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"Sesame Street": First Animated Muppets Made with Autodesk Softimage Software

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SpeakeasyFX Delivers "Abby's Flying Fairy School" Computer-Generated Series for TV and Web

SAN RAFAEL, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 10, 2009-- For the first time, a 3D animated series is part of the "Sesame Street" television program. The program's 40 th anniversary season debuted today, including computer-generated (CG) segments delivered by SpeakeasyFX and made with Autodesk Softimage software from Autodesk, Inc. (NASDAQ:ADSK). The series features a digital version of the favorite Muppet fairy-in-training, Abby Cadabby. "Sesame Street" is the longest running children's program on television.

SpeakeasyFX, an animation studio in New Jersey, worked on 13 nine-minute segments of "Abby's Flying Fairy School." These fully CG segments were created to foster preschoolers' critical thinking and problem solving skills. Abby Cadabby, along with an eclectic gang of new friends, attends Fairy School with Mrs. Sparklenose. Abby and her friends solve problems using rhyme, reason and cooperation.

"Until now, Sesame Street used exclusively hand-driven Muppets. We went the CG route with 'Abby's Flying Fairy School' so that we could bring to life all the wonderful physical action our writers envisaged -- such as underwater scenes," explained Carol-Lynn Parente, executive producer at Sesame Workshop. "As well, the CG format allowed us to produce many online game options for SesameStreet.org, extending the broadcast experience."

SpeakeasyFX used Autodesk Softimage to model, animate, render and composite "Abby's Flying Fairy School." "We've been using Softimage since we opened our doors," said Scott Stewart, executive director at SpeakeasyFX. "Our mandate was to bring movie-quality animation to 'Sesame Street.' Of course, we needed to do it quickly, easily and on budget. Softimage was key to achieving these goals, because we were able to do everything we needed to in the software. It was essentially a single software workflow -- we love Softimage for its versatility."

SpeakeasyFX created over 500 new props and characters for the series. The team's greatest challenge was the development of digital characters that behaved like real-world Muppets. This required advanced fur and cloth simulations, and complex rigging. Stewart said, "To preserve the creative vision, we decided to build our digital Muppet models as if a hand was manipulating them from inside. This was a breakthrough modification to our workflow and was critically important in helping us find the right balance between CG and traditional Muppet performances."

SpeakeasyFX relied on Softimage software's Interactive Creative Environment (ICE) to quickly generate magic effects. ICE was used to simulate particles, bubbles, a genie in a bottle and even a macaroni twister. Stewart added, "ICE gave us the bandwidth to include a lot of effects and magic, allowing us to deliver a level of quality that exceeded initial expectations. After building our ICE trees and toolsets we were able to easily customize and add effects and magic to shots in an extremely labor-efficient way."

"We feel fortunate to have collaborated with SpeakeasyFX on 'Abby's Flying Fairy School'," added Sesame Workshop's Parente. "They developed the digital characters with fantastic furry detail. Doing the series in CG, using Softimage software, provided the freedom to showcase different types of storytelling, while preserving what viewers of all ages love about 'Sesame Street'."

Stewart concluded, "Two of the big success factors for this project were great people and great technology. The Sesame Workshop staff clearly communicated their design ideas and vision with us. Miranda Barry and Carol-Lynn Parente were excellent at helping the project stay true to the Sesame heritage."

To view a clip of "Abby's Flying Fairy School" visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rKQUtrQsHo.

About Sesame Workshop

Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit educational organization that changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street.* As the single largest informal educator of young children, local *Sesame Street* programs produced in countries as diverse as South Africa, Bangladesh and India are making a difference in over 120 nations. Using proprietary research to create engaging and enriching content, Sesame Workshop produces programs such as *Dragon Tales* and *Pinky Dinky Doo.* In addition, multimedia needs-driven initiatives provide families tools for addressing such issues as children's health, military deployment and emergency preparedness. As a nonprofit, product proceeds and philanthropic donations support Sesame Workshop's educational research and creative content for children around the world. Learn more at www.sesamestreet.org.

About Autodesk

Autodesk, Inc., is a world leader in 2D and 3D design, engineering and entertainment software for the manufacturing, building and construction, and media and entertainment markets. Since its introduction of AutoCAD software in 1982, Autodesk continues to develop the broadest portfolio of state-of-the-art software to help customers experience their ideas digitally before they are built. Fortune 100 companies -- as well as the last 14 Academy Award winners for Best Visual Effects -- use Autodesk software tools to design, visualize and simulate their ideas to save time and money, enhance quality and foster innovation for competitive advantage. For additional information about Autodesk, visit www.autodesk.com.

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