



best of the Year awards



W

ho doesn't like a little recognition for a job well done? In the spirit of giving props, welcome to *KidScreen's* first quasi-formal celebration of the year's best efforts in international kids entertainment. We polled industry players to get a read on who made waves in 2007 that would likely resonate for years to come, and the result of that fieldwork is the following shortlist of candidates competing in six categories—Producer, Distributor, Broadcaster, Licensor, Licensee and Licensing Agent...of the Year.

This is where you come in! We're leaving it up to our readers to choose the winners. *KidScreen* has set up an online voting page at www.kidscreen.com/oftheyear. So after you've checked out the accomplishments of this year's nominees, please jump online and take a moment to fill out a ballot (one per reader, of course). The winners will be announced in our January issue, streeting on January 11, 2008. Happy voting!



Aardman Animations

2007 was anything but sheepish for Aardman Animations. Building on the launch of 40 x seven-minute stop-motion series *Shaun the Sheep* on CBBC, the studio's been busily expanding to target new demos and platforms. So far, *Shaun* has sold into more than 150 countries, and the global broadcast exposure is fuelling a growing merchandise program. HIT Entertainment's US operation snapped up North American licensing and home video rights to the property in September. And building on its relationship with the Beeb, Aardman has a greenlight to produce 52 x 10-minute spin-off *Timmy* for CBeebies' 2009 sked, marking the prodco's first foray into preschool programming.



Of course, Aardman is much more than a one-trick sheep. Also hitting its pipeline this year was high-profile Jamie Oliver toon *Little J*, which tells the story of a 10-year-old Jamie developing his taste for cooking. The concept generated considerable buyer interest at Cartoon Forum in September. And not to be overlooked is Aardman's as-yet-untitled Wallace & Gromit theatrical project and its three-year first-look deal with Sony Pictures, inked in April.

On the digital front, Aardman launched a new-and-improved Wallace & Gromit website and hooked up with internet TV operator Joost in May to launch an extensive Aardman branded channel. The company also struck significant mobile deals with Player X in the US and Rhythm NowMedia.

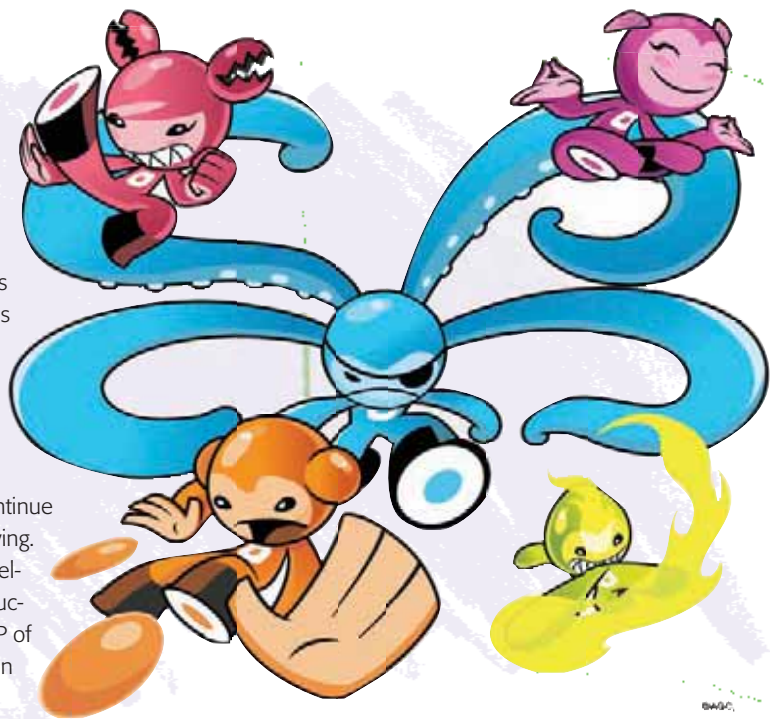
> www.aardman.com

American Greetings Properties

For a company that didn't even exist before 2006, American Greetings Properties hasn't wasted any time in ramping up its production business. Along with delivering an all-new 52 x 11-minute *Care Bears* series (based on parentco AG's classic property) and original toon *Sushi Pack* this fall to DIC's State-side Kewlopolis block on CBS, the company already has another two series underway—*Maryoku Yummy*, a co-pro with India's DQ Entertainment pegged for completion in 2008; and greeting card-based *Twisted Whiskers*, which involves DQ and Mike Young Productions.

Heading into 2008, AGP expects its output volume to continue to grow, and it's made some key hires to keep things moving. Namely, the studio plucked Sean Gorman from his VP of development post at The Hatchery in L.A. to become its VP of production and development in August. And then Sara Finn, former VP of animation at Sony Pictures, was brought in as VP of production in September.

> www.agpbrands.com





BRB Internacional

As it winds up a year-long celebration of its 35th anniversary, BRB has never been busier. The Spanish studio has had notable success experimenting with short-form CGI projects this year. Having partnered with Scotland's Red Kite Animation on irreverent 65 x 90-second series *The Imp*, BRB struck significant broadcast deals with Cartoon Network (US), TVC (Spain), Canal+ (France) and Canada's YTV, as well as signing Universal Pictures as a mobile partner in the UK. And new short *Angus & Cheryl* (104 x two minutes) got snapped up by France 3 and Nickelodeon (Belgium, France, Holland, Italy, Latin America, Luxembourg, Portugal, Scandinavia, Spain and Switzerland).

