



Zaxwerks ProAnimator and 3D Invigorator for After Effects: A Comparison

When Zaxwerks 3D Invigorator was released in 1999 it quickly became the industry standard for quick and beautiful 3D title and logo creation inside After Effects.

In 2001 a Pro version was released that included such features as custom bevels and 3D model import. The more recently released Pro version 4 added an integrated text engine—which meant you no longer had to create your text in Illustrator, 3D primitives, various material styles such as wireframe and cartoon color, motion blur and a range of other features that made this a must have upgrade.

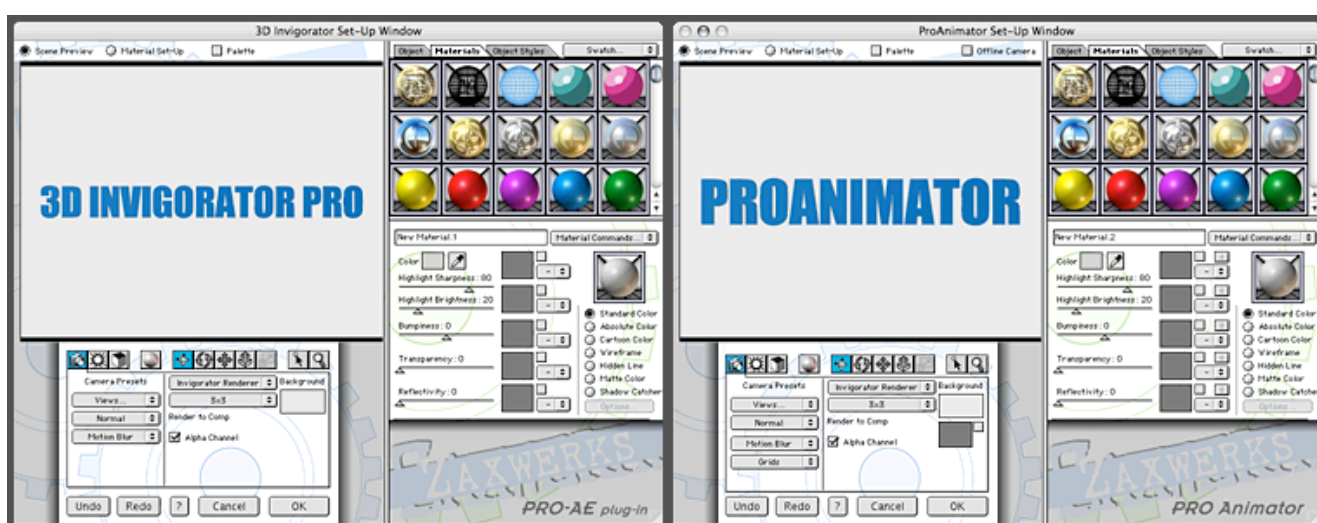
Then in 2003 Zaxwerks released ProAnimator, standalone 3D software that dramatically changed the way 3D titles are made. ProAnimator's behavioural-based animations enabled users to create complex 3D titles and logo animation that would take days of tedious keyframing to create manually.

For After Effects users however, one of the drawbacks with ProAnimator was the necessity to leave After Effects to create 3D elements then import the rendered files back into After Effects. This seemed like a step backwards when you're used to creating 3D elements directly in After Effects using 3D Invigorator. On top of that there was no way to match the ProAnimator camera accurately which made it hard to integrate the ProAnimator animation with After Effects' 3D layers.

With the imminent release of ProAnimator 4 this is no longer an issue. Now you can create those amazing 3D title and logo animations directly inside After Effects, as well as in the bundled standalone. Not only that, you can use the included Importer plug-in to import ProAnimator camera and object data and create coordinated, ProAnimator-style animations for your regular After Effects layers, which would normally take a lot of time and testing to make look right.

So just what is the difference between 3D Invigorator Pro and ProAnimator for After Effects? Which one should you buy? Do you need both? Hopefully this comparison will help answer those questions.

Version 4 of 3D Invigorator Pro and ProAnimator for After Effects share basically the same tool set, with features previously only available in 3D Invigorator Pro such as the various material settings like wireframe and absolute color now available in ProAnimator. The set-up windows are largely identical and if you already know how to model and texture in 3D Invigorator then you know how to do it ProAnimator.

