

TVKIDS

Development Slates / Distribution Shifts / Mattel's Josh Silverman & Robbie Brenner
BBC Studios Kids & Family's Cecilia Persson / Nickelodeon's Ashley Kaplan / Disney Branded Television's Gino Guzzardo
Behind the Scenes of *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* / *Gumball Returns*



LESSON ONE:
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BBC Studios Kids & Family Productions for BBC

For more information contact: Katharina.Pietsch@bbc.com

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BBC Studios Kids and Family Productions and Trustbridge Entertainment for Sky Kids

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Paradigm Shift

One word kept coming up over and over again at our TV Kids Summer Festival in June, now in its milestone fifth year: “pivot.”

The overarching message was that standing still—doing things the way you always used to do them—is not an option. Whether you’re a producer trying to complete the financing of a show, a distributor looking to maintain revenues from a challenged market or a trusted channel finding ways to make sense of being on YouTube, pivoting and adapting are paramount. And obviously, you have to be on YouTube, in one way or another. A recent Ofcom study indicated that for young ones in the U.K., YouTube is frequently their first stop for content.

Ed Leighton, Ofcom’s interim group director for strategy and research, noted: “Scheduled TV is increasingly alien to younger viewers, with YouTube the first port of call for many when they pick up the TV remote. Public-service broadcasters are recognizing this shift—moving to meet audiences in the online spaces where they increasingly spend their time. But we need to see even more ambition in this respect to ensure that public-service media that audiences value survives long into the future.”

Indeed, with kids spending so much time on YouTube and other digital platforms, the landscape of “traditional” free-to-air linear channels is being entirely reshaped amid a wave of closures. Meanwhile, outside of Europe’s values-driven public-broadcasting ecosystem, commissions have taken a massive hit and everyone is pursuing new, innovative ways to get shows off the ground.

This edition explores how creatives are addressing the market’s challenges, surveying a range of development executives about how slates are being crafted amid the transformative changes in the business. We also hear from several leading distribution executives about finessing windowing strategies—and using YouTube—to maximize a piece of an IP over the long tail.

The other refrain that we’ve been hearing in the last few months is that we can’t abandon this demo. Leaving them to their own devices (literally) as we sit on the precipice of an AI content boom isn’t an option, so it’s time to dig deep and get creative. And people are doing just that, as you’ll see from this edition, which includes insightful Q&As with Mattel’s Josh Silverman and Robbie Brenner, BBC Studios’ Cecilia Persson, Nickelodeon’s Ashley Kaplan and Disney’s Gino Guzzardo on embracing change while keeping kids first. —Mansha Daswani

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—KIDS—



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Ánima Kitchent

Cuquín / Tippi T-Rex / Howly & Wooly

Ánima Kitchent is bringing to MIPCOM a slate of programs “carefully designed to perform and thrive across a wide range of channels—broadcasts, streaming services, YouTube, apps, consumer products and more,” says Miguel Aldasoro, international sales and co-production director. This includes *Cuquín*, the company’s flagship IP. The preschool series *Tippi T-Rex* follows a curious dinosaur girl who turns everyday life into imaginative adventures. *Howly & Wooly* tells the story of two unlikely best friends who solve daily problems together. “Our IPs are developed with a true multiplatform vision from day one,” Aldasoro notes. “By leveraging in-depth analytics from platforms like YouTube and Tubular, we gain deep insights into global viewing habits, enabling us to adapt and optimize our content for different markets.”



“We’re dedicated to producing high-quality content that not only excels across platforms but also deeply resonates with audiences.”

—Miguel Aldasoro

Australian Children’s Television Foundation

Tales from Outer Suburbia / Knee High Spies / Windcatcher

The Australian Children’s Television Foundation has on offer *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, based on the best-selling book by Shaun Tan. When siblings Klara and Pim move to Outer Suburbia with their mother, the family goes on a roller-coaster ride of emotion, encountering weird and miraculous phenomena as they adapt to their new reality. The preschool series *Knee High Spies* is a mix of live-action and puppetry. “It brings high-energy thrills and the white-knuckle suspense of an espionage blockbuster to a young audience, reimagining exotic cinematic locations in a relatable domestic setting,” says Tim Hegarty, international sales manager. The family-friendly live-action film *Windcatcher* sees 10-year-old Percy Boy Collins and his crew of friends outsmart a gang of bullies to triumph at their school’s athletics carnival.



“Kids of all backgrounds and nationalities have one thing in common: they love laughter, adventure and stories that enthrall and entertain.”

—Tim Hegarty

BBC Studios Kids & Family

Crookhaven / My Friend Maisy / Rafi the Wishing Wizard

Leading BBC Studios Kids & Family’s MIPCOM catalog, *Crookhaven*, based on JJ Arcaño’s books, takes place in the mysterious Crookhaven School, where young crooks are selected to hone their skills for good. The screen adaptation “is a compelling coming-of-age, action-packed adventure with wit, multilayered storytelling and emotional resonance,” says Katharina Pietzsch, VP of content sales. In the book-based preschool series *My Friend Maisy*, Maisy and her friends talk for the very first time. *Rafi the Wishing Wizard* sees a young wizard navigate the responsibilities of magical powers with the help of her dads, friends and cat. “This dynamic lineup marks a major milestone, showcasing not only the strength of our current portfolio but also the creative ambition and production capability driving our future,” Pietzsch says.



“We’re focused on high-quality content that connects with young audiences and raises the bar for children’s storytelling.”

—Katharina Pietzsch

Pablo

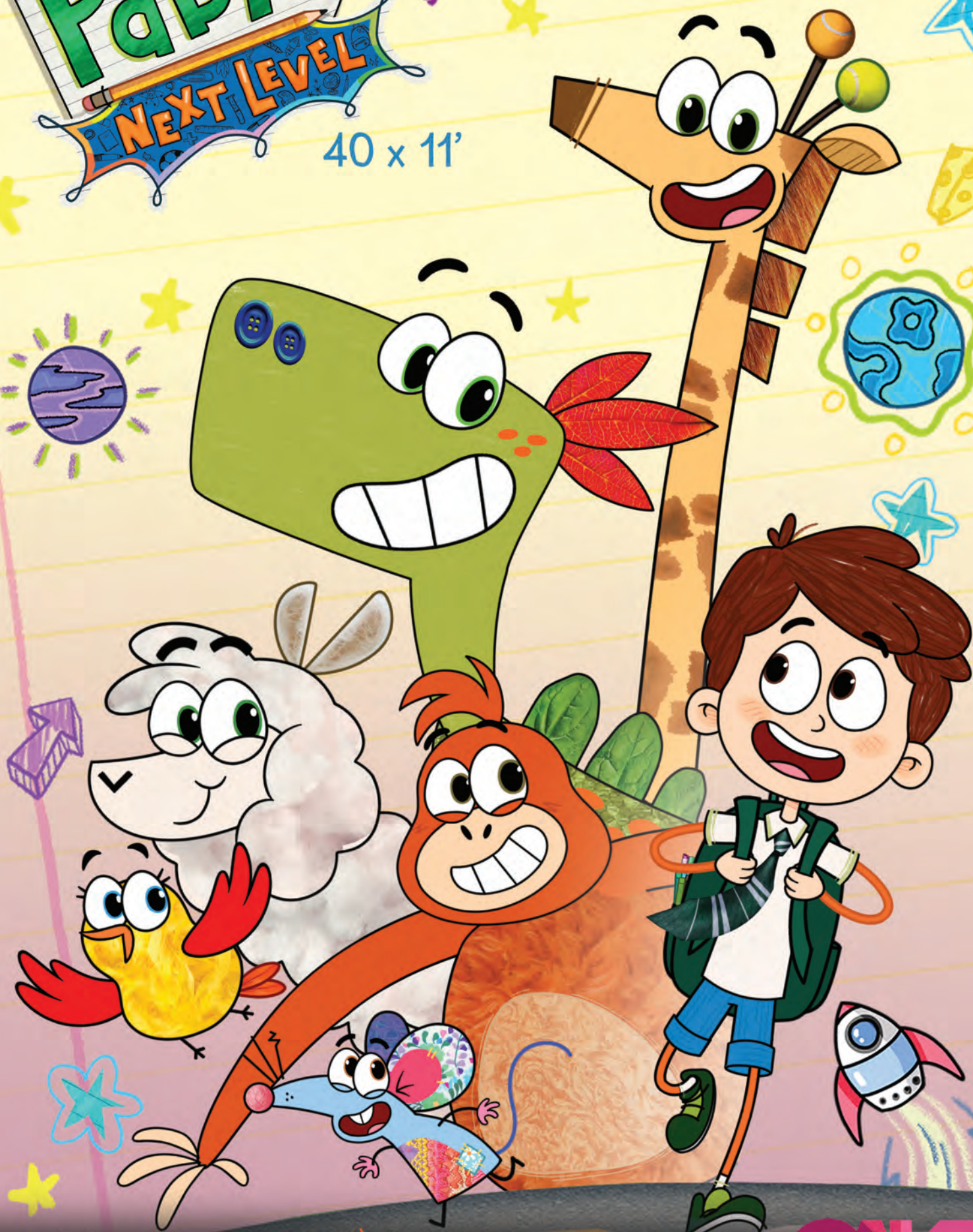
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Blue Ant Studios

Tralala / *Old Enough!* / *All-Round Champion*

The musical preschool series *Tralala*, created by Harry Sinclair, headlines the Blue Ant Studios slate for MIPCOM. “It’s a rare, special show; one of those projects you encounter maybe once or twice in a career,” says AJ Trauth, VP of development for kids, family, YA and animation. It “charms with music and original storytelling.” *Old Enough!*, the first English-language adaptation of the Nippon TV format, sees young kids take on real-world tasks while their parents watch from afar. *All-Round Champion* is an adaptation of NRK’s sports competition *Best i mest*, which sees teens and tweens compete across different sports, coached by professional athletes. “Its universal themes of teamwork and sportsmanship, combined with an incredible cast, make it a winner across markets,” Trauth says.



