Megan Montes

Digital Media Foundations

Professor Tracie Schaffer

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Pixar’s Platform

When you think of Digital Media, a blend of technology and content, building products that requires teams of professionals with diverse skills: one company shoots to the top, Pixar. Pixar Animation Studios using groundbreaking technology created a platform for animation that was never seen before. Even though Pixar has a short history compared to many other major movie studios, since their start, Pixar has established itself as an industry leader in CGI and completely digital animated feature films. With creative shorts like Luxo Jr and films like Toy Story, they became loved by the public and film industry while continuing to innovate animation.

In 1979, George Lucas, creator of The Star Wars Franchise and LucasFilm LTD, hires Ed Catmull, a graduate from New York Institute of Technology to head the computer division “Graphics Group”. Catmull and a team of scientists formed this division aiming to improve graphic animation but also develop state of the art technology for the film industry. In 1984, Lucas hires John Lasseter, a former animator for Disney to begin creating short animated films such as The Adventures of Andre & Wally B. At that time, the animation used in the film was considered groundbreaking (“*Pixar”).* In 1986, Lucas sold The Computer Division of LucasFilm to Steve Jobs who had recently left Apple to pursue new endeavors. (Lawson) Jobs established the division as an Independent company and “Pixar” was created. August of that year, John Lasseter’s directional debut Luxo Jr was the first film released after Jobs’ purchase of the company, premiering at that years SIGGRAPH conference. The film received an Academy Award nomination for Best Animated Short Film, becoming the first CGI film to be nominated for an Academy Award. (Lawson)

For the next two years Pixar continued to prove that they were a force in the media world using their own cutting edge software. It wasn’t until 1988, when the company won their first Academy award for their fourth animated short film, Tin Toy. In 1989, the first version of “RenderMan”, software created by Pixar, was marked as the new “go to” technology for animation. It would eventually go on to become the standard software used in the film industry for rendering computer graphics. (Lawson) With Pixar gaining attention with their new technology, in 1991 Pixar enters into an agreement with Disney to jointly develop, produce, and distribute at least one feature length animated film. That animated film would go on to gross more than $350 Million dollars across the world and become one of the most beloved movies of all time, Toy Story. With the success of Toy Story and John Lasseter winning a Special Achievement Oscar at the 1996 Academy Awards for his “inspired leadership of the Pixar Toy Story Team resulting in the first feature-length computer animated film”. (Lawson) In 1997 Pixar and Disney announced another agreement to produce five feature length films over the next 10 years. From 1998 to 2004, these films A Bug’s Life, breaking all previous Thanksgiving weekend box office records in 1998, Toy Story 2, broke box office records in the USA, UK, and Japan in 1998. Monsters, Inc., grossed $100 Million in the domestic box office in 9 days, faster than any previous animated film. Finding Nemo, came next to break the record that Monsters Inc. broke two years previous and The Incredibles, with would become the highest grossing Pixar movie at a box office on its opening weekend. (Lawson)

In the year of 2006, Steve Jobs makes a decision to sell Pixar to Disney Studios making John Lassester’s Cars Pixar’s last independent movie. Upon taking over, Disney appointed Ed Catmull President and John Lassester CCO of Disney and Pixar Animated Studios. With Pixar taking on the creating storylines and Disney at the helm of distribution, there was nothing stopping this new power machine. Since the merger, they have produced and distributed 12 more films including top hits like Up, Finding Nemo, Wall-E, and The Incredibles (“*Pixar”).*

Before Pixar came along animated films were hand drawn and merged together to create beloved movies like Snow White or Aladdin. Since being able to develop their own in house software, RenderMan and becoming the industries leader in CGI and animated feature films. Not only has this software an Academy Award winning software and been used for their own movies, it has also been used in iconic films like The Harry Potter series, The first two Lord of the Rings, and Pearl Harbor. As of August 2018, Pixar has earned $13 billion dollars worldwide from all twenty animated feature films. Of the Twenty films, 15 are credited among the 50 highest grossing animated films of all time. Nine films took home Academy awards for Best Animated Feature Film and two being nominated for Best Picture. Pixar has been able to improve and produce realistic yet, like imagery that was truly revolutionizing. Thirty-three years later and Pixar is still showing no sign of slowing down. Not only will their legacy live on, but continue to innovate future technologies in the film and digital industry.

Work Cited

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