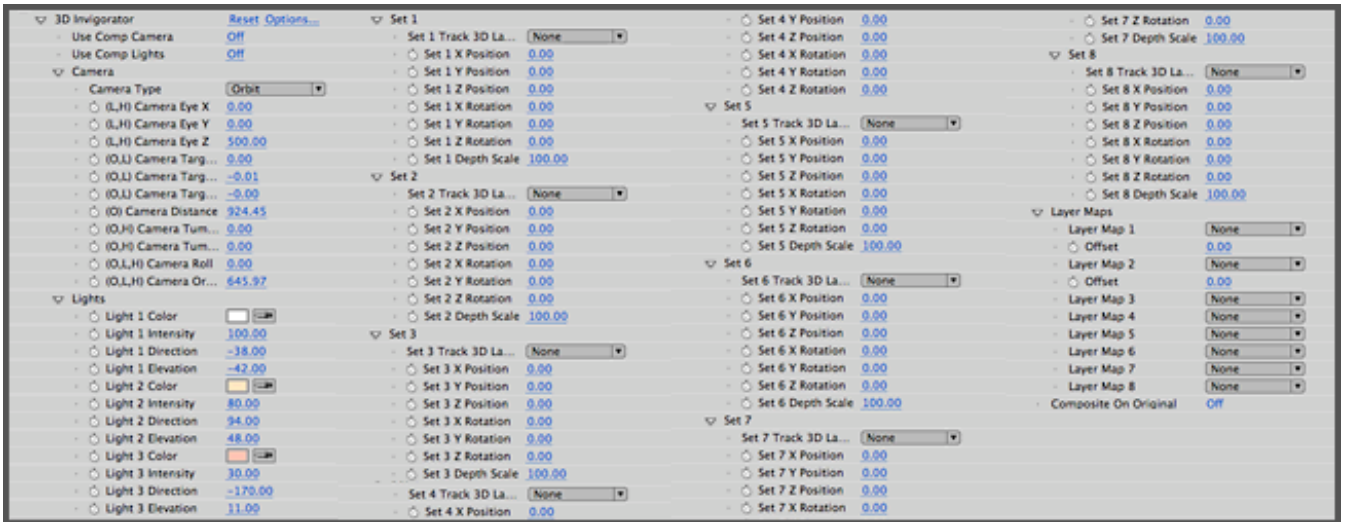


The 3D Invigorator Pro and ProAnimator Set-Up windows

The key difference is in the way you animate. As an example, if you took the word "Tonight" and wanted to animate it as a single word in 3D Invigorator you would use After Effects' Composition and Timeline panels to create a single animation path and keyframes for the individual XYZ position and XYZ rotation properties. This means working with 6 sets of keyframes and managing multiple data graphs to get proper ease in and out.

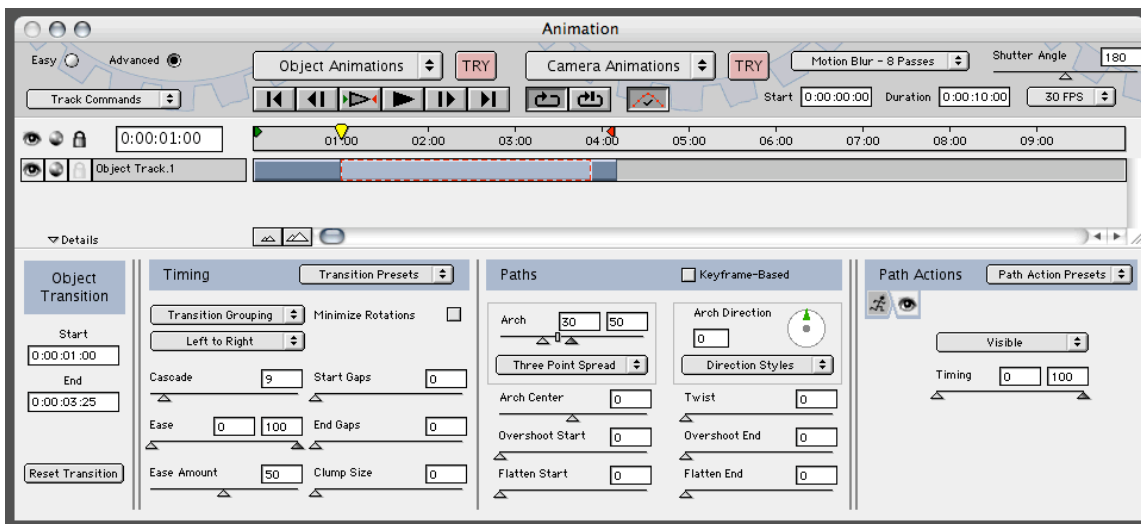
This is as simple as it gets with a keyframe-based system and can be frustrating if you want the objects to move in smooth curves rather than just straight lines.