Old Enough!



“Each [show] combines strong storytelling, distinctive creative voices and global appeal.”

—AJ Trauth

Boat Rocker Studios

The Next Step / *Dino Ranch: Island Explorers* / *Rocket Club*

Boat Rocker Studios’ tween drama *The Next Step* follows students of The Next Step Dance Studio through drama, adventures and high-stakes competitions. *Dino Ranch: Island Explorers* follows the Cassidy family as they swap their cowboy hats for explorer gear and set off to the mysterious Dino Island—a place brimming with new dinosaur species, giant insects and prehistoric amphibians. Viewers join friends Callie, Jeenie, Ravi, Chip, Bunny and their robot buddy TAC in *Rocket Club* as they blast off aboard StarBird-1. “These three titles share universal qualities that connect with audiences around the globe—compelling characters on relatable journeys, gripping stories that drive proven engagement and the kind of franchise credibility that gives buyers long-term confidence,” says Gia DeLaney, senior VP of global sales for kids and family.



Dino Ranch: Island Explorers



“From evergreen preschool storytelling that parents trust and kids love to the fresh discovery and expansion of a hit brand, each series delivers content that entertains today while building lasting value for tomorrow.”

—Gia DeLaney

CAKE

Pablo: Next Level / *Armorsaurs* / *Bubblegem*

Pablo: Next Level, from CAKE, follows the eponymous character after he starts at a new school that is wild and complicated. From rules that don’t make sense to chaotic corridors, Pablo navigates his new world with a little “help” from his book animal friends and imagination. In *Armorsaurs*, a team of teen pilots and their armored dinosaurs stand as humanity’s last line of defense against a sophisticated alien race. *Bubblegem* follows the magical adventures of Princess Purple, a curious young mermaid who secretly ventures into the human world. “Aimed at girls 6 to 9 years old, *Bubblegem* is a magical tale of friendship, courage and self-discovery and teaches children about friendship and how working as a team can help you succeed,” says Ed Galton, CEO.



Pablo: Next Level



“CAKE continues its growth through key acquisitions, expanding its catalog of premium kids’ and family content while strengthening partnerships with key strategic brands.”

—Ed Galton

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COMING SOON



TWO SEASONS
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Dandelooo

Hold on Gaston! / Pol the Pirate Mouse / Under the Sofa

Hold on Gaston!, available from Dandelooo and based on the *Little Unicorn* books by Aurélie Chien Chow Chine, centers on a young unicorn whose rainbow mane changes colors according to his emotions. *Pol the Pirate Mouse* teaches children about teamwork, friendship and tolerance. *Under the Sofa* sees stray objects live together in harmony under a couch. “Our preschool animation series are based on a child’s point of view, with universal emotions and desires,” says Emmanuèle Pétry, head of international and development. “These titles combine eye-opening storytelling with universal appeal that will charm global audiences. We focus on great writing, funny plots, endearing and relatable characters, good narrative rhythm, unique designs and visually stunning animation.”



“Our goal is to showcase ‘must-have’ animated content that will entertain and inspire.”

—Emmanuèle Pétry

El Reino Infantil

Bartolito / Boogie Bugs / La Granja de Zenón

Leading El Reino Infantil’s catalog for MIPCOM is *Bartolito*, a spin-off of the company’s flagship IP, *La Granja de Zenón*, “which remains our star property and continues to be a valuable title in the international markets,” says Ylka Tapia, partnership manager and executive producer. *Boogie Bugs*, inspired by the characters of *Bichikids* but reimagined with a global narrative, is also on El Reino Infantil’s slate. “These IPs are a safe and valuable bet for international buyers, mainly because they come with an already massive audience of over 222 million subscribers across our network,” Tapia says, stressing that “they are highly recognizable properties thanks to their established digital success, and their reach extends far beyond YouTube.” She adds, “The shows balance education and entertainment, creating a strong bond with families.”



“MIPCOM is the stage where we showcase our vision to bring high-quality family entertainment with global reach and universal values.”

—Ylka Tapia

Guru Studio

Bark Heads / True & You: Shorts from True and the Rainbow Kingdom / 123 Number Squad!

As Guru Studio celebrates its 25th anniversary, it is presenting a range of new and returning series at MIPCOM. *Bark Heads*, a comedy for older kids and families in late-stage development, “celebrates extreme personal agency and the loyalty of good friends who are bold and dogged enough to chase their dreams,” says Frank Falcone, president and executive creative director. The *True and the Rainbow Kingdom* franchise is growing, with Guru offering *True & You*, a collection of shorts designed for cross-platform viewership, “bringing the heart of the *True* universe to life in bite-sized adventures,” Falcone says. Also on the slate is a second season of *123 Number Squad!* “The new season explores key social and emotional development themes such as sharing, resilience, teamwork and friendship,” he explains.



“We’re excited to partner with content creators, brand managers and audience engagement experts to develop animated stories that center on entertaining characters.”

—Frank Falcone





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BOOTH P4.C14**

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Hidden Pigeon Company

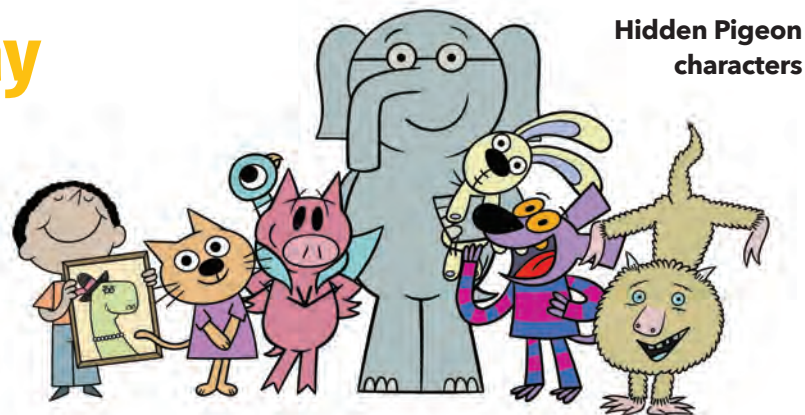
Edwina & Reggie

Hidden Pigeon Company is developing 11 series, features, specials and digital content based on the book catalog of the *New York Times* best-selling author and illustrator Mo Willems. *Edwina & Reggie* is based on the book *Edwina, the Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She Was Extinct*. With its projects, Hidden Pigeon Company aims to “appeal to a global audience through universally relatable kids’ and family themes, distinctive animation styles and a diverse cast of characters that aim to emotionally resonate with viewers, no matter where in the world they live,” says Kristofer Updike, senior VP of creative. At MIPCOM, “we’re excited to connect with broadcasters, streamers, distributors and animation studios to continue to build awareness around our vast catalog of literary works,” Updike adds.



“We’re excited to spend time with our global colleagues, introduce more people to Mo Willems’ extensive body of work and celebrate the incredible creative talent from around the world.”

—Kristofer Updike



Hidden Pigeon characters

Kartoon Studios

Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends

“MIPCOM marks a pivotal milestone for Kartoon Studios as we unveil *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* to international buyers for the very first time,” says Raphaëlle Mathieu, executive producer of the series. “As we approach the 100th anniversary of A.A. Milne’s original publication, there is immense global affection for these characters—yet they’ve never been reimagined quite like this,” she says. Writer Linda Woolverton (*The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*) and designer John Rivoli were involved in crafting the new title. “The result is a world that feels soft, yarn-like and utterly unique,” Mathieu notes. With a global licensing and consumer products strategy already lined up, “our goal is to create not just a show, but a cultural moment—an ‘oasis of goodness’ that can become a global evergreen brand for years to come.”



Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends



“What makes *Winnie and Friends* truly exceptional is the rare combination of timeless brand equity and bold creative innovation.”

—Raphaëlle Mathieu

Konami Cross Media NY

Yu-Gi-Oh! GO RUSH!! / Yu-Gi-Oh! SEVENS / Yu-Gi-Oh! Library

From Konami Cross Media NY comes *Yu-Gi-Oh! GO RUSH!!*, the latest *Yu-Gi-Oh!* series featuring new monsters and powerful spells. *Yu-Gi-Oh! SEVENS* provides the next evolution in dueling, introducing Rush Duels, which are faster and simpler but need new strategies. The rest of the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* library is available as well, with six titles in all, including the original series, *Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters*. “With a distribution history spanning more than two decades, *Yu-Gi-Oh!* has cultivated a dual audience of both dedicated legacy fans and a continuous influx of new viewers,” says Mark Kirk, senior VP of distribution. He continues, “Anime’s global rise is undeniable, moving from a niche subculture to a mainstream entertainment powerhouse. At the heart of this phenomenon, *Yu-Gi-Oh!* stands as a testament to this evolution.”



Yu-Gi-Oh! GO RUSH!!



“Yu-Gi-Oh!’s proven, enduring global appeal offers a compelling opportunity for buyers, demonstrating a track record of success.”

