

Maya Digital Studios

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Customer Success Story
India

Autodesk® Maya®

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– Hormaz Baria
Animation Head
Maya Digital Studios

A new take on old favorites.

Top animation studio uses Autodesk Maya to deliver an animation show on a famed comic strip in record time.



Image courtesy of Maya Digital Studios.

Six months is hardly any time to create a 3D animated show out of an endearing comic strip that enthralled three generations of comic book lovers in India, but Maya Digital Studios, one of the top animation companies in India, conceived, developed and successfully delivered the show to a leading children's entertainment channel in record time.

In June 2012, Maya Digital Studios struck a deal with Lotpot Comics, one of India's leading comic magazines, to adapt its widely popular comic strip Motu Patlu into an animated TV series. In the next five months the show was on air on Nickelodeon. By November 2012, Maya Digital Studios not only handed over all 26 episodes of the first season, but also started work on the second season.

The series is Maya Digital Studios' first home-grown 3D animated television show for the Indian audience, and it brings to life the adventures of two classic comic characters Motu and Patlu who are always caught up in funny situations, attracting all sorts of problems.



Image courtesy of Maya Digital Studios.

"Motu Patlu is a labour of love for us at Maya. With this show, we wanted to create a benchmark in animated kids' entertainment, and the entire team gave its best for the show. Also, the Indian TV content is largely dominated by 2D animation, so from a technical standpoint a 3D animated show with a pace of 2D animation was the way forward for us," says Suhas Kadav, creative director, Maya Digital Studios and the director of the animated series Motu Patlu.

In terms of the look and feel, the show selectively retained the original comic characters, including the mad scientist Dr Jhatka and the wily neighbour Ghasitaram. Everything else was thoughtfully created from scratch be it characters such as local hoodlum Jon and the swashbuckling cop Chingam or the fictional township of Furfuri Nagariya, where the story is based.

The story development team of Niraj Vikram, Dheeraj Berry and Suhas Kadav drafted stories in such a way that it held back the old world charm of the eighties yet stayed relevant to kids of the new millennium.

Challenges:

The first season of Motu Patlu had around 12 primary characters and scores of secondary characters that added to the humour of the show. But the litmus test for the team really was to make the middle-aged characters comical enough so that they could relate with the pre-teen audience. The net result: the script was created into a boisterous comedy with chases, collisions and all sorts of practical jokes.

The storyline had everything from the characters slipping on banana skins to chasing each other on

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Image courtesy of Maya Digital Studios.

tricycles to gravity-defying actions such as being hurled into space, leaving children in splits. This in turn was a task for the storyboarding artists and modeling artists, who had to create the innumerable assets, props and graphics without compromising on the quality.

While the storyboards were hand drawn, everything else was created on 2009 and 2012 versions of Autodesk® Maya®. One of the biggest challenges to the project was the limited time available to execute the project. Keeping in mind the limited resources, a meticulously planned production schedule had to be created.

“Several departments were involved in the process and thus the transition of a particular shot from one department onto the other had to be seamless and within the delivery timelines. The strategy was to create the show with a low polygon count so that fewer the polygons, the less time it would take to render the objects,” said Dheeraj Berry, Studio Head, Maya Digital Studios.

So if a normal character was developed using 30,000 to 35,000 polygons, the characters in Motu Patlu were created with 15,000 to 17,000 polygons. But fewer number of polygons also meant that the rigs had to be more detailed. The modeling artists burned midnight oil creating numerous assets, while the rigging artists customised new rigs that offered right amount of weight to the characters and tweaking to a particular joint or a mesh.

“People generally say that the strong point of Autodesk 3ds Max is that it can deliver low polygon model, but our experiences proved otherwise. Autodesk Maya does an equally good job in modeling characters with less number of polygons,” says Hormaz Baria, the animation head of Maya Digital Studios.

Further, the fictional town of Furfuri Nagariya had to represent the microcosm of cosmopolitan India with vibrant colours. As a result, shaders had to be written in such a manner that the colour pallet

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reflected the diversity of characters and met the demands of the client.

Rendering of passes also had its own share of challenges. While render wranglers generally go overboard utilising the entire suite of passes such as the beauty pass, the highlight pass, the reflection pass, the shadow pass, the lighting pass and the effects pass, the rendering team in Maya Digital Studios had to devise a method where a limited number of passes gave the desired effect. Clearly, less passes meant less rendering time, and the onus of efficient delivery now fell on the compositing team.

Solutions:

The compositing team promptly introduced best practices to ensure that slight adjustments to the process could deliver high quality within limited time. For instance, by carefully adjusting the composite, the darkness of a shadow or the colour of a glow could be made without going through the time-consuming process of re-rendering the whole environment.

Moreover, still images were used for some elements, especially when the frame wasn't

moving. For example, one still frame of a room might be composited behind every frame of a separately rendered animated character.

The highlight of the production was the file reading process of 2012 version of Autodesk Maya. “One of the biggest advantages of 2012 version of Autodesk Maya is its file reading capability. Our render wranglers observed the file reading software in 2012 is much faster than the 2009 version. So they kept pushing us to work on 2012 so that rendering could be achieved faster,” says Hormaz Baria, while adding that eight episodes of 22 minutes each were finished in a month's time.

Walt Disney, one of the greatest animation artists of all times once said that all our dreams can come true, if only we have the courage to pursue them. The hard work and perseverance shown by the production team of Maya Digital Studios has paid off with the animated series bagging an impressive 1.74 TVR between 4 and 14 years age group across the Hindi speaking markets category of all cable and satellite homes – all this in just three weeks of the launch. Nickelodeon, on its part, has raised its stake by approving the second season of the project.



Image courtesy of Maya Digital Studios.