Then what if you decided to animate the same word one letter at a time? In this case you would end up with 42 sets of keyframes! Not only that, you would have to create seven animation paths in 3D space that all resemble each other but start and end at different positions and coordinate the ease in and out of each letter. This quickly becomes complicated and time consuming.



The Effect controls panel for 3D Invigorator Pro is pretty overwhelming when compared with even the advanced ProAnimator Controls (below)

ProAnimator has its own timeline and would handle this same case on a single track. Whether you animate by letter or by word, it's still a single track. Behaviors are substituted for keyframes and there are no graphs to figure out. Adding ease in and out is a single slider and affects all objects on the track. There are behaviors for twist, arch and overshooting paths, and other behaviors that affect timing to create cascading motions, all easily controlled using sliders.



The ProAnimator timeline and Advanced controls

Animation in 3D Invigorator Pro is done using what are called Sets. You can have as many 3D objects in a Set as you like but you are limited to 8 sets. Problems arise when you have more than 8 separate objects you need to animate. Again using the word "Tonight" as an example, let's say you'd set up your animation for each individual letter and got it looking just right and the client added the words "at 7.30". Not only do you have to adjust all of the letter's positions and value graphs manually to incorporate the new letters, but because you've reached the Set limit you would also need to create another effect to add the extra letters. This makes the composition more complicated and far more difficult to update later.

This is where ProAnimator really excels. It isn't limited by sets and its behavioral-based

animation makes it easy to change text once the animation is set up. Timing is automatically recalculated for new objects even if the number of objects changes. So you can turn the "Tonight" animation into a "Tonight at 7.30" animation without needing to add new keyframes for the additional letters. All you do is type in the new letters and hit Preview! This makes the ProAnimator exceptionally responsive to client changes and additions.

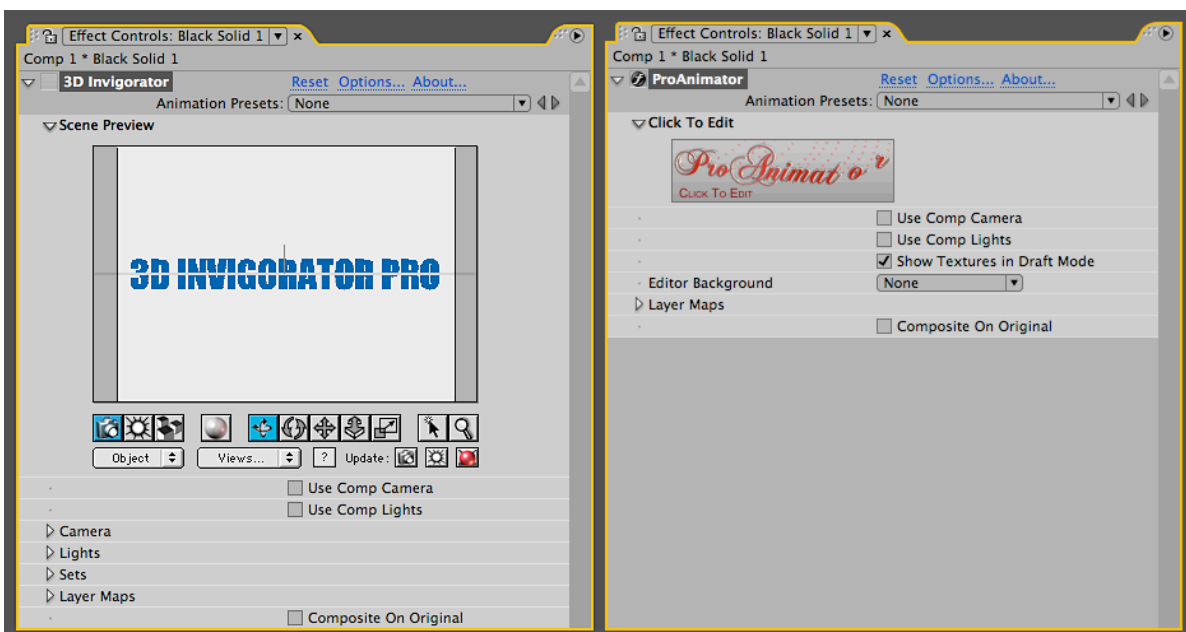
For highly customized animations it is possible to create keyframe-based 3D Invigorator-style animation with ProAnimator. When you choose this option you lose the behavioral ability to set object positions, however you still get to use the behavioral timing controls and some choose to animate in this way because it's still faster than having to set keyframes in a regular keyframe-based program.

