



MOBILE PHONE ANIMATION SOFTWARE

IKIVO ANIMATOR 1.1



PRICE

£233 (€199 ex VAT)

CONTACT

Ikivo 00 46 853 48 11 80 + www.ikivo.com

PROS

Cleverly designed animation features + Easy to use + Works well with Adobe Illustrator

CONS

Many mobile phones don't yet include the player + No information on installing the player manually + Expensive

Adobe's SVG format – or Scalable Vector

Graphics – was originally created to provide compact online vector graphics for desktop computers, but the newer 'SVG Tiny' standard is aimed squarely at delivering information-rich graphics and animation to mobile phones. To produce this animated SVG Tiny content, there is essentially just one serious tool around: Ikivo Animator.

Ikivo Animator is a vector-based animation tool created specifically to help designers create animated content for mobile devices, which means phones and PDAs. It doesn't support bitmap content at all, so you'll have to use tracing tricks to get such images into your animations. Wisely, Ikivo didn't try to give Animator its own graphic creation tools, preferring to hook into Adobe Illustrator (version 10 and above) instead. If you don't have a compatible version of Illustrator you may be faced with editing the SVG code in a text editor; hardly a pleasant experience. Fortunately, with Illustrator at hand the process is easy. Set it as Ikivo's SVG editor in its preferences, then click the Add Item button in the Object Browser palette to set up a new SVG document on disk which then opens it in Illustrator. Saving from Illustrator updates it in the Object Browser list, which is really a specialised view of the compatible contents of folders on your Mac. Helpfully, names assigned to objects in Illustrator CS and CS2 are preserved in Ikivo. Objects can be placed in the 'stage' window, dragged about, rotated and scaled with the multi-purpose pointer tool.

Animating objects is a simple process. In the Timeline window, use the Show Animations option for an object, then insert a keyframe for its position, rotation or scale, or even its visibility, stroke or fill. Add another keypoint later on in the timeline to have the two automatically joined as a 'tween', or just drag the item around at a later time-point to



Ikivo Animator's interface includes a Preview palette that plays your work in a simulated mobile phone interface, as well as an Object Browser and a well-featured Color Palette.

make an irregular, freeform animation path. This can be reshaped later using the kind of bezier-like controls that any experienced designer will recognise in an instant.

Clicking objects multiple times drills down into them so you can select individual constituent parts in a group or just the fill or stroke on a shape, then alter its colour properties. Of course, like everything else, this too can be altered over time.

Object opacity is a nice touch, and this can be animated as well, although it will only be supported in SVG Tiny 1.2, an as yet unratified version of the SVG Tiny standard. (Fortunately, Ikivo includes ways to simulate transparency by working out underlying colours and faking the see-through effect, so you can get more or less the same look with today's SVG Tiny 1.1-standard players.)

Grouping objects can help keep the underlying SVG code compact, at least where animated parameter changes are concerned. Re-using objects also helps, as multiple instances of something, no matter how altered, are just references of the same item with transformations applied. Ikivo's native file format is SVG itself, so your final results are saved directly in SVG or compressed (zipped) SVG format. These can then be copied directly to an SVG Tiny-capable mobile phone and played at will, or provided as browsable online content.

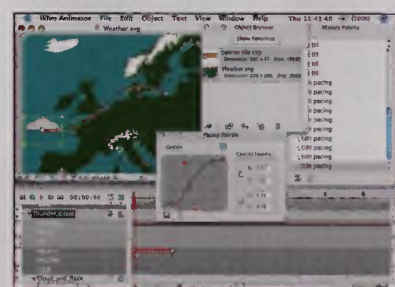
Ikivo says this is an ideal tool for creating handset personalisation, mobile browsing of visual data, screensavers and themes, and mobile user interface design, at least where the Ikivo SVG Player engine is included. Because the SVG data is essentially text, back-end server systems could manipulate the SVG content you build to deliver customised content to visitors relatively easily.

Which brings us to delivery. The range of phones that come with the Ikivo SVG Player installed right now isn't exactly

enormous, but it does include some of the more interesting models from Sony Ericsson (the K700, S700, V800, K500, F500 and newer in those lines) and a number from Siemens. Additionally, Ikivo has contracts with Motorola, Alcatel and Panasonic to include the Ikivo SVG Player on their handsets, and the player works with Symbian 6 and 7 (there's no mention of 8 in the documentation). It seems that the company faces a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. It needs a critical mass of installed players to convince large numbers of content designers to use their software, but it needs more content to convince mobile manufacturers to embed the player. Adobe's backing earlier this year will have helped, of course, and it does enable rich, animated content to be produced with tremendous ease.

All this reminds us of the early days of web browser plug-ins, and Ikivo and the SVG format may well prove to be the Flash technology of the mobile world. As an animation tool it is easy to use and works impressively well, but player support simply isn't sufficiently widespread as yet. Having said that, things are moving fast in this arena, so dismiss it at your peril.

KEITH MARTIN



The animation controls are deceptively powerful. Free-form animation paths can be adjusted with bezier-like handles, and a Pacing palette adds control over the speed of changes, whatever they are.