—Mark Kirk



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Lion Forge Entertainment

Iyanu / *Bugtron* / *The Wingfeather Saga*

Lion Forge Entertainment's Yoruba mythology-based series *Iyanu* "has successfully launched in the U.S., U.K., Africa, the Middle East and Australia with incredible results," says Kirsten Newlands, executive VP of production and content partnerships. "We're looking to firm up broadcast partners in our remaining territories and move to a season three green light." In *Bugtron*, a battle brews between factions of highly evolved bugs. The action-adventure fantasy series *The Wingfeather Saga*, for children ages 6 to 11, follows the journey of the Igbiy family. "Spending time with global distribution partners is incredibly important to us, and MIPCOM remains a tremendous platform to connect in person, showcase our slate and discuss key developments, like the recent investment from HarbourView," Newlands says.



Iyanu



"We believe our franchise-building blueprint is a unique differentiator and the additional capital allows us to further develop and invest in expanding our library."

—Kirsten Newlands

Madgic Distribution

Jade Armor / *High Hoops* / *Lana Longbeard*

Madgic Distribution is making its MIPCOM debut with a mix of animated and live-action properties. *Jade Armor*, a finalist for the Unifrance TV Export Awards in 2024, is back with a second season, produced by TeamTO for France Télévisions and Super RTL. Madgic is also offering a second season of *High Hoops*. "Live-action comedy series continue to be a major hit with broadcasters and audiences across the world," says Lionel Marty, managing director of Madgic Distribution. "*High Hoops* season two is making its much-anticipated international debut following the successful launch of season one on CBBC and first international releases on ABC Australia, TVO in Canada and NDR in Germany." *Lana Longbeard*, Zephyr's first production with Copernicus Studios, is also on the slate.



"We have a great slate of both animated and live-action series that we hope to continue to sell to broadcast and platform partners."

—Lionel Marty



Lana Longbeard

Mattel Studios

Hot Wheels Let's Race / *Pingu* / *Thomas & Friends*

On offer from Mattel Studios, a third season of *Hot Wheels Let's Race* continues to bring the beloved toy car brand to life. A new *Pingu* series, in development with Aardman, revives the iconic penguin character on-screen. Mattel Studios' slate also features a host of content from the *Thomas & Friends* franchise. "These titles stand out because they combine purpose with longevity," says Robbie Brenner, president of Mattel Studios and chief content officer. "Each has deep cultural recognition and built-in equity with audiences around the world. *Hot Wheels*, *Pingu* and *Thomas & Friends* all deliver storytelling that transcends borders and connects across generations. They are part of Mattel's franchise flywheel, where content drives engagement across toys, consumer products, digital platforms and beyond."



Thomas & Friends



"Our vision for Mattel Studios is to collaborate with leading creators to make standout-quality content based on Mattel's iconic brands."

—Robbie Brenner



GIFTED

10 x 28'

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MORTINA

52 x 12'



© 2025 Cartobaleno - Trechouse Republic

LOUCA

26 x 24'



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Paramount Global Content Distribution

The Thundermans: Undercover / *Tim Rex in Space* / *Wylde Pak*

Paramount Global Content Distribution is bringing to MIPCOM *The Thundermans: Undercover*, a spin-off of *The Thundermans*. It “delivers new adventures with beloved characters in a format that has traveled well,” says Lisa Kramer, president of international content licensing. *Tim Rex in Space* sees a dinosaur navigate life in an asteroid town. It “offers a unique lens on preschool life, combining two universally loved themes—dinosaurs and space—to create a globally resonant experience,” Kramer notes. *Wylde Pak* spotlights a blended Korean-American family, bringing “authentic representation to screens with its multi-generational, multicultural family dynamics,” Kramer says. “Its comedic tone and relatable themes, both trademarks of Nickelodeon animation, make it both entertaining and meaningful for global audiences.”



“With a rich portfolio of iconic franchises and a pipeline of innovative new titles, we’re committed to telling stories that resonate with young audiences everywhere.”

—Lisa Kramer



pocket.watch

Ryan’s Mystery Playdate / *Love, Diana Musical Mysteries* / *Toys and Colors*

The Emmy-nominated series *Ryan’s Mystery Playdate* leads pocket.watch’s MIPCOM offering. The show has five seasons available. Episodes of *Love, Diana Musical Mysteries* open with live-action Diana and Roma before they are transported to a magical 3D animated kingdom to solve a new mystery. A host of content featuring the YouTube supergroup Toys and Colors is on offer from pocket.watch as well, with *Toys and Colors Club*, the holiday-themed *Toys and Colors Elf Academy* and *Toys and Colors Kaleidoscope City*. “These are the shows that today’s kids most want to watch,” says David B. Williams, senior VP and general manager of channels. “When you put them up against other shows on the basis of cost per unit of watch time, they just about always come out on top, often by wide margins.”



“Each of these shows represents a perfect union, marrying the intrinsic appeal of an established star creator with the fine craftsmanship and enriching ingredients that come with a premium production.”

—David B. Williams



Polydont Films

MechaNick / *Mazukta & Shambabukli* / *Roman Pigeons*

Polydont Films is delivering a 3D series titled *MechaNick*, which combines adventure, discovery and creative thinking while also teaching children about the importance of caring for their toys. *Mazukta & Shambabukli* is a comedy that tackles existential questions, emphasizing the idea that everyone is the creator of their own life path. *Roman Pigeons* features a new format of ultra-short webisodes for young adults, exploring relatable everyday themes such as relationships and work. “A key strength of Polydont is our diverse content lineup, which allows us to engage multiple target audiences across different age groups—preschoolers, teenagers and young adults,” says Elena Lyalina, CEO and producer. “This versatility enables us to tailor our projects to resonate deeply with each group’s unique interests and perspectives.”



“Our main goal at MIPCOM is twofold: to secure broadcasters and distribution partners for our projects in production and to foster new collaborations for co-productions and the development of next seasons.”

—Elena Lyalina

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123

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Rainbow

Winx Club: The Magic is Back / Mermaid Magic / Gormiti—The New Era

The reboot *Winx Club: The Magic is Back* leads Rainbow's MIPCOM offering. Its "vibrant new look and modern feel is designed to appeal to contemporary audiences, and reaction to the eagerly awaited series has been hugely positive," says Andrea Graciotti, VP of sales and co-production. *Mermaid Magic* centers on the adventures of three mermaid friends as they battle an evil pirate. The episodes share messages about ocean conservation and respecting nature. *Gormiti—The New Era*, which reimagines the franchise with a blend of live action and CGI effects, sees four heroes from Earth called to save the fantasy realm of Gorm. "All three series showcase Rainbow's unwavering commitment to quality, compelling storytelling and innovation, with high-quality production values and themes with wide universal appeal," Graciotti says.



Winx Club: The Magic is Back



"We aim to continue to expand our fabulous and diverse portfolio of content for the whole family."

—Andrea Graciotti

Sesame Workshop

Tales from 123 / Mecha Builders / Sesame Street: The Nutcracker

Sesame Workshop's *Tales from 123* takes viewers inside the famous brownstone from *Sesame Street*. *Mecha Builders* transforms Elmo, Cookie Monster and Abby Cadabby into robot heroes-in-training who use STEM powers to solve problems. *Sesame Street: The Nutcracker* reimagines the Christmas tale in the world of *Sesame Street*. "With beloved characters like Elmo, Cookie Monster, Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch, *Sesame Street* has become a standard bearer for early childhood storytelling through carefully researched educational content," says Kay Wilson Stallings, executive VP and chief creative development and production officer. "We remain committed to partnering with innovative, mission-aligned organizations, licensees and distributors who can amplify our message and ensure local relevance."



Mecha Builders



"For over 50 years, Sesame Street has brought joy to kids and adults around the world."

—Kay Wilson Stallings

Spin Master Entertainment

Unicorn Academy / Vida the Vet / Sparkles Magical Market

A second season of *Unicorn Academy* headlines Spin Master Entertainment's lineup. "*Unicorn Academy* offers a proven book-based franchise, a massive content pipeline, cross-platform shorts and a booming music footprint—all wrapped in a high-end look and feel that's irresistible to its core demo," says Caroline Tyre, VP of global content distribution. A second season of *Vida the Vet* is also on offer, "blending learning, empathy, music and teamwork into every story," Tyre says. The *Sparkles Magical Market* IP—originally launched as a Roblox game—has expanded to include 30 5-minute shorts that give more insight into the world and its characters. "Each title embodies Spin Master's signature strategy: premium storytelling plus robust, built-in global appeal," Tyre says.



Vida the Vet



"Our mission is to create premium, story-rich universes that ignite imagination across every platform kids love, from streaming to social to gaming."

—Caroline Tyre

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Studio 100 International

Louca / Mortina / Gifted

Leading Studio 100 International's MIPCOM lineup, *Louca* follows the friendship between the titular clumsy high schooler and a handsome soccer player who happens to be a ghost. "Louca goes far beyond sports, addressing themes such as self-confidence, courage and personal growth," says Dorian Buehr, head of global distribution. The character's "clumsy antics, spontaneous actions, wild ideas and unpredictable behavior create a comedic tone that keeps the stories entertaining and memorable," he adds. *Mortina* centers on the universal fear of not being accepted by telling the story of a 9-year-old zombie girl and her friends as they solve cases in the decaying Crumbling Manor. In *Gifted*, a diverse group of teenagers whose special powers are closely linked to their backgrounds are pursued by a shadowy organization.



Mortina



"Looking ahead to 2026, Studio 100 International plans to greenlight new development projects and is preparing to unveil fresh animated and distribution titles in the coming months."

