

# Riding the animation wave



A K Madhavan

The 3D CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) animation industry has come of age in the last 11 years. It all started in 1995 when Pixar released its first CGI animation movie, *Toy Story*. Currently, 3D CGI is used extensively in special effect movies including *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolution*.

Crest Animation is the first Indian animation studio in this space to compete with international studios. Its US-based subsidiary RichCrest Animation (RCA) is co-producing and co-financing, along with Lions Gate Entertainment, to create three state-of-the-art animated feature films for Hollywood including *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* based on a story written by the creator of *Shrek*.

## SUNRISE SEGMENT

Animation is a new industry in India. The country possesses the necessary skill-sets and expertise to provide quality 3D CGI animation and can compete with international studios and digital animation production houses in the US. Animations made by Crest are shown on international TV networks such as PBS, Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon on a regular basis. Crest has won a Balia award and received an Annie nomination for the best animation

A K Madhavan, CEO, Crest Animation Studios, on how his company is meeting international standards

TV production for children. The Indian animation industry is coming of age not only in India but even in the international arena.

## IT IN ANIMATION

Two things are of utmost importance for an animation production house. The first is creative competence and the second is IT competence. The entire business model needs IT.

We are a digital production facility. Creative skills are applied on a digital medium. Nothing can be done without a proper IT set-up in place.

In order to compete with the best global digital animation houses, it is necessary to deploy state-of-the-art hardware and software. If they use Apple Power Mac G5, 10 gigabit switches and 64-bit Nocona architecture for compositing, we too have to use a similar configuration.

## RIGHT IT INFRASTRUCTURE

There are many factors which go into deciding the IT infrastructure. Though state-of-the-art hardware, software and networking solutions are critical, they are evaluated depending on what is most suitable for the quality of output required by the client. The animation studio utilises these solutions and equipment to create the desired outputs. The end-users are children who watch the final product on Cartoon Network or other TV channels, on a DVD or at the theatre.

## HUMAN INPUT

A major challenge faced while setting up and running an international-standard animation studio in India is the human skillset. There are no schools or universities, or even training programmes exclusively for

animation. There are some good art schools which give degrees in the fine arts, but they are not tuned to animation. Thus, skillsets are a major entry barrier.

Another challenge is huge and constant capital requirements. Technology keeps changing, so there is a need to constantly update the hardware and software. At Crest, we get trainers from the US and Canada to train our staff and help them understand the current trends in animation in the world market. This ensures that the output is on par with the acceptable levels for international standards, especially Hollywood.

Yet another challenge is how to optimise the CPU power of the servers and IT infrastructure. Plugins, proprietary software available with vendors, or in-house software help in resolving this issue. Processes such as rendering use a lot of CPU power. At times even 250 blades or CPUs are not enough—especially for hair or cloth dynamics. A program can be written to splice a particular frame. When the CPU is free, that particular frame can be rendered.

Software professionals are engaged to write programs, scripts, routines to address and resolve issues. Such solutions are a combination of the right mix of hardware and software, and it is based on research done by the in-house IT team. There are around 15 people doing research on network, rendering or compositing-based solutions.

## ROLE OF IT

The CIO and the IT team have to do research and know about the latest technology available in the animation industry space.

IT is also critical from the