Both 3D Invigorator and ProAnimator have their own cameras and both can use the After Effects Comp camera. ProAnimator however, ships with dozens of camera move presets which take the hassle out of setting up moves manually.

It's not just camera move presets either, there's also a bunch of object animation presets which make creating a complex animation as simple as pressing one button. Once you've chosen an animation preset you can customize it then save this as a new animation preset and reapply it to any other set of objects, letters or logo elements for instant animation. You can build a library of custom moves for each individual client so that for future projects you can literally have the 3D component of your graphics complete in minutes.

ProAnimator previews in real time and you can continue to change the animation while the preview is playing, which is a real time saver. Previews in 3D Invigorator are done using After Effects' less than perfect RAM preview feature which is a major roadblock in comparison.

The key features of 3D Invigorator Pro that are not available in ProAnimator are direct manipulation of objects in the Composition and Effect Controls panels and 3D Object Tracking. Zaxwerks can't put these features into the ProAnimator plug-in or else the Final Cut Pro, Motion and Premiere versions would no longer be compatible.



The 3D Invigorator and ProAnimator Effect Controls panels. Notice how ProAnimator has no Scene Preview window.

Not being able to directly manipulate objects means that each time you want to adjust your 3D elements you need to go into ProAnimator to make the adjustments. The upside is that fine-tuning is less necessary when using ProAnimator and when you need to fine tune ProAnimator lets you choose any After Effects layer as a background image so it's pretty easy to get the 3D objects in the right place.

With 3D object tracking anything you can do to an After Effects 3D layer, including such things as applying keyframe assistants and expressions, you can do to an Invigorator 3D object. This gives you more control over how your 3D objects integrate with After Effects 3D layers. Take a look at the video tutorials here on Creative Cow (go to the After Effects

or Zaxwerks forums and click on my photo) for more on this very cool feature.

As I mentioned earlier ProAnimator ships as a set of 2 plug-ins plus the original standalone software. This means you can use the standalone to generate 3D elements for editing, skipping After Effects altogether, or you can use the standalone to generate elements which will be brought into After Effects, then ,make further adjustments using the ProAnimator for After Effects plug-in. ProAnimator project files can also be swapped between the standalone and the plug-in.

Final word

If you use Classic then you can't go wrong upgrading to 3D Invigorator Pro or ProAnimator. Both of these applications have more than enough useful features to make the upgrade a no-brainer.

If you use 3D Invigorator Pro then I see ProAnimator as the next step. With the similarities between the two you'll quickly realize that your investment of time learning 3D Invigorator wasn't wasted. And once you get used to ProAnimator's timeline you'll be creating graphics in record time which would be near impossible using 3D Invigorator Pro. You'll probably only go back to 3D Invigorator Pro for it's 3D tracking feature. Being able to import ProAnimator camera and object data and apply it to your After Effects 3D layers is also something that can't be overlooked.

The good thing from a user's perspective is that Zaxwerks offers special pricing if you have both and you can still use them both. You're not required to disable or throw away 3D Invigorator for After Effects if you've upgraded to the ProAnimator.

If you don't yet use any of these products I recommend you go straight for ProAnimator, it's power, versatility and sheer ease of use is hard to beat. There really is nothing else like it.