—Dorian Buehr

The Wiggles

The Tree of Wisdom / Ready, Steady, Wiggle! / Wiggle Up, Giddy Up!

Topping the slate of content on offer from The Wiggles, *The Tree of Wisdom* is a brand-new series that expands the universe of the titular character. An eighth season of *Ready, Steady, Wiggle!* is available as well, as is the 75-minute country-themed special *Wiggle Up, Giddy Up!* "The Wiggles bring a rare combination that buyers can trust: decades of global brand recognition, a proven track record of entertaining and educating children and a style that families have loved for over 30 years," says Luke Field, general manager for commercial. "To me, what really makes The Wiggles content stand out is the music. That power is front and center in all these titles we are showcasing at MIPCOM." The Wiggles brand also features off-screen extensions such as live tours and music albums.

"The Tree of Wisdom carries the unmistakable Wiggles DNA while introducing incredible new music and comedy that broaden its reach."

—Luke Field



The Tree of Wisdom

WildBrain

The Snoopy Show / L'il Stompers / Zip and the Tiny Sprouts

In WildBrain's *The Snoopy Show*, the beloved beagle, his best friend Woodstock and the rest of the Peanuts group go on brand-new adventures. "Our newly available Peanuts content, including *The Snoopy Show*, is timeless, funny and full of heart," says Katie Wilson, VP of global sales and acquisitions. *L'il Stompers* centers on a group of dinosaur friends who love playing and exploring the world around them. With *Zip and the Tiny Sprouts*, "we have a beautifully crafted series that showcases a deep understanding of what helps young hearts and minds grow," Wilson says. She adds, "The shows we're bringing to market this fall represent everything that makes great kids' and family content—engaging characters, vibrant visuals and compelling stories with universal themes that inspire, educate and entertain."



The Snoopy Show



"Across animation and live action, we've got something for every age and every platform."

—Katie Wilson

JOIN THE DUEL!

遊戯王



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遊戯王

GORUSH!!

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GETTING

How do you craft development slates for a market that seems to change daily? Leading executives share their perspectives with **Mansha Daswani**.

There's a rapid-fire, frenetic pace to so much of the content that is resonating with kids on YouTube, the preferred platform for this generation of young audiences. Their favorite social stars are posting new content on a daily basis to feed this always-on demographic. The "traditional" kids' media ecosystem, meanwhile, is dependent on much longer timelines, between the practicalities of producing high-end animation and the layered decision-making of broadcast and streaming organizations that can slow down commissioning and production schedules. How does an industry made to serve the entertainment needs of these fast-moving audiences keep up? We surveyed a broad range of players to understand how development slates are being crafted that meet the needs of where kids are now and where they will be three years from now. It's no easy feat.

"The starting point is always the market," says Martin Krieger, CEO of Studio 100 International. "We carefully analyze which types of content are in demand and where gaps still exist. At the same time, every project must align with our core values: family-friendly entertainment, strong storytelling, cultural relevance and international appeal. It is also important to us to complement our existing portfolio rather than cannibalize it. Ultimately, we only pursue projects we truly believe in. Genuine passion translates into market success. What matters most are strong creative voices, partners who share our vision and brands with the potential to resonate across generations."

At Magic Light Pictures, Martin Pope, joint CEO and co-founder, says it's all about having complete faith in a property's conceit.

"If it's going to take us years to make this, then it needs to be something that we can all believe is very high quality, is going to enrich children's imaginations, take them on a journey and is something we can be proud that we've done," he says. "For years, we have been trying to develop only those things that we are definitely going to make rather than try out lots of things."

Emmanuèle Pétry, head of international and development at Dandelooo, lists a range of factors the team at the French outfit considers when deciding which projects to invest resources in. "First, the concept needs to be unique and immediately understandable. Second, the design has to catch our eye and stand out from the typical colorful chewing gum palette. We want a look that feels fresh and authentic. The age target needs to be well defined, too. Most importantly, we want to work with truly talented and passionate creators. We ask ourselves, 'Can this project become a 'must-have' that stands out in a crowded market, connects emotionally and compels audiences to watch?'"

At Lion Forge Entertainment, the guiding ethos is "diverse stories, authentically told," says Koyalee Chanda, senior VP for animation. Properties need to fulfill that mission and "have a viable sales strategy," she says. "In this current market, a path to sales is essential. Creatively, we look for IP that feels both unique and commercial. We believe there is value in broadly appealing content that stands out."

CREATIVE



Ánima Kitchent is using data and analytics to constantly adapt its IPs, including *Cuquín*.

Having some kind of brand awareness can certainly help a project get into a studio's development slate.

"There's no denying it—the appetite for known IP is huge today and stronger than ever," says Dandelooo's Pétry. "Our strategy is to acquire the rights to best-selling books that we genuinely love. We then focus on developing the adaptation into an animated series to reach many more eyeballs than the book fans, therefore creating the IPs of the future."

KNOW ME?

Chanda at Lion Forge adds, "Known IP is great because it gives buyers a comfort level when committing to a project. Books are the classic source for this in the kids' and family space. But we take a very broad view of what makes something 'known IP.' It can be a well-known book, but it can also be a global brand like Rebel Girls that brings awareness and audience to a new narrative project. Known IP could be a toy that has the potential to build a storytelling world around it. It could be a piece of music that supports a script. We love combining our creative ideas with these types of IP to create something global, commercial and with a built-in audience."

Ánima Kitchent has been building out the *Cuquín* IP and is seeding properties on the platforms kids are spending the most time on. "We have been using strategic criteria based on testing vertical shorts and video games such as Roblox experiences," says Rodrigo Pineda, strategy director and executive producer at the Spanish studio. "Children's content and products are going through a turbulent time. This is due to the clash between the traditional mainstream model of 'broadcast and toys' and the radical emergence of platforms such as YouTube, SVOD services and Roblox dominating children's screen time. This shift influences our criteria for development, pushing us to consider flexible platform-oriented formats that align with how kids consume content today."

While it is using short-form to explore the potential of IPs, Ánima Kitchent is developing content intended for all types of platforms.

"At the moment, our production slate spans from YouTube shorts through to our first family feature film," Pineda says. "We also create digital educational videos, traditional comedy series and games and experiences in Roblox. Essentially, whatever format resonates best with kids—whether it's episodes, games or interactive content—we provide it, adapting to their preferences, the needs of families and the demands of our clients."

"Traditional" formats remain the bedrock at Studio 100, Krieger says, "but from the very beginning, we think about every brand in a cross-platform way. *Vegeosaurs*, for example, not only lives as a TV series but also on its own YouTube channel featuring clips and sing-along videos. Together with FXXF Studio, we launched a Roblox experience for *Maya the Bee*. We are open to projects conceived from the outset as short-form or gaming, as long as they expand the brand in a meaningful way and reach new audiences."

PLATFORM PERSPECTIVES

At Hidden Pigeon Company, founded to develop content based on Mo Willems' works, "We work across all formats, styles and audiences," says Kristofer Updike, senior VP of creative. "We're developing traditional series formats in 11-, 7- and 5-minute lengths, as well as 90-minute features, 30- and 45-minute specials, and short-form digital content. Our goal is to stay flexible, adapting to the needs of each platform while tailoring the format to best serve the story and characters."

It's a similar perspective from Lion Forge's Chanda: "We make a practice of looking at every property and saying, What is the best way to get audiences to fall in love? That could be a feature, a series, short-form or a combination. We take pride in our ability to produce at a variety of budget levels and in multiple formats."

Pope says that Magic Light is exploring how to do digital-first content. "For independents to understand how we are going to be able to raise enough money to get it out there sufficiently in order to then monetize it is a conundrum we can't claim to have cracked yet. But it's one that



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Book IP remains key at Magic Light Pictures, which is rolling out *The Scarecrows' Wedding*, based on a book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler.

we all have to. The audience has moved there. They will want to find it on that platform. That platform will probably want it to be there. So, how are we going to make that work? And that's the challenge. Because if we are looking ahead, either AI is going to flood YouTube with just enormous amounts of low-grade animated material and there will be lots of richer kids watching things behind paywalls, or we're going to have to find a different way of doing digital first so that we can deliver great quality to that audience in that space."

Plus, Pope adds, "The challenge for us is that we need to think about the public-service broadcasting material we can make at that price point that can reach that audience on that platform. Those are the challenges that we need to face as a creative community."

The creative community is also coming to grips with understanding the available insights on what's moving young audiences.

"We are committed to creating universally memorable characters, centered firmly around our audience and not just the platforms themselves," *Ánima* Kitchen's Pineda says. "That is why we conduct weekly behavioral analysis using real-time data from our engineering and math team to understand how kids engage across platforms. Our relationship with broadcasters and streamers is a partnership: we jointly explore their niche needs and work together to deliver content that drives engagement. This ongoing data-driven strategy ensures we're always aligned with both viewer preferences and client expectations."

Chanda at Lion Forge says the team is keen to understand not just what kids are watching, but how they are watching. "We have invested in some key internal resources, including experts in the digital space (YouTube); in the international creative, distribution and sales spaces; and the franchise space."

ART & SCIENCE

It is a delicate balancing act: being responsive to what the numbers are saying about what's happening right now while still looking ahead and leaving open the potential to be surprised by something.