But perhaps the biggest score for BRB was cracking the US market with *Iron Kid*. The 26-ep CGI series co-produced with Screen 21, Manga Entertainment, Designstorm, Daewon Media and TVE bowed on the Kids' WB! Saturday morning block this fall under the title *Eon Kid*.

And *Bernard*, which currently airs on the BBC and Cartoon Network in the US and Eastern Europe took a major leap into digital with several Euro mobile deals and a DVD contract with Universal Pictures International Entertainment. BRB is now hard at work on a full-length *Bernard* theatrical feature for 2009.

> www.brb.es

Chorion

Since bringing New York's Silver Lining Productions into the fold in late 2005, Chorion has been nurturing some of the market's highest-quality book-based series through development and production, as well as making major deals with the big three kidnets this year. To start with, *The Mr. Men Show*, based on Roger Hargreaves' classic publishing franchise, has just made its US debut on Cartoon Network, and master toy licensee Fisher-Price is planning a worldwide rollout of playthings in 2009. Ian Falconer's *Olivia* is also ready for her close-up, and a major development deal with Nick Jr. US will bring the 52 x 11-minute CGI series to screen next fall, with a full merchandising program to follow. And Chorion and French co-pro partner Marathon got the nod from France 3 and Disney Channel to send a new 26 x 22-minute series drawn from Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* books into production for 2008.

An early indication that the company was getting serious about its in-house production business came in March, when it made three significant hires, including poaching Kurt Mueller from Sesame Workshop to take the post of VP of creative. Finally, a new version of Chorion flagship property *Noddy* is in development for 2009 to coincide with his 60th anniversary.

> www.chorion.co.uk



Little Airplane Productions

The preschool specialist has taken flight by keeping its productions on a short leash and building a unique brand. 2006 headliner *The Wonder Pets!* was a hit for Nick Jr., and the show created by president Josh Selig has wrapped a second season of production. Nick also picked up licensing rights and is building out a mass-market merch program for 2008.

Selig's unique after-effects animation style and gift for storytelling and music hasn't gone unnoticed by broadcasters outside the US. The company scored a plum CBeebies commission for new series *3rd & Bird!* this past August. The production will be a cross-Atlantic affair with work taking place in New York and London studios. And the pros at BBC Worldwide are getting to work on a consumer products program.

Little Airplane also significantly upped its hometown profile. For the second year in a row, the company hosted an intensive three-day workshop under its Little Airplane Academy banner and helped participants hone their preschool series-crafting skills. The studio also moved into a new 12,000-square-foot space in the Big Apple's South Street Seaport area. House-proud Selig now offers tours (à la Universal Studios) of the compound to the public, and just in time for Christmas, he has fulfilled his longstanding dream of opening his own toy shop. The Little Airplane Shoppe, specializing in animation, puppetry, literature on kids TV and classic toys, is opening its doors in December.

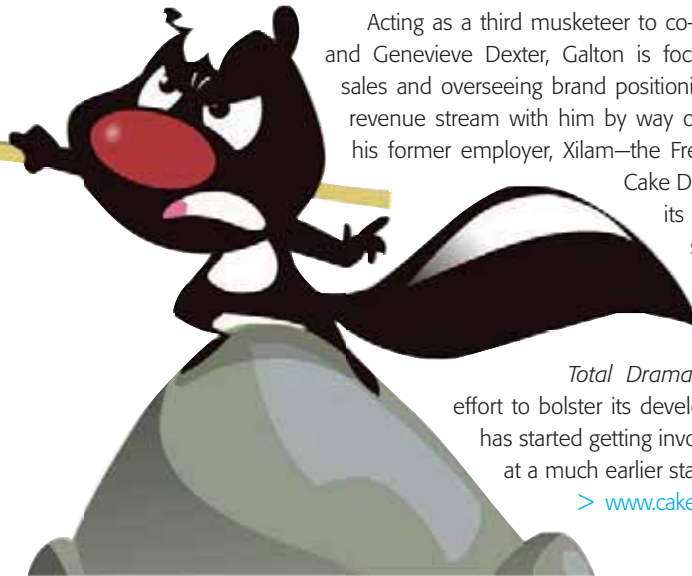
> www.littleairplane.com





Cake Distribution

Landing a prime US spot for 2-D animated comedy/action series *Skunk Fu!* was a highlight for Cake Entertainment's new distribution arm in '07. The 52 x 12-minute series, which tells the story of a Western skunk learning martial arts moves at the feet of a wise old Kung Fu master, bowed on Kids' WB! airwaves this fall, after first launching on CBBC and ABC Australia. And the company has beefed up its sales initiatives by bringing on former Xilam EVP of business development, Ed Galton, as MD.



Acting as a third musketeer to co-directors Tom Van Waveren and Genevieve Dexter, Galton is focusing on international pre-sales and overseeing brand positioning. He also brought a new revenue stream with him by way of an exclusive alliance with his former employer, Xilam—the French prodco has appointed Cake Distribution to handle sales of its entire library in all English-speaking markets. Besides *Skunk Fu!*, the distributor's most recent pick-ups include *Edgar & Ellen* and *Total Drama Island*. And as part of an effort to bolster its development slate, the company has started getting involved in indie-driven projects at a much earlier stage.

