

On the shopping list: Multiplatform-friendly properties like Domo, for which Big Tent holds worldwide rights

BIG TENT GETS CASH INFUSION LOOKS TO SPEND AT MIPTV

by lana castleman

New York-based licensing and marketing agency Big Tent Entertainment is heading to MIPTV with a shopping spree in mind. The company has just closed a

multi-million dollar round of financing led by Mercury Capital Partners and is primed for aggressive expansion in the kids and family entertainment space.

"We feel we have some holes in the portfolio," says CEO Rich Collins. "And we're looking to shore up the holes at MIPTV." Collins and his team will have very specific goals in mind as they look for projects that complement the company's current lineup, which includes worldwide TV and merch rights for Domo and North American licensing rights for Entara's *Those Scurvy Rascals*. (Both properties have scored worldwide broadcast deals with Nickelodeon in recent months.)

At the top of the shopping list are: a live-action family series, an edgier kids puppet/animation show, a teen fashion property and seasonal fare centered around major holidays such as Christmas and Halloween. Collins is interested in properties that can play on multiple platforms rather than those solely developed for TV so newcomers shouldn't "have to stretch to work on broadband or mobile."

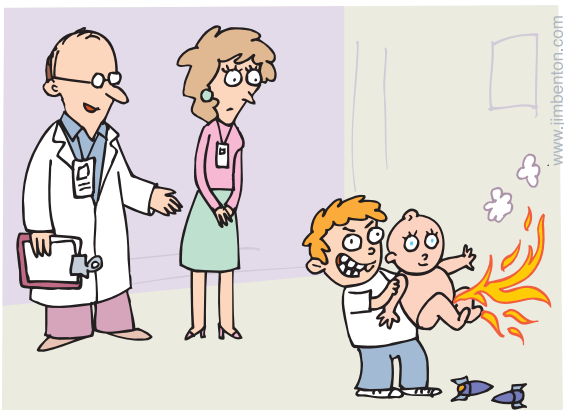
As for Big Tent's planned level of involvement, Collins says it can range from outright acquisition or investing in production to assuming licensing rights and masterminding a marketing push; he's staying flexible.

The second peg of the plan revolves around Big Tent expanding its market reach further into Latin America, so expect the

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Roll the Cartoon

by jim benton



"We liked the toy-cars-for-girls idea so much that we came up with traditional baby dolls for boys. This one poops atom bombs and pees fire."

The world may not be ready for Mr. Benton's creation above, but Mattel has done a fine job of customizing vehicle play for little girls (page 67).

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company's future deals to include North and South American rights at a minimum. Alejandra Denda Hampton, co-founder of The Mercer Group, has been brought on to lead the charge.

"We see Latin America as a huge opportunity in the next 10 years," says Collins. "The economies are getting better, the middle classes are growing, and the population is booming." However, he recognizes it's a complex market, and each country in the region has its own challenges. Part of Hampton's job is to build an overall plan of attack, and once that's in place Collins says the company

will begin putting staff on the ground—most likely an office in Buenos Aires, Argentina to start.

In the meantime, Collins has just made another key appointment to help grow existing business. He's tapped industry veteran, and former EVP of worldwide consumer products at The Jim Henson Company, Isabel Miller to spearhead licensing and retail business development for Big Tent's current portfolio of properties. Her immediate tasks are to ramp up licensing revenues for Domo, Rascals, Habbo, Aussie import The Saddle Club, teen-skewing Crusty Demons and preschool classic Miffy & Friends. ■

The company behind the company...

They say behind every great success story, there's a great team.

And this maxim certainly applies to Big Tent's success in the TV business. Through a unique and open-ended partnership that can't really be summed up as consulting or contract distribution, kids entertainment veterans Joan Lambur and Suzanne Wilson have steered the licensing agency's entrée into IP acquisition, development and broadcast sales for the past five years.

And with *Domo* set to roll out shortly on NickToons and Nick International, *Miffy* on Noggin and a series of two-minute *Planet Groove* animated music vids featuring the Star Girls in production for NickToons, it's patently obvious the two companies have found a good fit in one another.

Looking to replicate that dynamic, Lambur & Associates has hooked up with Toronto, Canada's Story City in a similar way. The five-year-old indie studio is run by former Cambium staffers Ed Lee and Dave Beatty, and so far, its work slate has been dominated by third-party servicework (most notably on *Bigfoot Presents: Meteor and the Mighty Monster Trucks*, a CGI series that debuted on Discovery Kids last fall).

But Lee and Beatty have been working on original concepts for awhile now, and they have the development and production expertise to handle the creative end of crafting them into TV products. What they don't have, however, are relationships with broadcasters, and this missing link is crucial to financing. Enter Lambur



Lambur & Associates, which brokers TV deals for Big Tent, is turning its talents to developing *Doc Knowledge*

and Wilson, who specialize in finding TV placement for properties, particularly on State-side outlets. "We're able to advise them in the development phase about what will work in the US and internationally, and what will work in licensing," says Lambur. "We're also helping them prioritize their slate and come up with an action plan for IP development."

At the top of the pile is a mixed-media series called *Doc Knowledge*, which is built around a science curriculum for six-

to nine-year-olds. Doc lives in the cosmos with a gaggle of little ETs called Edlings. When a mystery worth investigating crops up—i.e. one of the Edlings spends too much time outside and gets a sunburn one day—Doc beams down to his colleagues on Earth for answers. The show combines archive footage, live action "man on the street" bits and animation, and L&A is talking to educational broadcasters and foundations about partnering on the project. **JC**