"We do not try to 'stay current and trendy,' as it is a constantly moving target," Pétry says. "Instead, we trust our own judgment and try to understand and focus on what makes a project meaningful. We also ask ourselves, What does it bring to the table that's new, distinctive and fresh in an overcrowded media landscape? Having said that, we need to keep in mind the needs of the broadcasters and platforms as well. We try to identify their blind spots by not developing an idea similar to a project they are already working on or areas where their slates might be missing something. It's having a mix of intuition, creative passion and awareness."

At Magic Light, similarly, "we're not trend-led," Pope says. "Amid the maelstrom of conflicting developments and excitements, we have a belief in the desire of audiences to watch and experience a story that is going to take them somewhere they have not been emotionally and imaginatively before."

TAKING SHAPE

Once a project has made it through a studio's rigorous filtering process, the hard work begins of turning it from a great idea into a compelling show that kids will fall in love with.

At Dandeloo, Pétry and the studio's head of development, Ségolène Avicé, "work closely with the creator from the beginning," Pétry says. "We collaborate on shaping the original concept, refining the characters and developing the stories in multiple drafts until we obtain a solid, convincing bible which we can use to pitch to the French main broadcasters. The characters need to feel real. Most of the time, we work on book adaptations because we are huge literature fans. You need to capture the charm and strength of what makes the book special, but find a mechanic to build multiple stories that work structurally and emotionally on-screen."

Whether partnering with a production studio or a solo creator, the priority for Studio 100's Krieger is always having a "clear creative center. In that role, we support and guide that creative voice while ensuring the project aligns with market needs. A major advantage for us is our own production studio, Studio Isar Animation. We benefit



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Dandeloo has secured a commission from France Télévisions for a second season of *Billy the Cowboy Hamster*.

from short communication paths, a highly skilled team and the ability to react quickly and flexibly to new ideas. We also work closely with a number of international partners. Regular exchanges and in-person encounters, such as creative workshops or summits, help us shape a strong shared vision for the story and are especially valuable, as these often spark the best ideas.”

FAST-TRACKING

As at Studio 100, projects land at Lion Forge from a range of sources. “Sometimes it’s an outside pitch from a creator; sometimes it’s a book from the library of Oni Press, our sister company; sometimes it’s a germ of an idea that starts internally that we bring in writers to flesh out,” Chanda says. “We are producers and creatives, which gives us flexibility in how we work with projects and partners. Because we approach our projects with sales in mind, our job is to make sure we work with creators and writers in a way that stays true to their creative objective *and* strengthens [the show’s] viability in the market. So, we tend to be more hands-on creatively.”

The team at Hidden Pigeon works directly with Willems on adaptations of his beloved books. “Our process always begins with a ‘Mo Speaks’ session—a deep dive into the book or series we’re considering for development,” Updike says. “In these sessions, Mo shares the origins of the idea, why it was created and who it was created for. This gives our team invaluable insight into the meaning behind the work, from its story and design to its layout and themes. We then distill that conversation into a short deck that captures all the key touchpoints. That becomes our foundation as we explore how best to adapt the material, whether that’s into a series, feature, special or digital project.”

Those sessions deliver a significant jumpstart to the development process, Updike says. “What might otherwise take weeks or months to align into a clear creative path becomes much more focused from the outset. On top of that, working with incredibly talented writers, production partners and designers allows us to iterate more efficiently and bring ideas to life with both speed and depth.”

Ánima is using its digital expertise to help speed up animation time frames, Pineda says. “Our creative engine is powered by three main pillars: continuous data analysis, rapid YouTube testing and integrating AI tools. These elements collectively reduce investment risk and shorten our time to market, especially for characters and content that prove successful. Of course, our production team remains the real cornerstone of our success, balancing top-tier quality with maximum efficiency and competitiveness. Without their effort, we could not deliver what kids truly want.”

CREATIVE TOOLS

Studio 100 is also enhancing its creative teams’ skill sets with technology, Krieger says.

“We use proven digital production tools such as previs, animatics and storyboards to make better creative decisions early and operate efficiently. In addition, we integrate AI-driven tools that automate repetitive tasks and enable smarter production planning—freeing our creative talent to focus on storytelling and artistry. At the same time, we remain intentional in early development: exploring ideas, gathering market insights and refining concepts. By combining our artists’ craft with the efficiency of new technologies, we deliver high-quality content that our partners and audiences expect, staying competitive in a rapidly changing industry.”

It’s a similar story for Lion Forge, Chanda says. “We are engaging artists, storytellers and seasoned animation professionals who use the available tools to iterate, explore and experiment in efficient ways. The same artistry, inspiration and critical eye that are inherent in all development processes have not changed, but we are leaning on the tech to be able to prove out those creative ideas faster.”

Dandeloo is also using tools that have sped up certain processes, “but we have not found, nor are we actively looking for, systems to shorten the development process,” Pétry says. “Story, concept and character development need natural creative maturation. As is often said, You cannot produce a baby in one month by getting nine women pregnant. Creativity takes time.” ■

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WildBrain's *Strawberry Shortcake: Berry Bitty Adventures*.

TURN UP THE VOLUME

Amid the commissioning slowdown, producer-distributors of scale discuss how they are maximizing their valuable libraries. By Mansha Daswani

The news that Sky Kids would be axing its original commissioning budget was another blow for the U.K.'s animation sector this year. The Children's Media Foundation called the move "depressing and short-sighted" and argued it would "leave U.K. children less well-served." While gut-wrenching for the U.K. production companies facing a dwindling number of commissioners, Sky Kids' move to an all-acquisitions model is an opportunity for some. Those IP owners with standout libraries are exploring all the avenues available to maximize the value of those slates as the commission crunch continues.

"We're seeing broadcasters and streamers make more library acquisitions in response to the decline in original commissions," says Kate Smith, executive VP of audience engagement at WildBrain. "We have seen more renewals of well-known series and globally known IP for both commissions and acquisitions. Series such as *Teletubbies* offer large volume, active franchise marketing and build on high awareness among parents."

Platforms need to "continually acquire new content and renew existing titles to satisfy their audiences," says Dominic Gardiner, managing director for distribution at CAKE. "That said, the economic climate has meant budgets are under pressure across the board. Compared with commissioning,

acquisitions have remained relatively steady, but it is still a highly competitive space for both producers and distributors."

DEMANDING VIEWERS

Gardiner, too, stresses the importance of having volume, especially as broadcasters scale their on-demand libraries.

"Multiple seasons are always desirable," says Gardiner. "They provide volume, which increases time spent viewing on a platform, and they also serve as a marker of success. A show that runs beyond season one has already proven it can attract and retain an audience."

Volume does help in the AVOD space, where your returns can be negligible if you're not starting from a position of scale.

"Restrictions on advertising to children and COPPA compliance make it much harder to monetize compared with adult-facing AVOD," Gardiner says. "Having said that, we do license AVOD rights, and while the revenues are incremental rather than transformational, they are growing year on year."

WildBrain has taken a multipronged AVOD approach, licensing to third parties as well as operating its own slate of FAST and digital channels.

"We're seeing exciting momentum across various AVOD platforms," Smith says. "Broadcasters are increasingly open to AVOD windows, which is encouraging for franchises looking to



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CAKE aligned with MGA Entertainment to take on the distribution rights to *Armorsaurs*, a remake of a hit Korean series.

build their awareness and affinity with kids. The more places a show is available, the more engagement we see across different forms of content distribution. *Strawberry Shortcake* is a great example—we took the opportunity to widely distribute the library of series with multiple partners in the U.S., and the more we made it available, the higher the franchise engagement.”

“AVOD is a great way to monetize,” says Elianne Friend, VP for digital and distribution at 9 Story Media Group. “We are in the FAST channels space. It costs money to be on those platforms. Whereas on the AVODs, you deliver and you create artwork, and there are costs associated with it, but not monthly hosting costs. We have to be where the kids are.”

LEARNING TO SHARE

That need to be everywhere has meant changing the conversation about exclusivity, with everyone becoming more flexible when it comes to figuring out how to maximize the reach of an IP for the long tail.

“We’ve always believed that shared exclusivity and smart windowing within a territory are some of the best ways to build a brand,” CAKE’s Gardiner says. “Windowing isn’t new, but for a time, the market became overly territorial and windowing fell out of favor. With rising production costs and reduced appetite for risk, buyers are again looking at sharing rights, co-productions and flexible windowing strategies.”

Asked about the changing nature of exclusivity, WildBrain’s Smith says it “still has a place, especially when it comes to major franchises, originals and brand-building. As more platforms look to build brand loyalty and differentiate in the market, exclusive content can help. That said, we’re seeing a shift. With commissioning down, many platforms are leaning into non-exclusive deals—they’re faster, more budget-friendly and can help fill gaps in programming while maintaining engagement.”

To thrive in this landscape, beyond having a diverse slate, it also helps to be able to bundle ancillary materials for on-demand or social platforms.

“Platforms need to amplify new content not just on their own services, but across other channels, and social is a cost-effective way to do that when marketing budgets are tight,” Gardiner says. “If distributors or producers can provide ready-made support assets alongside the content, it makes promotion faster, cheaper and more impactful for the buyer and the audience.”

Smith agrees, adding, “It’s become increasingly important to consider promotional materials that will be effective on social platforms and YouTube. We’ve evolved our support materials to include more short-form video content, which is often what these platforms are looking for to drive engagement.

In some cases, we’ve even put the first episode ‘in front of the wall’ as a teaser to help build early buzz around a series and drive tune-in.”