> www.cakeentertainment.com

Entertainment Rights

Entertainment Rights has had a busy year carrying out its long-term goal of expanding into the US market. To that end, the acquisition of Classic Media in January brought with it a stake in new US kidnet qubo, which has a terrestrial block on NBC and 24/7 digital cable coverage on Telemundo and ION networks. And to up State-side revenue streams for the group's entire brand portfolio across TV, licensing and merchandising, DVD/video, digital platforms and music, ER went looking among the ranks of market master Disney for a leader. Deborah Dugan, former head of Disney Publishing, took over as president and CEO of North American operations in May.

ER used its new qubo holding to roll out flagship property *Postman Pat* in English and Spanish. The new *Postman Pat* series, which joins the 80 episodes already in ER's catalogue, positions the iconic mailman in a new environment, interacting with new cast members and vehicles.

Continuing its US invasion, the group inked a deal to place *Jim Jam & Sunny* on AOL's US preschool portal KOL Jr. The site is airing eps of the puppet-led series, as well as featuring games and other short-form content. ER also snagged the international TV distribution rights to new Hasbro/ Cartoon Network series *Transformers: Animated* that covers 26 half hours and a 70-minute one-off special.

> www.entertainmentrights.com



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Nelvana Enterprises

The distribution arm of Nelvana Studio and subsidiary of media conglomerate Corus Entertainment continues to make strong international library sales, but its most interesting moves this year have been made in the nascent field of digital distribution. Over the past 12 months, Nelvana has hooked up with UK-based BT to get its library fare on the upstart BT Vision VOD platform and BT-Vision download store. The deal made toons *Franklin the Turtle*, *Max & Ruby* and *Maggie and Ferocious Beast* available for about US\$3 per viewing on BT-Vision boxes.

The company also partnered with computer giant Hewlett-Packard to sell its toons online via its growing Video Merchant Services. US consumers will be able to buy episodic DVDs from the company's catalogue on-demand or as digital downloads through HP's network of e-tailers. VMS is beta-testing delivery with retail behemoth Wal-Mart, so it's a space to watch. Speaking of big, the distributor made a notable deal with the king of online retail, Amazon. Nelvana now has content on download-to-own service Unbox, which allows US customers to download a number of series like *Ruby Gloom* for US\$1.99 an ep.

Finally, Nelvana buddied up with DIC Entertainment and UK channel operator/distributor Sparrowhawk Media and launched 24/7 global multiplatform channel KidsCo in April to widen its Euro distribution swath.

> www.nelvana.com



Taffy Entertainment

If you can't join them, make your own platform. That was the rallying cry that led Taffy Entertainment to create innovative VOD service/broadband portal Kabillion with partners Comcast and EM.Entertainment. The idea was to up exposure for series in the tight US broadcast scene. Within six months of launching the network in January, Kabillion's average weekly VOD viewings on Comcast were up 30% and it netted a carriage boost by signing on with Bresnan Digital Cable, which has a presence in Colorado, Montana, Utah and Wyoming. Kabillion's programming lineup also continued to grow to include brand-new animated series, an online preschool block and original Kabillion casual games. COO Bill Shultz is confident that Kabillion's VOD component will reach 70% to 80% market penetration over the next six months, after the i's are dotted on more carriage deals currently in the works.

Taking a shot at a new distribution model—and making it work—put Taffy in the running for Distributor of the Year, but its track record on the more traditional side of the business didn't hurt, either. *Code Lyoko*, *Dive Olly Dive!*, *Fantastic Four*, *Growing Up Creepie* and *Bleach* all performed admirably on the international stage, scoring berths in several countries this year. And most recently, Taffy was tapped by new Spanish net VEO to create a two-hour branded kids block featuring series from its library, including *Funky Squad* and *Wheel Cops*.

> www.taffyentertainment.com



TV-Loonland

It could be said that it was a Little Princess that made it a big year for the German distributor. Through 2006 and into 2007, preschool series *Little Princess* has sold into more than 120 countries, including landing a key spot on UK broadcaster Five's highly rated Milkshake block. And with an eye toward the future, the company inked a master toy license with Martin Yaffe International in expectation that a large-scale merchandising program will bolster its bottom line in the year to come.

TV-L's 52 x one-minute multi-platform short series *The Owl* also proved successful in TV, home video and mobile circles, locking down a spot on CBBC this past September and a large multi-territory deal with Jetix covering the US and Latin America. Global start-up net KidsCo turned to TV-L to help fill its fledgling schedule, snapping up a raft of titles such as *Clifford* and *G.I. Joe*. Moreover, a carefully selected slate of promising new shows is likely to keep the distributor's contract-signing pens busy in '08. Keep an eye out for oddball buddy series *Pat & Stan*; *Raymond*, a 26 x seven-minute 2-D animated comedy; and 52 x five minute painterly preschool toon *Penelope* from Japan's Nippon Animation.

> www.loonland.com



nominees
broadcaster

Cartoon Network Europe

CNE's development execs kicked things off at the beginning of 2007 by putting out an open call for new original series from Latin America, Asia and India. Uncovering a creative hit from one of these territories that could translate into an international hit was a key focus of the outreach program. And over the year, the program made some significant headway in Asia, in particular, with three projects from India, one from Thailand and one from Australia now in development.

