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This Software Could Even Improve Jennifer Garner's Look

"Design has become much more of a differentiator." That's Doug Walker, president and CEO of Alias Systems Corp. (Toronto; www.alias.com), the developer of a suite of remarkable 3D graphics software tools that are not only all the rage in Hollywood as Walker points out, used by every automotive company in the world. (Which brings up the somewhat snarky question: So how do you explain all of those mediocre vehicle designs out there?, which he deftly parries, "Our tool is really a prosthesis for the God-given talent of the designer. It is like digital ink and paint or digital clay. It's really up to the designer." He adds, "What the tool offers is an ability to iterate more times, to explore new designs in shorter periods of time and communicate much more effectively because it is digital." It is harder to share a clay model or a sketch than it is to be able to push a button and send an image anywhere on the web. "In the end, it is up to the designer.")

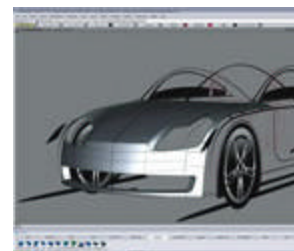
According to Walker, what he sees happening is that as manufacturers all become competent as regards the functionality of their products, they are now paying greater attention to form: "The actual design, the human factors, is becoming a differentiator between what people buy and what they don't. On a weighted basis, people are shifting more toward design than in the past. Take a look at how a kid will buy a bike or an adult a television or a stereo. The design of the technology is at least as important as the function of the technology—given that you have products in the same price range." Or, stated more simply, cool design wins.



Doug Walker, president and CEO of Alias: "Our software is about creating new paradigms."

Walker says that Alias software is proliferating thanks to the development of improved hardware. About a decade ago, a high-priced, high-powered workstation was necessary to run it. Today, a PC is the trick. For example, the recently released StudioTools 12, which helps translate 2D sketches into 3D space and then share the results collaboratively, runs on Windows XP (as well as Windows 2000 and SGI IRIX). Speaking of the 2D-3D nexus, Walker says, "To the extent that we can integrate 2D sketching with 3D, you're going to see an explosion in the use of digital tools."

The explosion, as well as the ability to iterate, is going to result in an abundance of designs. Walker notes that one of the advantages of working in digital space is that the designs can be readily archived and accessed much more simply than is the case if working with physical properties. Consequently, the intellectual properties of a design studio can be capitalized upon, not lost in a drawer somewhere.



Alias StudioTools 12: putting

Although mainstream CAD companies offer products that provide images that resemble (to the untrained eye, at least) what Alias systems output, Walker says that Alias concentrates he calls "best-of-breed solutions": "Our belief system is that in the end, the companies want the best set of tools." He continues, " Our lineage is all about The way we build our products is the way the designer thinks. The CAD vendc all about developing mechanical CAD." While there are manufacturing surface result from the Alias designs, the compelling images are critical. —GSV

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