MASTERING YOUTUBE

As Smith mentions, having a strategy for kids’ favorite content platform is essential. WildBrain has been on the platform for almost a decade, Smith says, “and it’s become a key part of how we connect with families around the world. We manage one of the largest networks of premium kids’ content on the platform, generating over 17 billion minutes watched per month and over 1.5 trillion lifetime minutes watched since

launching in 2016. Our YouTube proposition is brand-safe, with a wealth of broadcast-quality entertainment for families worldwide. We manage and optimize channels for our own and partner brands to deliver COPPA- and CARU-compliant monetization opportunities. In an age where YouTube is a go-to platform for kids, well-run, active YouTube channels are essential as they provide useful data and insights and an additional stream of revenue.”

CAKE launched its own YouTube channel business a decade ago with Popcorn Digital, which “offers a service for producers and IP owners who want to build a YouTube presence,” Gardiner says. “When we acquire a series for distribution, we offer Popcorn Digital as an add-on, but the Popcorn team also works independently and can take on shows outside the CAKE catalog. They don’t just run channels—they also create original content for YouTube. Increasingly, YouTube is also a place where producers test and grow new ideas, and platforms are watching closely. For us, it’s both a development space for new IP and a valuable exploitation window for existing series.”

“With YouTube dominating 80 percent of the market, it’s something we just can’t ignore,” says Friend at 9 Story, which has been using YouTube to sustain interest in returning brands and build new ones, including *Paris & Pups* with Paris Hilton.

“Our digital-first content slate has many products underway because we must be in charge of our own destiny and meet kids where they are,” Friend says. “We are first rolling out [on YouTube] but also have in mind to put it on AVOD platforms.”

With discoverability being such a huge challenge, projects are being developed at 9 Story with the view to “breaking through the noise on YouTube,” Friend says. “We are trying to identify projects with certain differentiators or competitive advantages. Content with an existing fan base. Brand-new content with promotional muscle. Content that fills a white space and serves maybe another business line in your company. For us, it’s publishing, as part of the Scholastic family. Identifying legacy IP that can be strengthened as a franchise or reboot on a digital platform is something that a more traditional company can focus on if they have strong IP. It’s a combination of creating great content for kids on the platform, but realizing you’re creating it for a platform. You’ve got to lean into the data. If you are not looking at data, you are poorly misguided. So, it’s combining all the elements that I just mentioned and being able to pivot. It can’t be a two-year development process. Part of your distribution strategy [should be] dropping episodes with the idea that you can refine later.” ■

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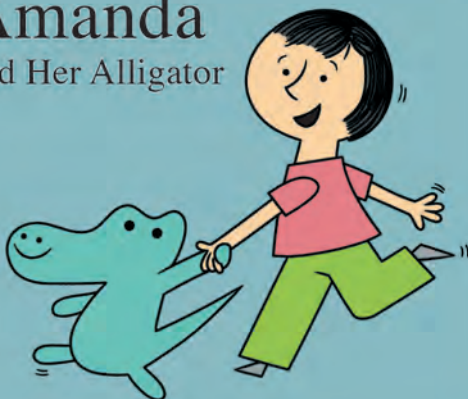
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Josh Silverman **Mattel**

By Mansha Daswani

As executive VP and chief franchise officer at Mattel, Josh Silverman is ensuring that the company's trove of beloved brands reaches fans wherever they are, from consumer products and publishing to location-based entertainment, digital gaming and more. Silverman is heading to Cannes to keynote at MIPCOM with Robbie Brenner, president of Mattel Studios and chief content officer, as Mattel marks its milestone 80th birthday. Silverman and Brenner talk to **TV Kids** about the company's evolving content strategy, the importance of "new-stalgia" and harnessing opportunities on YouTube.

TV KIDS: Eighty years is quite the milestone! What have been the keys to Mattel's longevity?

SILVERMAN: Mattel's longevity stems from our ability to continue to evolve while staying true to what makes our brands culturally relevant and emotionally resonant. For eight decades, we've kept pace with shifting consumer habits by continually innovating across play and storytelling, ensuring our franchises thrive across generations.

A defining shift has been our focus on a brand- and franchise-driven model. We see our brands as interconnected ecosystems in what we call a "franchise flywheel"—building experiences that span content, live events, digital platforms and products, which all feed into each other, creating a complete universe for fans to engage with.

That philosophy is what has enabled the *Barbie* film to become not only a global box office phenomenon but also a multigenerational symbol of empowerment. It's why *Hot Wheels* thrives in streaming and digital gaming, while remaining a top-selling toy brand. It's about ensuring our properties live in culture, wherever kids and families choose to engage with them.

TV KIDS: What's been your approach to YouTube and creator economy content more broadly?

SILVERMAN: YouTube and the creator economy are critical touchpoints for today's fans. We see them as an opportunity to extend our brands in participatory and interactive ways. That's why we've invested in YouTube programming, as

well as immersive digital experiences like *Barbie DreamHouse Tycoon* on Roblox, which held the top spot as the most-visited branded experience on the platform for over a year, and the *Masters of the Universe: He-Man Heroes* Fortnite island. We're also excited to announce further integration into Roblox via their License Manager program, where Polly Pocket, Street Sharks, Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots and Matchbox will be available for creators to license on the platform.

TVKIDS: Tell us about the concept of "new-stalgia" and how that informs your development process across all of your business lines.

SILVERMAN: "New-stalgia" is at the heart of how we reimagine our brands. It's about taking something beloved and timeless and reinventing it so it feels relevant and fresh for modern audiences. We're seeing parents who grew up with our brands now introducing them to their kids, which creates a powerful cycle of shared experiences. By pairing iconic IP with bold creative voices and executing with the help of strategic partners, we activate on stages that range from toys to live and digital experiences. We reinforce and reignite fandom through extensions of beloved properties, striking the balance between familiarity and surprise.

TV KIDS: Mattel struck up a pact with OpenAI earlier this year. Tell us about that collaboration and how Mattel is approaching gen AI in the content production process.

SILVERMAN: The agreement unites Mattel's and OpenAI's respective expertise to design, develop and launch groundbreaking experiences for fans worldwide. By utilizing OpenAI's technology, Mattel will bring the magic of AI to age-appropriate play experiences, with an emphasis on innovation, privacy and safety. This collaboration aims to enhance and complement traditional play, not replace it.

TV KIDS: What gains are you seeing in your digital gaming business, and what synergies are you driving between gaming and your television and film output?

SILVERMAN: Digital games are a true growth engine for Mattel. We continue to see success with mobile titles like *UNO! Mobile*. Other titles like *Barbie Horse Trails* and *Hot Wheels Let's Race: Ultimate Speed* are bringing our brands to every major digital and console gaming platform. In partnership with AirConsole, we've brought *UNO Car Party!* and *Pictionary Car Party!* to select BMW, Audi, Porsche, Volkswagen and MINI vehicles, showcasing how innovation can bring our franchises into unexpected arenas.

So far this year, we've developed over 20 digital gaming integrations across mobile, console, PC and even in-car platforms. The synergy lies in the storytelling: when audiences watch *Hot Wheels* on screen, they want to experience the thrill of racing those cars digitally. When fans reconnect with *UNO* or *Phase 10* through mobile play, they're reminded of the timeless fun of the card games offline. It's a virtuous cycle; our digital and physical play reinforce each other, deepening brand loyalty and broadening our reach.

TV KIDS: The kids' sector has been awash with some challenging news lately; what's your message to your teams?



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SILVERMAN: Our message is one of confidence and resilience. While the market has had its challenges, demand for toys and family entertainment remains robust, and Mattel continues to perform exceedingly well with iconic franchises like Hot Wheels, UNO and Barbie fueling our growth.

The global toy industry itself has grown year-to-date through June, and Mattel's position is strong. By focusing on innovation, operational excellence and fostering a culture of inclusion, we're well-positioned to drive sustained, long-term growth.

TV KIDS: What are your goals for the business in the 12 to 18 months ahead?

SILVERMAN: To continue driving franchise value in partnership with all the great work our talented Mattel colleagues, Robbie and her team included, are leading. That means not only delivering value through our category-leading brands, but also extending our franchise and entertainment offerings to fuel fandom far beyond the toy aisle.

We're measuring success by how deeply we connect with fans wherever they play—whether that's in theaters, on streaming and digital platforms or through traditional play.

In a landscape defined by constant change, the priority is ensuring Mattel remains a consistent source of creativity and connection.



Robbie Brenner Mattel Studios

This summer, Mattel tapped Robbie Brenner, then at the helm of its film division, to lead a unified film and TV operation. She talks to TV Kids about what's guiding her strategy.

TV KIDS: What motivated the move to combine the film and television segments at Mattel, and what advantages does the new structure provide?

BRENNER: Bringing film and television under one banner allows us to operate

with a unified creative strategy across formats. Our vision for Mattel Studios is to collaborate with leading creators to make standout quality content based on Mattel's iconic brands that will resonate in culture and appeal to global audiences.

The formation of Mattel Studios also gave us the opportunity to bring in dynamic new leadership. Jennifer Breslow, whose television career spans hits such as *Fate: The Winx Saga* on Netflix and *Scandal* and *Grey's Anatomy* on ABC, now leads our television division, steering the strategic direction of our slate, content creation and distribution.

On the film side, Darian Lanzetta, who brings years of agency leadership from CAA, where she forged key talent attachments and deals for Mattel's film projects; and Tom McNulty, who has led both 21 Laps Entertainment and Happy Madison Productions, hold parallel roles at Mattel. Together, they are spearheading the development and production of major motion pictures based on our iconic IP. When combined, this new structure ensures we're building cohesive, cross-format franchises while driving both creative and commercial success with best-in-class partners.