In the meantime, the net's new London-based Studio Europe has been busy developing original ideas, nurturing talent and delivering brand-new original series; in fact, one new project is already greenlit.

An on-air redesign took the network back to its roots with IDs and navigation created and inspired by the cartoon creators, shows and characters. And a new broadband site, www.supercartoonnetwork.co.uk, offers streamed eps, games and interactive short-form content on its just-launched Shorties site. The network also fared well with several new series this year. Animated quiz show *Skatoony*, produced with Talent TV,

uniquely pits real-life kids against cartoon contestants and garnered status as the channel's highest-rating show at launch. A second season is going to air, a third has been greenlit, and a distribution deal is in place with Target Entertainment.

Other 2007 initiatives included CN Superstar, which gave one viewer and two friends a weekend of VIP treatment, while new episodes of *Ben 10* were part of an interactive, multi-platform campaign. And the net's first-ever live-actioner *My Spy Family* began airing on Boomerang in the fall.

> www.cartoonnetworkeurope.com



CBeebies

Heading into its fifth year on air, CBeebies underwent a brand refresh and rejigged its schedule to mirror the daily ebbs and flows of its viewers' lives, breaking programming into four distinct blocks in '07. The Get Set Go block now kicks off the morning with *LazyTown* and *Tweenies*. Discover and Do follows up and targets the zero to four stay-at-home crowd, while the Big Fun Block comes on just in time for the after-school rush and is a key part of the net's strategy to extend its viewer age up to six. And finally the Bedtime Hour block winds things down at 6 p.m. with gentle series such as *Charlie and Lola* and *In the Night Garden*.

In terms of new programming, the channel's first multi-platform commission, *Tommy Zoom*, went to air in March. The show started out online and raked in millions of hits, convincing the net to create a show based on the lead character. And three new comedies—*Big Barn Farm*, *Big & Small* and *Nuzzle and Scratch*—have also bowed. Moreover, creative director Michael Carrington continues to break ground with his 2008 commissions, greenlighting CBeebies' first-ever live-action comedy *Grandpa in My Pocket* from upstart prodco Adastra Creative.

The channel is also expanding its reach. Radio station BBC7 now carries a three-hour CBeebies program block everyday between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m., and the Beeb's commercial arm BBC Worldwide is moving CBeebies into more international territories. Already BBC Worldwide has launched CBeebies on Tata-Sky's DTH platform in India, and CBeebies VOD will be available to BBC America subscribers in early 2008. The net should also land in at least four European territories later in the year.

> www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies



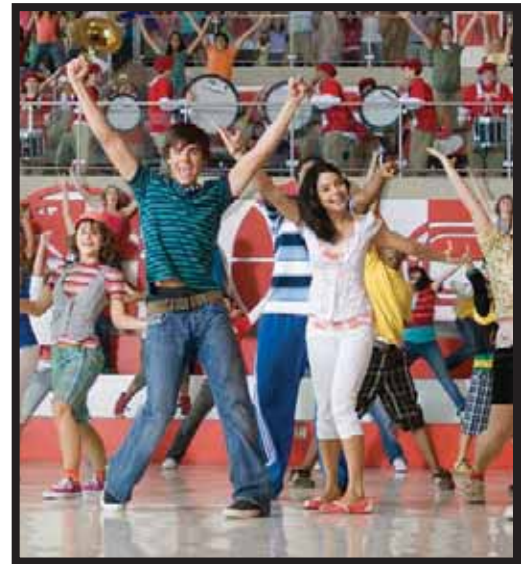
Disney Channel US

The 24-hour net that airs in more than 89 million households broke all existing ratings records for a cable channel in August, when its much-anticipated *High School Musical 2* debuted to an audience of 17.2 million, making it the most-watched basic cable telecast ever, as well as the most-watched telecast for kids six to 11 and tweens nine to 14. The HSM phenomenon, along with blockbuster series *Hannah Montana*, has made Disney the envy of broadcasters the world over.

Everyone is trying to crack its code for hatching pitch-perfect live-action fare for tweens, but it's more likely that Disney's hits will be formatted for other markets. Head of global operations Rich Ross announced at MIPCOM that plans are in the works to create a Japanese version of *Hannah Montana*, and several localized productions of *HSM* are already underway. Not to mention that *HSM* is spinning out onto the big screen with *HSM3* debuting theatrically in 2008.

The net has also been busy beefing up its digital presence as broadcasters continue to try and monetize the realm. DisneyFamily.com is making a concerted effort to expand its reach with moms, in particular, as part of its strong push for co-viewing. And since relaunching in January, Disney.com is averaging more than 100 million video streams per week.

> www.disneychannel.com



France 3

To adapt to a quickly diversifying French broadcast scene, terrestrial net France 3 spent 2007 fine-tuning its programming strategy to embrace the global media, cross-platform future. F3 plans to spend more of its US\$23.2-million annual commissioning budget on properties designed to work on both TV and new media platforms. And its move away from an acquisitions model to get involved in more co-productions means greater control over content.

France 3's first multi-platform co-pro is *Wakfu*, a 52 x 22-minute series inspired by a French MMOG called *Dorfus* that has attracted more than five million plays and 250,000 subscribers to date. A companion *Wakfu* web game is in the works, and the net is planning to create two MMOG-inspired series every two years.

