

## Making Movies is Hard Fun: Building Tools for Telling Stories

*Director Michael B. Johnson, Pixar Animation Studios, USA*

### Abstract:

Making movies is a complex, collaborative, creative activity. At Pixar, they don't pretend to know exactly what they're doing, but they do have a process. They trust the process, but they constantly test and refine it, based on the stories they want to tell, the resources they have to tell them, and most importantly - the people who want to tell them.

Technology and art go hand in hand at Pixar - each challenges and reinforces the other. Technologist Michael B. Johnson, a Pixarian since he joined as an intern in 1993, has been involved in many of Pixar's feature films and short films. He will share his perspective on the Pixar film-making process; one which involves both creative story tellers that want things they don't understand how to make and flexible technologists who are more concerned with empowering their users than winning an argument with them.



Come along as Michael tells stories from inside their process; sharing the how and the why. Join him as he tries to explain how Pixar always manages to keep their eye on the big prize - a compelling story, well told.

### Speaker:

Dr. Michael B. Johnson leads the Moving Pictures Group at Pixar Animation Studios. His group is responsible for the design, implementation and support of the pre-production pipeline for Pixar features and shorts. This includes Story, Editorial, Art and the review process. His team works directly with the directors, editors, producers, production designers, art directors, artists and production folks who start the process of bringing Pixar stories to the screen.

Dr. Johnson has been at Pixar since 1993, and has written tools for all of Pixar's feature films (and many of their short films), including storyboarding, pre-viz, layout, animation, modelling, lighting, rendering, and editorial tools.

Prior to Pixar, Michael attended the University of Illinois where he earned his undergraduate degree in Computer Science Engineering. He studied abroad for a year in Swansea, Wales and also worked for NCSA, Thinking Machines, IBM and MIT's Media Lab.

He completed his Masters of Science in Visual Studies and his PhD in Computer Graphics and Animation at the MIT Media Lab, where Dr. Edwin Catmull (founder of Pixar) was on his thesis committee. He lives in Oakland CA with his wife and daughter.