand drawn, showing how you intend to film your script. From that you optionally create a rough animated film or **animatic** based on the storyboard. Finally, you film your movie using your animatic or storyboard.
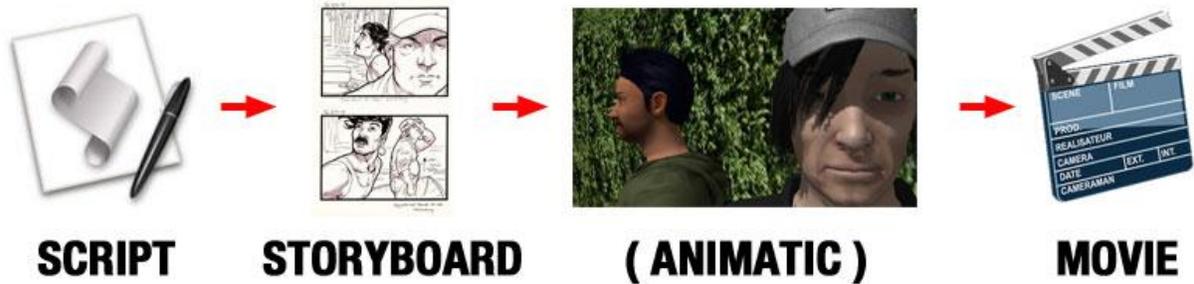
When you use Moviestorm you switch the middle two stages around. You first film an animatic, and then use that to generate your storyboard.

WHY CREATE AN ANIMATIC?

Animatics have two main advantages over storyboards. First, they're actual movies, while storyboards are more like comics, so they include sound, movement, camera moves, and time. It's easier to spot what's going to work well when you can actually sit back and watch your ideas in movie form: shots and moves that look great on paper don't always come out the way you expect when you film them.

Secondly, animatics can contain much more visual detail than a storyboard: Because you're building everything in a 3D virtual world, you can easily add in set dressing, details of costumes, lighting, and so on.

WHY CREATE A STORYBOARD IF YOU'VE ALREADY MADE AN ANIMATIC?

The simple answer is that some directors don't bother with storyboards any more. However, animatics are a relatively new technique, and not everyone is used to working with them. A storyboard is something that everyone understands and is familiar with, so it's a useful skill to have at your command.

It's also easier to print out a storyboard and make written notes on it. Everyone can have a copy of the storyboard and refer to it at any time. This is particularly handy for brainstorming sessions and for some aspects of pre-production; for example, the cameraman can easily note down what equipment he will need to get a particular shot.

TWO TYPES OF ANIMATIC

Before you begin making your animatic, take some time to decide what you want out of it. This will stop you wasting valuable time. The key to making a successful animatic is not to put in any more detail than you need - just focus on what matters for your specific project.

There are two different approaches to animatics. They are both useful in different ways. You'll probably find that what works best for you is something in between the two.

Technique 1: the minimalist animatic

This is the equivalent of drawing stick figures. It's an extremely fast technique for creating the basic choreography, camera shots and edits, known as **blocking**. It has almost no detail in, and just focuses on the bare essentials.

This type of animatic is primarily useful as notes for the director, cameraman and editor. If you're shooting fast, or you're working on location where you don't have control over the actual set, this may well be all you need.

Technique 2: the detailed animatic

This is the equivalent of producing lovingly hand-painted images for each frame in your storyboard. Your sets are fully built, dressed, and lit. All your characters are unique and properly costumed. Add in as much detail as possible to the performance, and if possible, use the actual actors to read their parts. The finished animatic should have full sound and music, and you may even go as far as producing titles and credits.

This is a lot more work, but what you end up with is almost a complete blueprint for your final movie which tells everyone, from the set designer to the wardrobe mistress and the sound designer, what they have to do.

CREATING ANIMATICS: FILMING AND EDITING

Refer to the Moviestorm documentation for detailed instructions on using Moviestorm to create videos.

Creating an animatic is exactly like making any other movie in Moviestorm. First create your sets and characters, then direct the action and film it, and finally edit it together. However, there are some things you can do differently if you choose to, particularly if you're taking the minimalist approach.

- Don't put any more detail into the sets than you need until you know what's going to be on camera. If you're doing an interior, start with a couple of bare walls, plus any necessary windows, doors and furniture, and use that to do your basic direction. You can then go back to the Set Workshop and add in anything else later if you need to. Foreground objects and background objects are useful if they help your composition.

- You don't need to build all the sets, particularly for establishing shots. Just find a suitable image and use that. You can put your characters in front of a photographic backdrop to save a lot of time. (See the video tutorial on the Moviestorm Web site how to do this.)

- Use stock characters as much as you can. You can worry about their costumes later if you need to.

- Don't worry about getting the details right: if the scene calls for a cypress tree, but you only have an oak tree, use that. As long as it's roughly the right size and shape, it'll do.

- Don't bother with recording the dialog. Just add in subtitles in the cutting room. This will also save you adding on captions later when you put the images into your storyboard.

- Switch off shadows so that Moviestorm runs faster. Graphics quality is not a major consideration for animatics.

Left to right: working on a minimalist set with just doors, windows and essential furniture; filming against a photographic backdrop; using subtitles in place of dialog.

Working as a team

If you're creating a detailed animatic, you can divide your team according to different roles as described in *Making Movies with Moviestorm: A guide for schools*. If you're making a minimalist animatic, then most of those roles won't have much to do, so it's easier simply to crowd round the computer offering suggestions and taking turns in the director's seat.

CONVERTING ANIMATICS INTO STORYBOARDS

There are two techniques for generating a storyboard from your animatic. Use whichever is more convenient for you.

Technique 1: video capture

Capturing images from Windows Media Player on Windows 7.

Make your movie as normal, complete with all the edits you want, and render it in the **Publisher's View**. You then have a video file of your animatic.

Play your video file back in your preferred media player, and use screen capture tools to capture the key frames you need for your storyboard.

Technique 2: Moviestorm screenshots

Capturing images from within Moviestorm.

This technique is a little quicker, but you don't end up with a video file, so your animatic can only be viewed within Moviestorm.

Do not render your movie. Instead, play it back in Moviestorm's **Cutting Room View** and and use screen capture tools to capture the key frames directly from Moviestorm.

Resize the images to whatever size you need and save them in a suitable format. Remember to give them sensible filenames so you can quickly identify which is which. If you need to add extra information to your images, such as arrows to indicate camera movement or character movement, you can do this in your usual graphics editor.

Making your storyboard
You have many ways to create your final storyboard from your images. You can paste them into your word processor and add captions: remember to use a table layout to keep them aligned. There are also many free storyboard tools available online: just search for "free storyboard tools" and find one that suits you. Most of them are fairly simple. Others, such as Celtx are professional grade tools.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Moviestorm education resources at http://www.moviestorm.co.uk/hub/educationresources

       The Moviestorm guide to previsualisation (PDF download)
       Making Movies with Moviestorm: A guide for schools (PDF download)
       Storyboarding lesson plan

Moviestorm user documentation at http://www.moviestorm.co.uk/hub/docs

       Moviestorm user manual (PDF download)
       Moviestorm video tutorials (online video)

Other sites

       Celtx pre-production suite (free software download)