The website for its key after-school Toowam block has been revamped to include improved gaming options, social networking apps and video streaming, and is now co-managed by the channel's digital division and programming department so it can be scheduled as carefully as the on-air lineup. In 2008, the site will preview new TV series, launch original content and play into on-air programming stunts.

> www.france3.fr

Nick UK

Nick UK's pilot development program to fill a hole in the live-action comedy category with original productions proved to be a worthwhile cause in 2007. Debbie MacDonald, VP of programming, says four live-action pilots for Nickelodeon are on deck and two more will be greenlit in 2008, making Nick UK the most active commercial broadcaster in the territory. Already into its second season is the broadcaster's co-pro with Helion and Moi J'aime la télévision, *Genie in the House*. The net has also been busy beefing up its website with easier-to-access VOD and mobile content, plus a red-button service that offers free games.

The channel has been quite active on the community outreach front, too. Of note are multimedia campaigns "See Something, Say Something" (in association with the Anti-Bullying Alliance); Nicktrition, aimed at helping kids make healthier food choices; and Nick's Big Green Thing, which is oriented around the issue of climate change and showing kids how they can make a difference.

Finally, Nick UK received 12 BAFTA Children's Awards noms this year. Most notably, both Nickelodeon and Nick Jr. have been nominated for Channel of the Year, and Nick Jr.'s cookery commission, *Bubble & Squeak*, is up for best preschool live-action series.

> www.nick.co.uk



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BBC worldwide

In a year that saw merchandising revenues at the BBC's commercial arm reach a five-year high, courtesy of Doctor Who's outstanding performance in the UK retail market over the past 18 months, BBC Worldwide appears to have another licensing hit on its hands with Ragdoll preschool series *In the Night Garden*. According to TV ratings tracker BARB, the live-action show has averaged more than 300,000 viewers per weekday since June, just two months after launching on CBeebies' Bedtime Hour block. And industry researcher The NPD Group pegged the licensing program as a stand-out effort for 2007/08.



Master toy licensee Hasbro introduced an eight-SKU line in late July, and the UK press has since been rife with reports of product sell-outs, particularly of the Igglepiggle feature plush. More than 20 licensees are on-board the UK program, and fall/winter marketing plans, including promos at national nurseries and with Tesco Toddler and Baby Club, are in full swing. Looking ahead, the company has snapped up worldwide distribution and merch rights to upcoming preschool series *Harry and Toto* (from ex-BBC staffer Paul Shuttleworth's Handle and Spout) and *3rd and Bird!* from Little Airplane to bolster its property portfolio into 2009.

On the organizational side of things, BBCWW folded its children's business into the more profitable home entertainment division under Gill Pritchard earlier this year, so it's now poised to benefit from her publishing and licensing experience.

> www.bbcworldwide.com

Disney Consumer Products

There's no denying that Disney Consumer Products is the 800-pound gorilla of entertainment licensing, and on the surface, it may seem like an all-too-predictable nomination choice. But when it comes to industry innovation and pushing into new categories, few can keep up with DCP in any year, and 2007 was no exception. The division is on track to generate more than US\$26 billion at retail worldwide by year's end. Icons Mickey and Winnie continue to account for a good share of that coin, but properties introduced in the last few years are gaining ground quickly, particularly Disney Princess, Cars, Hannah Montana and High School Musical.

As for breaking new category ground in the past 12 months, the company was the first of the big three US-based licensors to formally confront the issue of childhood obesity by issuing healthy food licensing guidelines in late 2006. It has since followed up with large-scale direct-to-retail programs at key grocers in North America (Kroger, Sobeys) and the UK (Tesco) built around proffering nutritious foodstuffs. DCP has also continued to push brands into adult territory, notably introducing a high-end bridal-wear line with designer Kirstie Kelly and the Walt Disney Signature collection of art deco-inspired fine furniture, as well as sealing a deal with the US's largest residential builder KB Home to showcase the Disney Home range of flooring, paint and room décor in KB building centers designed for new home buyers. Finally, on the licensee/licensor relationship front, DCP launched a web-based Brand & Image packaging tutorial in mid-July to help its 10,000-odd worldwide licensees maintain a cohesive brand position. The service gives licensees a comprehensive guide to using DCP brand assets on product, packaging and POP displays.

> www.disneyconsumerproducts.com





Hasbro Properties Group

The licensing division of toy giant Hasbro has, by all accounts, had a remarkable year—call it robot magic, if you will. Bolstered by the Hollywood blockbuster *Transformers*, which has grossed more than US\$700 million worldwide at the box office, Hasbro Properties Group lined up some 225 licensees for the 2007 program based on the 1980s plaything. Certainly, the new line of Hasbro-made Transformer toys has been climbing up bestseller and holiday must-have lists, but sales of ancillary products aren't too shabby, either. In the UK, for example, industry researcher The NPD Group estimated that for every British pound spent to see the *Transformers* film, consumers threw down 35 pence on related merch. With new

toon series *Transformers: Animated* set to bow on Cartoon Network in 2008 and a movie sequel reportedly scheduled to hit theaters in 2009, you can expect to see HPG padding its licensee list for some time.

