

LES' COPAQUE
PRODUCTION SDN BHD

Malaysia
Customer Success Story

Autodesk® Maya®



Autodesk Maya was genuinely a tool that was instrumental in making our feature film a reality.

Safwan Ab Karim
Art Director
Les' Copaque



Autodesk Maya brings Malaysia's first 3D animation film to life on time, on budget



Images courtesy of Les' Copaque Production Sdn Bhd

Les' Copaque Production Sdn Bhd was established in 2005 with an ambition to create Malaysia's first full-length 3D animated feature film. Their vision soon became a reality when *Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula* (*Geng: The Adventure Begins*) hit the silver screen and raked in the second highest ticket collection in the history of local film.

The Adventure Begins

The project began in January 2006 with the development of the main characters in the story, leading to the birth of mischievous twin brothers Upin and Ipin who loved to run around finding excitement wherever they went.

The project hit a roadblock when the team realised that they were hampered by limitations in the artists' experience, knowledge and resources. To achieve success, they needed to find the right balance between high-technology animation and a good story with compelling characters, culture and realistic environment.

They spent a year researching on pre-production and technologies required for the production and made a sneak peek of the film to gain some preliminary feedback. To the surprise and joy of the team, the short film won three awards at the Short Film Award 2006 for best direction, animation and overall categories.

Armed with the accolades, Les' Copaque proceeded to win the confidence of the sponsors, including Malaysian Development Corporation who invested in the project. The sneak peek also gained interest from TV9, a local terrestrial television station who contracted Les' Copaque to produce a mini-series for children named after the twins.

The *Upin & Ipin* series quickly achieve a loyal following, which led to TV9 investing in a continued series. Eventually, viewership of the series came in second after the most-watched Japanese cartoon series, *Doraemon*.

As the Clock Ticks

The process of designing and developing the characters and scenes was a time-consuming phase. Modeling, a process to form the characters and objects in still format, required at least a day per character. Rigging, or specifying the internal skeletal structure and defining the motion, typically takes up another day per character. Rendering is another long process using an ordinary computer. Additionally, there were several other mandatory processes required to ensure quality film, including texturing, animation, compositing, audio, editing, and more.

"We understood that we had a relatively low budget, but we knew we couldn't compromise on the quality of output," Tuan Haji Burhanuddin, managing director of Les' Copaque.

The challenge: to deliver *Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula* on budget, on time --- in three years.

Autodesk Maya, a Natural Choice

It was a natural decision for Safwan Ab Karim, one of the art directors and the Board of Directors to select Autodesk Maya in helping them realise their ambition. The software needed no introduction to them as they were already familiar with the features and functionalities back in academia.

Autodesk®



The open architecture of Autodesk Maya software, combined with an industry-leading suite of 3D visual effects, computer graphics, and character animation tools enabled the team to realise their creative vision for their film.

Safwan contacted Caveman, a reseller for Autodesk Maya. Through consistent support and consultation over six months, Les' Copaque successfully assimilated Autodesk Maya into its production operations. In less than one day, their animators were able to start work.

"We are prepared to make a significant investment on Autodesk Maya as we believe it is definitely worthwhile," said Safwan.

Model faster And Manage Complexity

Autodesk Maya enabled designers and animators to meet production demands with fast, efficient tools and workflows which offered new creative possibilities.

During their pioneer research, the team developed their proprietary pipeline that not only improved the efficiency of design and animation, but also helped organise files and define the identity of 3D animation products created by Les' Copaque.

Throughout the process of developing Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula, they found that Autodesk Maya worked consistently well with the pipeline they developed.

Tuan Haji Burhanuddin added, "We believe that Autodesk Maya is one of the best software tools for movies. The plus point was that our team was already familiar with it. The software is flexible and it worked seamlessly with our pipeline, and we clearly see the results and value right from the start."

Iterate and Collaborate

Autodesk Maya allowed them to intuitively helped the team discover ways to simplify their job. The flexibilities and shortcuts in using the software delivered the same results faster, without compromising on the quality.

Safwan commented, "The software was open and seamlessly integrated with the script we developed for rigging, which significantly cut the total time required for modeling and rigging combined by more than half."

A movie like Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula typically requires about a year to render. Using mental ray® at the Render Farm hosted by MIMOS helped reduce rendering time to about four months.

Another advantage of using Autodesk Maya was that the animators, designers and artists, mostly local graduates, were already familiar with the software. They knew how to use and operate the software and did not have to go through rigorous training before getting down to work.

In fact, a huge community of Autodesk Maya users on the internet share research outcomes and tips to help other users.

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Surpassing Expectations

The project was completed in September 2008, with a total budget of RM4million (USD1.15 million). The film came in six months ahead of plan; savings gained from the collective amount of time saved especially from the modeling, rigging and rendering processes.

Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula officially opened for screening on 12 February 2009, at 90% less budget, and with half the time and resources required for a typical Hollywood animated feature film. The film was also notable as it was the first 3D animated feature film in Malaysia, recognised by the Malaysia Book of Records.

The Adventure Gets Better...

Geng: Pengembaraan Bermula saw an official closure with a ticket collection of RM6.3 million from a total of 813,604 viewers. Not resting on its laurels, the company is now looking to further expand its operations and teams in Malaysia, focusing on discovering home-grown multimedia talents and spurring the animation industry in the country. Les' Copaque aims to grow the size of the organisation from 50 to a total of 100 staff by end of 2009.

"Now is the time to grow the whole ecosystem for the country's animation and multimedia industry. It is the right time to showcase to the world that Malaysia has the home-grown talent which makes us more competitive than our neighbours Thailand, India and Singapore. It is time to make this a key contributor to our economy," said Tuan Haji Burhanuddin.

As at January 2009, the company received opportunities from across the world, including co-production jobs from Los Angeles, Argentina and Australia. Locally, TV9 has signed up with Les' Copaque for 42 new episodes of Upin & Ipin and another new 52-episode series with Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM).



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