

Chapter 4

Animated Icons & Cursors

Creating a New Animation

Editing a Frame

Creating Animation Effects

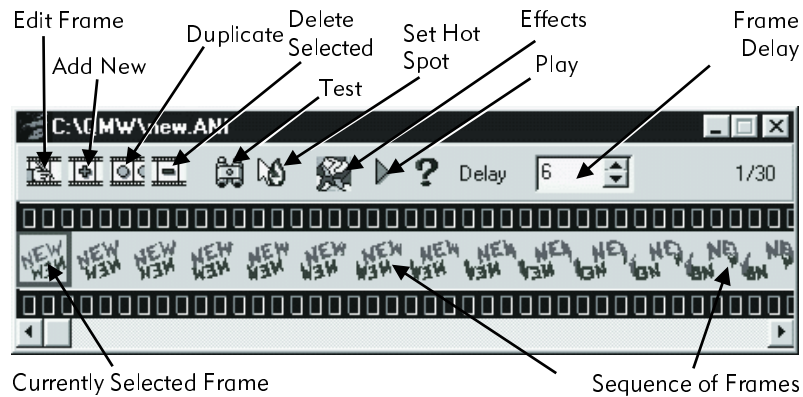
Testing Your Animation

Other Options

Animations are used by certain portions of Windows and other programs to display small moving images. These may be cursors or icons. Animated cursors/icons are stored with the .ANI three letter filename extension. The animation consists of a string of icon frames which are played, one after another, with an optional delay between each frame. The perception of movement is caused by differences from one frame to another. This is the same technique a strip of motion picture film uses to create the illusion of movement.

Creating a New Animation

When you choose to create a *New* or edit an existing .ANI format animated icon or cursor, an editing window different than that used to edit static icons will appear (see illustration). This window shows the sequence of image frames which make up the



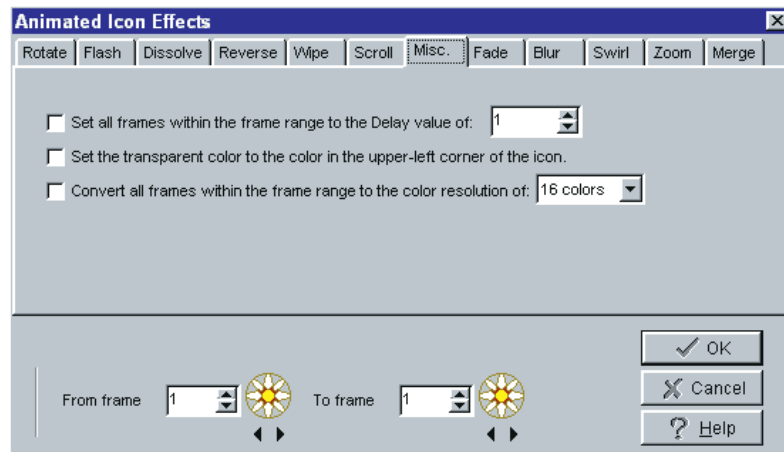
Animation Editing Window

animation. You may click on a single frame to make it the currently selected frame, and either drag it to a new location, duplicate it, delete it or add a new frame following it. The counter in the window's upper right corner displays where the currently selected frame is located within the animation. The first number is the location of the frame, and the second number shows the total number of frames in the sequence. If there are more frames than will fit into the animation's window, use the scroll bar (at the bottom) to go to areas which lie outside the window.

Editing a Frame

To edit a single frame, click on the desired frame to highlight it, then click on the *Edit* button (at the left side of the button bar). You may also double-click on a frame to edit it. The individual frames are edited in the same editing window used to edit icons, and using the same tools. You may edit several frames at the same time and cut and paste between frames.