> www.hasbro.com

Nickelodeon & Viacom Consumer Products

NVCP moved a long way from Bikini Bottom this year, striking several large-scale deals involving international real estate that should further catapult its properties into the collective consciousness. Last March, the licensing arm made its first foray into theme parks with US cathedral of consumerism, the Mall of America. The mall's seven-acre indoor theme park is in the process of being redesigned to house all things Nick—including rides like the Avatar Airbender Rollercoaster and a 4,000-square-foot retail store—and is set to start welcoming visitors in spring 2008. Just two months later, plans for a massive US\$1-billion theme park in Dubai—slated to open its doors in 2011—were announced. And on the heels of that, the company unveiled international Nickelodeon Resorts by Marriott, a hotel project that should see the first of 20 planned Nick-themed family vacation spots open near San Diego, California in 2010.

On the product front, NVCP challenged licensees to turn the heat up, and Oakdale, Minnesota-based Imation delivered. The licensee reinvented Nick's presence in the consumer electronics category with the Npower line, making the features of characters like SpongeBob intrinsic to the design of digital cameras, TVs and alarm clocks, and generating a lot of buzz for the properties.

> www.nickelodeon.com



Pokémon USA

Moves made in 2006 by the US arm of the US\$15-billion Japanese property—including taking back all licensing rights, bringing trading card and DVD businesses back in-house and signing a master toy deal with Jakks Pacific—set the stage for the revival of Pokémania in the US some 10 years after the property first made a splash there. And this year, the comeback campaign driven by a new video game and TV series centered around the Pokémon Diamond & Pearl theme resurrected merch sales for the once-flagging franchise. In the first nine months of '07, Pokémon went from being nowhere to everywhere, scoring prime retail placement at Toys 'R' Us outlets across the US through dedicated in-store boutiques, marking a 400% increase in trading card sales and cracking the top-five in the action-figure category.

According to Pokémon VP of licensing and entertainment Holly Rawlinson, the rebranding and repackaging is also paying off in terms of future growth. New categories are opening up, and the minimum guarantees commanded by the property have more than doubled this year.

> www.pokemon.com

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Character options

This UK-based toyco designs and develops more than 70% of its product offering in-house, and with the success of its Doctor Who line in the last year and a half, it has developed a knack for interpreting distinctly British properties into saleable playthings. The Doctor Who sales streak continues, with the UK Toy Retailers Association putting the new Doctor Who Dalek Hybrid Voice Changer Mask and action figures on its annual "Dream Dozen" holiday list. Joining the time traveler there is the Peppa Pig Campervan Playset, which is on track to sell 100,000 units by year's end.

Recognizing its aptitude for turning out fantastical toys, Character has lined up another master toy deal with BBC Worldwide for sci-fi series *Primeval* and is set to bow product at UK retail in January. Entertainment Rights' Postman Pat is also joining the stable with new playsets, plush and collectibles based on Pat and his pals scheduled to roll out in early 2009 to coincide with the launch of the new series on CBeebies and BBC Two.

> www.character-online.com



Jakks Pacific

Jakks has been riding high this year in the sales aisle, thanks largely to robust sales of its licensed lines, particularly Pokémon, Hannah Montana and WWE. The company is on-track to generate US\$800 million in sales by year's end, up roughly US\$35 million from 2006. But what's more interesting, perhaps, is the moves it's made this year that are likely to pay off in '08.

The company has been on a master toy tear. Since June, Jakks has signed deals for five high-profile properties. Courtesy of new US agent Big Tent Entertainment, Jakks now counts The Wiggles and educationally focused brand Discovery Kids as part of its portfolio. Products for both will land on retail shelves next fall, bringing both properties back into mass distribution channels. Plus the toyco picked up Fancy Nancy from United Media, and will draw on the bestselling books about the girliest of girls to create things pink and sparkly. And Nickelodeon & Viacom Consumer Products has tapped Jakks to help relaunch cyber sensation Neopets and become *SpongeBob SquarePants*' new master toy licensee. Toys based on the US\$6.5-billion oceanic franchise are slated for retail in spring 2008.

> www.jakkspace.com



Mattel

The world's largest toyco has endured what has arguably been the toughest five months in its history. Massive product recalls involving leading kids licenses such as Disney's Cars, Dora the Explorer and Sesame Street, and in-house brands like Polly Pocket, have plagued both Mattel and preschool-focused subsidiary Fisher-Price. However, the company has managed to maintain its integrity and the status of the licensed IP involved by dealing with the crisis in an open, public manner, laying down a blueprint for others to follow that should be lauded.

Six days before the initial recall of 1.5 million toys was announced on August 2, Mattel's toy testing processes were the subject of a lengthy article in *The New York Times*. In it, Mattel opened up completely, giving the reporter full access to one of its Chinese facilities, while SVP Jim Waters freely admitted, "We are not perfect; we have holes." After news of the recall broke, CEO Robert Eckert quickly issued a public apology to parents and pledged to increase inspections at its paint facilities, and Mattel began making good on returned product. The company then set up a Corporate Responsibility Group in September, which is now charged with overseeing product integrity and environmental health & safety, among other things. Christmas sales results weren't in at press time, but Mattel had yet to experience a significant drop in revenue or share price.

> www.mattel.com

Steve & Barry's

US apparel retailer Steve & Barry's is the first of two retailers nominated in this category, and with the rise of direct-to-retail licensing in recent years, it's not surprising. Co-owners Steven Shor and Barry Prevor have led an aggressive expansion over the last two years, nearly tripling the chain's number of storefronts to more than 200. (It's opened 70 new stores in the past year alone.) And quality licensed apparel, in a category dominated by Wal-Mart-competitive prices of under US\$10 apiece, is what's driving the growth.