TV KIDS: What's guiding the television strategy amid the broader challenges the kids' media ecosystem is dealing with?

BRENNER: Television is an important piece of Mattel's strategy, and our focus is on delivering premium content that has global reach and enduring impact. Today, Mattel's shows are available in more than 190 countries

and translated into over 30 languages, which speaks to both our scale and commitment to accessibility.

We're striking a balance right now between nostalgia and shaping entirely new stories. For example, *Hot Wheels Let's Race* has been a top performer on Netflix since its launch. In its first season alone, *Let's Race* was viewed more than 22 million times, reaching the top ten TV rankings in 69 countries. Subsequent seasons have continued to chart globally, showing the staying power of the Hot Wheels franchise.

What sets Mattel apart is how we meet kids, fans and families wherever they are—whether that's streaming, linear TV, YouTube or other digital platforms. We're especially excited to reveal more about our upcoming premium, live-action titles at MIPCOM.

TV KIDS: *Barbie* set such a high mark for your feature film output; how are you approaching that sector?

BRENNER: *Barbie* was more than a movie; it was a cultural event. It validated our approach of taking risks and making great films. We're carrying *Barbie's* momentum forward with an ambitious film slate built on bold creative partnerships and designed to resonate across generations. ■



First created in the 1980s, *Pingu* is returning with a brand-new stop-motion series via Mattel Studios and Aardman.





Cecilia Persson

BBC Studios Kids & Family

By Mansha Daswani

Every children's media executive probably wishes that they, too, had a **Bluey** on their slate. Critically acclaimed, widely distributed, an L&M hit and absolutely beloved by preschoolers and their caregivers across the globe, **Bluey** is among the many crown jewels at BBC Studios Kids & Family. Cecilia Persson, who has led the division as managing director since its launch in 2022, talks to **TV Kids** about what's guiding her strategy amid choppy times for the kids' media segment.

TV KIDS: What has been your top-line strategy for the division amid the challenges the kids' sector is facing?

PERSSON: We are an end-to-end business with production, marketing, digital, consumer products, development, deficit funding and distribution. That means we can be agile and flexible. The possibilities for partnerships are much more at your fingertips and endless. This has been really beneficial and integral to us over the past three years.

Strategically, one of the things I set out to do early on was to expand our animation slate. We have had great success in preschool, and that's an area that we continue to build and develop in, but we wanted to get our 6/7-plus [slate] on the map. We announced *Vanishing Point* at Annecy, coming together with BBC Children's and Education and France Télévisions. We hadn't done anything [for this demo] since *Danger Mouse*, which

was a while back. We've also worked hard to expand our live-action slate. With *The Primrose Railway Children*, we took it up a notch. This year, we've gone into production on *Crookhaven* in Northern Ireland. It's based on the best-selling books by JJ Arcaño and flips the high school genre with a gripping, morally complex, twisty mystery rooted in identity, loyalty and found family. It's a compelling coming-of-age adventure with cinematic storytelling and a large cast featuring Dougray Scott and stars from shows like *Adolescence* and *Heartstopper*.

It was also important for us to focus on our producer and broadcast support with the setup of a content strategy team, which is also across our international channels.

Having a 360-degree infrastructure has been fundamental for us to grow and achieve the successes we have had.

TV KIDS: How are you working with the team at BBC Children's and Education?

PERSSON: We work very closely with them. We share a similar editorial passion, approach and excitement for the audiences we serve. Once we hone in on projects that we are both equally excited about, that alignment sets us up in the right direction from the start.

They are supportive of all their production partners; they work with creative teams across the development and production of their commissions and they also often help identify potential co-producers and broadcast partners.

On *Vanishing Point*, we have France Télévisions, but also the animation is with Watch Next Media in France and Kavaleer Productions in Ireland, so we can tap into the different tax credits and put funding together. All the different components work well together, editorially and creatively. The BBC supports and helps with those introductions and relationships. They champion the content and the production community.

TV KIDS: How vital are co-productions today, not just for financial reasons but also to help make a show that will appeal to viewers in multiple markets?

PERSSON: They have always been incredibly important, but they are fundamentally more important now. The audience is growing up with much more experience and they are savvy about the world. Content becomes more compelling editorially when you have the insights that different co-production partners bring to the table. We developed *Supertato* with Tencent. It might have been an English book property, but we developed it in tandem with them. That made for a different take than if we had just gone in thinking about the British audience. The sentiments, the comedy, those laugh-out moments translate the world over. It isn't just about the funding. There is that learning, working with different partners and getting a different editorial take and style that you may not have naturally gravitated toward, but which becomes a much more exciting execution. Ultimately, that's going to connect more with the audience.

TV KIDS: How are you approaching your development process amid this time of rapid change?

PERSSON: You have to have a long-term vision. We're creator-led. We're passionate about the characters and storylines that come from a genuine position, often things that the creators have experienced themselves. When

storylines come from something genuine, kids recognize that, find it more intriguing and they lean in more. We also have a great insights team. We examine what our audience is navigating from and identify the white spaces.

We have a show that's in production, *Rafi the Wishing Wizard*, a brand-new animated sitcom that follows 7-year-old Rafi Martin, a determined young wizard learning to use her very own wishing wand. *Rafi* was born when creator and executive producer Tom Cousins was working in development. He identified a gap for a preschool series about magic and transformation. He was looking through that lens and also thinking about his own upbringing and family, and he envisioned a show centered on a loving and chaotic, relatable family.

What if you added magic to that? He took the insight that he gained, but he adapted it, drawing on his own experience, knowledge and characters to create an original idea for a new show. When you watch it, you feel that heart. There has to be a creator-led passion underneath it; otherwise, it doesn't cut through.

TV KIDS: How are you striking that balance of tapping into the known IP that kids want to keep engaging with, while also being able to champion original ideas?

PERSSON: There is this feeling that if you have something that has a built-in audience, you're a step ahead from the outset. We do love adapting books and working with authors. We're working with Lucy Cousins on our new animated preschool series *My Friend Maisy* with Trustbridge Entertainment. She created this fantastic character with her books, and we are bringing Maisy back to the screen where audiences, for the first time, will hear Maisy and her friends talking; that development is fantastic.

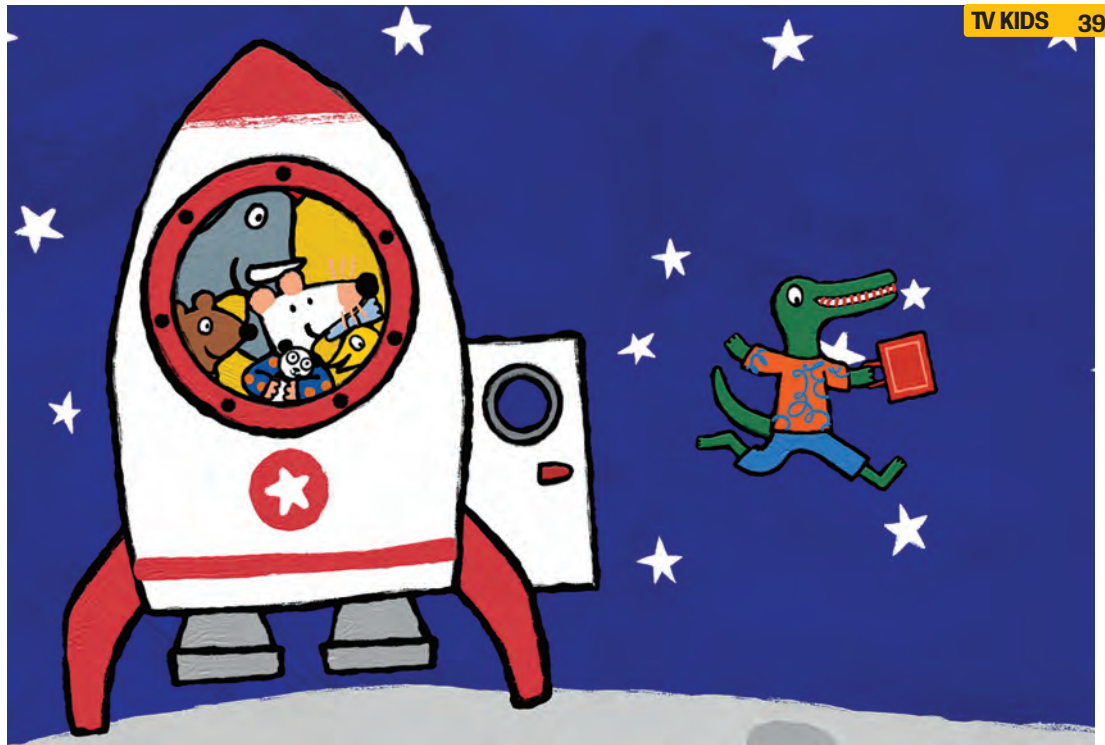
The audience also wants to find characters that they feel are theirs, that reflect what's happening to them now. You need originality as well as familiarity and comfort. It's important to have both.

Recently, our insights team showed us some Ampere data, and when it comes down to it, 76 percent of what has been commissioned from 2022 to 2025 is original ideas. There is definitely a demand from the audience.

TV KIDS: What's been the approach to franchise management and keeping brands beloved year after year?

PERSSON: The audience, especially preschoolers, doesn't perceive TV in the way that you and I did when we were children. They're used to having access to everything, everywhere, all the time. They want to touch, hold and have the possibility to immerse themselves in the world of the characters they love. We have a clear content strategy. When we look at something like *Bluey*, we consider all the touchpoints and ensure that if the audience wants more, it's readily available and easily accessible.