The button group at the top/left of the animation editing window are used for *Editing*, *Adding*, *Duplicating* and *Inserting* frames into the



Special Effects Options

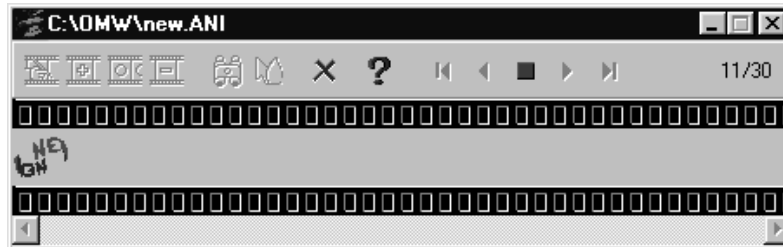
animation. If you have trouble remembering a button's function, simply allow the cursor to pause over the button and a short description will be displayed for a moment.

Creating Animation Effects

The *Effects* button allows you to automatically generate frames for various animation effects (such as dissolving from one frame to the next, wiping the image, etc.). Simply click on one of the tabs, choose your options, then click *OK* to generate the frames.

Many *Effects* allow you to generate transitions between frames. For these, use the *From frame* field to locate the initial image. Use the *To frame* field to specify the frame holding the image which will be seen at the end of the transition.

You can also use the options under the *Merge* tab to use an existing icon or cursor as a background to your animation.



Playing the Animation

Testing Your Animation

Another group of buttons is located in the center of the window's toolbar. Use the *Test* (binoculars) button to preview the icon/cursor with a variety of controls and backgrounds. The *Test* dialog also allows you to try out cursor Hot Spots. The *Hot Spot* button is used to set the location in the animated cursors which triggers events (i.e., the spot on the cursor used to click on items).

The green arrow button is used to *Play* the animation in Preview mode. While in Preview mode, VCR-style buttons are added to allow you to step through the animation frame-by-frame (e.g., to detect frames which need more work). To exit from the Preview mode, click on the *Halt* icon (the "X" in the center of the icon bar).

Other Options

The *Delay* field is used to specify a delay before the next frame is played. Delay is specified in increments of 1/60th of a second (known, in Windows parlance, as a "jiffy"). You can set a single *Delay* value for all frames by using the *Misc* tab under the *Effects*.

Animated cursor and icon files are saved with the .ANI three letter filename extension. To save a new animation, simply choose the *Save As* function from

the *File* menu, and provide a new name for your animation. The three letter filename extension is added automatically.

- ⇒ **Notes:** Because most Windows versions see animations as cursors, the size will be limited to 32x32.

The *ActivIcons* utility which is included with *IconForge* allows you to display your animated icons on the desktop. You will find this option on its *Desktop Animation* screen.

- ⇒ **Trick:** Windows usually limits the size for animated cursors to 32x32. However, you can make your animated icon/cursor appear to be larger if you alter the *Hot Spot* for each frame. The image will rotate around the *Hot Spot*. To do this, do **not** use the *Hot Spot* editor from the animation window. Rather, double-click each frame in turn and use the *Set Cursor Hot Spot* function from the *Options* menu to set the *Hot Spot* for each frame.

E.g. As an experiment, try creating this 4 frame animation:

Frame 1: make your cursor's image point towards the upper/left corner, and set the *Hot Spot* for this frame at the upper/left corner (0,0).

Frame 2: make your cursor's image point towards the upper/right corner, and set the *Hot Spot* for this frame in the upper/right corner (31,0).

Frame 3: make your cursor's image point towards the lower/right corner, and set the *Hot Spot* for this frame at the lower/right corner (31,31).

Frame 4: make your cursor's image point towards the lower/left corner, and set the *Hot Spot* for this final frame also at the lower/left corner (0,31).

Now click the *Test* button and notice how the frames move around a central point (the location of the *Hot Spot*).

⇒ **Tip:** You can export your animation as a single filmstrip-type panel of icons by using the *Save As* function under the *File* menu, and using a *.BMP File Type*.

If you need a panel which contains larger images, use the animator in the *ImageForge* program (which is installed along with *IconForge*) to create the sequence, then save it using a *.BMP File Type*.

Filmstrip-type panels of images are used to create animation in programs such as Internet Explorer. These panels are also used by programmers when creating images for program controls, etc.

If you may need to edit the panel in the future, you should also save a copy of the animation in *.ANI* or *.AVI* format so that the frames are preserved.