According to president Andy Todd, S&B holds licenses to more than 300 properties drawn from all segments of the industry, including character, entertainment, sports, fashion and collegiate. Kids apparel, however, was earmarked as the chain's largest growth area in 2007, and so S&B struck major portfolio deals with Marvel Entertainment and Hasbro Properties Group to further drive its kid appeal.

What's most compelling, perhaps, is that licensors not only get guaranteed shelf space, but the 50,000-square-foot, mall-based stores are carefully merchandised around the shop-in-shop concept, making way for major retail statements from licensors that might not be possible in mass retail outlets.

> www.steveandbarrys.com



Ty's Toy Box

Since launching three years ago with a dedicated boutique housing all products Wiggles-related, the e-tailer has expanded at a rapid clip and now features products based on roughly 80 licenses. But what's put Ty's Toy Box in the running this year is the unique approach it has taken to helping properties kick-start their consumer products sales in a retail climate that's, er, less-than-hospitable to brand-new IP. Acting as both retailer and licensee, Ty's broke ground with The Doodlebops, producing quick-turnaround soft goods such as t-shirts for the preschool band's online storefront in 2006. From there, licensor Cookie Jar Entertainment was able to take sales results of the Ty-produced goods to existing and potential partners, and build out a larger mass retail program.

To keep momentum going this year, Ty's opened up TTB Marketplace to service licensors. The key to TTBM is its relationship with drop-ship software service CommerceHub, which enables Ty's to expand the retail reach of its licensor partners and improve its own product development capabilities. Through the system, suppliers ship directly to online customers, cutting down on inventory investment for Ty's. The e-tailer then takes the savings and plows them into developing product and retail programs for properties with fanbases clamoring for product that isn't yet available.

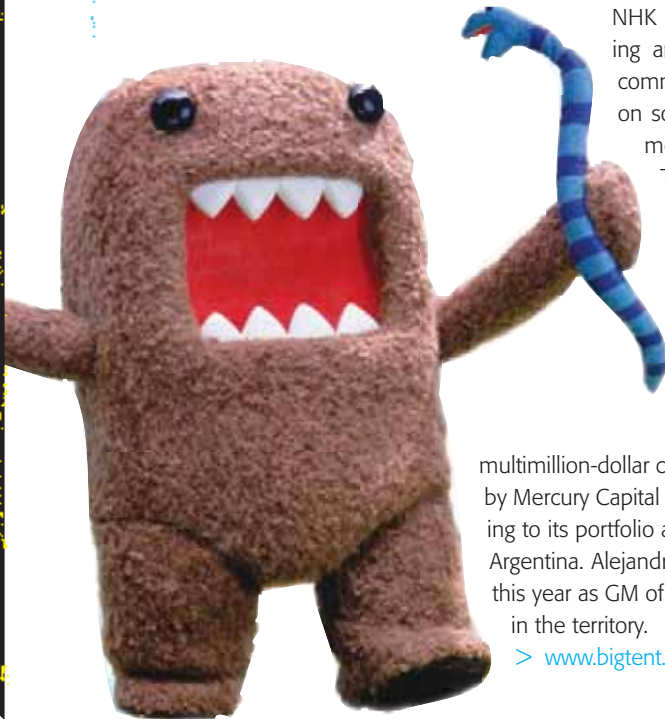
> www.ttbmarketplace.com





Big Tent Entertainment

2007 was a watershed for the five-year-old licensing and marketing agency helmed by president and CEO Richard Collins and CMO Richard Maryyaneck, known as Rich & Rich to many in the industry. Along with continuing to build a buzz-worthy portfolio with IP from non-traditional media—such as Japanese import Domo (which first appeared as the mascot for pubcaster



NHK and went on to amass an online following around the world) and social networking community Habbo—the company has brought on some well-known brands in kids entertainment to widen its demo reach. In June, Big Tent took over US licensing for preschool sensation The Wiggles and edutainment network and brand Discovery Kids. And master toy deals have been lined up for all three, with Play Along signing rights to Domo and Jakks Pacific taking both The Wiggles and DK.

The agency also took steps to bankroll further expansion. Armed with a multimillion-dollar cash infusion from a round of financing led by Mercury Capital Partners, Big Tent is in the process of adding to its portfolio and opening up an office in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Alejandra Denda Hampton was brought in earlier this year as GM of Latin America to build up Big Tent's reach in the territory.

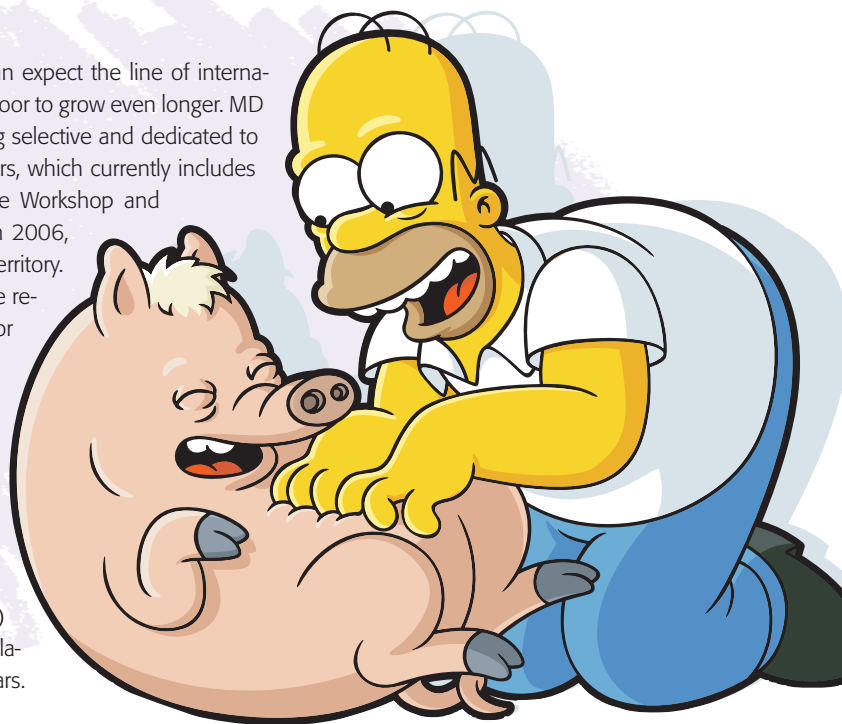
> www.bigtent.tv

Haven Licensing

With Gaffney International closing shop earlier this year, you can expect the line of international licensors looking to get through this 14-year-old agency's door to grow even longer. MD Tom Punch and his team have developed a reputation for being selective and dedicated to breaking new ground Down Under for its all-star cast of licensors, which currently includes Fox L&M, Lucas Licensing, Marvel, MGA, Nickelodeon, Sesame Workshop and Sony Pictures. HIT Entertainment also joined the Haven fold in 2006, and has seen its business increase by a reported 50% in the territory. In fact, the London-based IP owner has been so chuffed with the results of the move that it presented Haven with its Pingu Award for International Agent of the Year at Licensing International 2007.

The company spearheaded major retail and promo programs for silver-screen blockbusters *Spider-Man 3* and *The Simpsons Movie* in 2007, but the standout achievement is the overhaul of its approach to the food category and related promotions. The issue of childhood obesity has been grabbing headlines in Oz, and Haven's done a lot of proactive work with its licensors to find partners in health-friendly categories. To name a few initiatives, it has helped launch Sesame Street licensed eggs (yep, kid-sized eggs!) and lunchbox-sized springwater, Simpsons and Bratz low-sugar flavored water, and a new line of SpongeBob SquarePants muesli bars.

> www.havenlicensing.com.au



Kidz Entertainment

This Scandinavian shop kept up its streak of aggressive expansion in 2007, giving territory stalwart Plus Licens an even harder run for its money. Having inked a deal in late 2006 with Pro Licensing to set up Kidz Entertainment Finland, the company conducted a merger with Eastern European-focused agency EEMC last spring. The combined entity is being managed out of Kidz' main office in Copenhagen, and it plans on conquering the growing Eastern European market. To help these plans along, Kidz restructured its upper management team. Moving former VP of licensing Anna Lisa McBride up to the post of CEO, chairman Morten Geshwendtner added the mantle of president of licensing and special projects to his remit, and Claus Tømming took on the president of entertainment role. KJ Istok, meanwhile, is spearheading future expansion as president of emerging markets.

HIT Entertainment has already taken advantage of Kidz' extended presence in Eastern Europe and has transferred management of its stable of preschool properties, including Thomas and Friends and Bob the Builder, to the growing agency.

> www.kidz-entertainment.com



m4e

Growth has been the name of the game for four-year-old brand management company m4e (Made for Entertainment) this year. Along with scoring German licensing rights to Nerd Corps' sought-after boys action toon *Storm Hawks* and Rainbow/Big Bocca's anticipated 2008 series *Huntik*, m4e made a move to go public in July. The first round of the IPO made on the Frankfurt stock exchange raised US\$7.2 million that was quickly earmarked for kids entertainment acquisitions and co-pros, moving m4e beyond third-party agent to partner.

Expect the company to invest in a minimum of two co-pros next year and to add two to three properties to a licensing portfolio that already includes Marvel and Nelvana brands. Plans are also in the works to expand its licensing coverage beyond Germany into key Euro territories including France and Italy. In the meantime, m4e has turned an eye to upping its homegrown property roster, teaming up with Berlin-based prodco Hahn Film to create a new production company called Lucky Punch.

> www.m4e.de

TLC UK

According to entertainment division MD Lisa Shapiro, TLC UK has punched well above its weight this year, breaking and then exceeding reforecasted sales targets. What got the agency there was paying particular attention to the country's ever-competitive retail environment, and bringing together all the pieces of the property puzzle for a stable of clients that currently includes MGA (Bratz, Little Tikes), LazyTown and Lucas.

Shapiro's also been busy building up her tight-knit team for the next few years. She's brought on ex-Disney marketing director Warwick Brenner to extend retail reach, a new head of creative services in Gillian Thomas and designer Gabrielle Sims, who draws on a great commercial sensibility.

As for 2008's property rollouts, look for increased activity on upcoming Lucasfilm series *The Clone Wars* and the Indiana Jones sequel. TLC has also just snagged UK rights to *Madagascar 2: The Crate Escape*, the sequel to DreamWorks' 2005 CGI hit

> www.thelicensingcompany.com