We also produce bespoke content. We filmed the original cast of the Australian version of *Bluey's Big Play* and premiered it on ABC. For audiences that don't have a chance to go to theaters, we brought it to them at home. It's exciting to be able to do different kinds of executions alongside the 2D animation.



TV KIDS: What's been your overall approach to YouTube and creator economy content?

PERSSON: We make a lot of content alongside the shows that we produce that drives that experience on YouTube. For *Supertato*, we've done songs and shorts. If you look at it, apart from actual presenters or live-action characters on YouTube, the content that is the most successful in animation often has a life in another area or has transitioned off YouTube in other areas. Kids want to have access to that larger world in one place. The shows that are on linear also exist on YouTube. That is the expectation of the audience. What you show them in those places is what we're thinking about. What does a kid want on YouTube versus what do they want on linear, and how do they cross-sect? That is something we work on all the time to ensure that we create a combination of what our digital team refers to as fandom, as well as enjoyable moments that complement what iPlayer does, for example, and what builds the overarching brand or experience for the user.

TV KIDS: What are your priorities for the business in the 12 to 18 months ahead?

PERSSON: Successful launches for some of our key titles like *Rafi the Wishing Wizard*, *My Friend Maisy* and *Crookhaven*. We are working carefully with our partners on those. Obviously, there are things in production that still have to go before they are delivered, like *Vanishing Point*. The constant ongoing thing is pushing your creative standards to keep them high, making sure that you are listening to the audience and that you are reacting to their needs. You have to be able to pivot. It is keeping all of those things together at once. Be present while ensuring that you deliver on both the future promise and what is necessary for success now.

We will continue to collaborate and find ways to work together with partners to get things off the ground, as well as seek out opportunities. That can be quite challenging when you have to work maybe twice as hard for similar results you'd have gotten a few years ago. You have to be open to the new possibilities that are coming. They are there. And keep listening to your audience! They are very savvy and want us to create excitement and new and different things that they feel speak directly to them. If we listen to them, they will tell us what they need. ■

One of BBC Studios Kids & Family's latest offerings is *My Friend Maisy*, based on the book IP by Lucy Cousins.

Ashley Kaplan Nickelodeon



By Mansha Daswani

Since 2019, Ashley Kaplan has been tasked with building out Nickelodeon's digital presence with a strategy that, up until earlier this year, was centered on using YouTube and the like to roll out additional content based on signature on-screen franchises. In January, Nickelodeon premiered *Kid Cowboy*, its first original for YouTube, with plans to build that brand out across the wider Paramount footprint. Kaplan, executive VP for unscripted and digital franchise studio, shared with viewers of the TV Kids Summer Festival the thinking behind *Kid Cowboy*'s launch and offered up some tips on navigating the YouTube ecosystem.

TV KIDS: What has been Nickelodeon's YouTube and digital content strategy to date?

KAPLAN: You really can't talk about kids without talking about YouTube. It's by far the number one platform for kids. Ninety percent of all kids are on that platform. It has about 60 to 70 percent more reach than Netflix. [Kids] spend 80 minutes a day watching content there. Its influence on the biggest IP is clear. With the exception of *Bluey*, all the major [new] kids' franchises have been born on YouTube. It plays a massive role, maybe the most critical role, in how kids discover shows,

brands, toys, music and culture. [Since 2019,] my team and I have worked to build out the largest YouTube network out of any kids' media or entertainment company. We have [50-plus] channels on YouTube delivering content in more than a dozen languages. We have over 200 million total subscribers. We get 2.5 billion views a month. We're the gold standard because we do not consider what we do on YouTube marketing. We program content on YouTube the same way that you would program content on any entertainment platform. Through watching our content, kids become fans of the IP. It's not just about awareness, it's really about building heart-share.

TV KIDS: How did *Kid Cowboy* originate as a YouTube-first property?

KAPLAN: We knew we had to fish where the fish were. [I was asked to] develop new IP on YouTube. Grow it there, build fandom and heart-share there before taking it elsewhere. It isn't that much different than what Nickelodeon used to do in the past. Nickelodeon was always focused on learning from kids about what they wanted to see. Back in the day, Nickelodeon used to take their ideas and put them in front of kids at schools and get feedback. It's the same fidelity to that idea. Instead of putting it in front of 200 kids in schools, we're putting this new IP in front of millions of kids on YouTube and learning what they're responding to and what they are not. *Kid Cowboy* was the perfect first project, mostly because it was fully developed! It was sitting on the development slate for years. I think it was about to revert back to the creator, Freddy Wexler. I approached him. He has three kids under 7 and he totally got it. I loved it for the unique story environment and the music. I knew it would work.

TV KIDS: What have been some of the lessons learned from *Kid Cowboy*?

KAPLAN: Don't be afraid to make changes. Lean into what this platform and the process can afford. Because of our footprint, we have all this data. We can figure out truly what they're responding to and what they are not responding to. We're able to make adjustments in real time. We can get from idea to video in a matter of weeks. We have to move faster. So, not being afraid to pivot when we need to.

TV KIDS: What are the franchise plans for *Kid Cowboy*?

KAPLAN: YouTube is important, but it's not a great place to make money. The strategy for *Kid Cowboy* is to build it into the next major franchise. We start on YouTube. We get kids as excited as we can. Once they are, we can move beyond the YouTube content. We can do more narrative, long-form storytelling. The goal here is not just to build large YouTube channels. The goal is that this

becomes the next *PAW Patrol* with a long-form series, theatricals, toys and consumer products. I believe the next *PAW Patrol* will be born on YouTube.

TV KIDS: Are there certain qualities you look for in a digital-first pitch?

KAPLAN: It's about how you format the content for YouTube. How you introduce the characters. It's about getting to the action quickly and integrating some of the characters into other content that already has an audience. You have to have a way to find the audience. You can't just post a video on YouTube without an audience. I would not start a channel from scratch. We're in this unique position here at Nick that we have such a footprint, we have the ability to find the audience to launch something new.

TV KIDS: What elements should "traditional" content creators keep in mind when making the switch to digital-first storytelling?

KAPLAN: Creative flexibility and willingness to take strategic risks when it comes to animation style or pacing. Treat YouTube like a launch pad, as a franchise incubator. Try to think beyond episodes. Plan to expand the world and the reach of your IP in different ways. We're in an interesting time in the industry, and I would just say keep looking for opportunities where you can pivot because the world is changing.

TV KIDS: I know you can fall down a rabbit hole of YouTube data. How are you using all of that intelligence?

KAPLAN: The rabbit hole is amazing. I wish we had that level of data for linear. We can see where people are going back to rewatch the same thing. That can inform what

characters they're liking the most. We can see when they're not engaging as much. It is testing, learning and paying attention to where there is engagement. Watch time is the best way to gauge that more than any other stat.

TV KIDS: How does YouTube help support Nickelodeon's other business lines?

KAPLAN: My work since 2019 has mostly been focused on supporting existing franchises like *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *PAW Patrol*. We built the best-in-class ecosystem with those beloved shows. This strength in digital is a huge advantage in launching shows and franchises because we know linear alone is not enough. The franchise strategy of using Paramount theatricals to further build our Nick titles works so well in cultivating audiences because we see that they're willing to move with the characters across our platforms. We can use our strength and popularity in digital in the exact same way.

TV KIDS: You also oversee unscripted. What's the strategy there? Is it mostly centered on sports?

KAPLAN: It's mostly in the sports space. It's also in tentpoles. My goal with all unscripted, whether it's the Kids' Choice Awards or the NFL games, is to break through culture. It's to get everybody talking about us. I consider our unscripted tentpoles more as an opportunity for brand marketing than anything we do on YouTube. The slime cannons that we brought to life in the first Wild Card game broke the internet. With the Super Bowl [in 2024], we were the most mentioned brand on social. We're always thinking about how we can build things into the creative that will "travel," so to speak, off the screen and into the national dialogue. ■

Kid Cowboy is Nickelodeon's first original series produced specifically for YouTube, with a view to building the animated series into a full-on franchise.



Raphaëlle Mathieu

Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends



By Mansha Daswani

This MIPCOM, Kartoon Studios arrives in Cannes with *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends*, bringing A.A. Milne's beloved Winnie-the-Pooh character back for a new generation of preschoolers and families. Working with a creative team that includes Linda Woolverton, Elise Allen and John Rivoli, Kartoon Studios is building out a comprehensive launch platform for the new series. Raphaëlle Mathieu, executive producer, talks to **TV Kids** about how Kartoon Studios is reinventing the iconic, lovable bear.

TV KIDS: How did plans to relaunch Winnie-the-Pooh come about at Kartoon Studios?

MATHIEU: Winnie-the-Pooh is one of the most beloved characters in children's entertainment history, with timeless themes and global recognition. When the original works entered the public domain, the team saw a unique momentum to reimagine this classic for a new generation. At Kartoon Studios, the mission is to create safe, enriching and joy-filled entertainment for kids and families, so bringing Pooh and his friends back to life in Kartoon Studios' *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* felt like a perfect alignment. It was approached as an adaptation fully respectful of A.A. Milne's spirit of wonder, friendship and gentle humor, while introducing a visual and narrative style that speaks directly to today's young audiences.

TV KIDS: How are you maintaining the DNA of the original while reinventing it for contemporary audiences?

MATHIEU: Preserving the heart of Winnie-the-Pooh has been our guiding principle from day one in developing *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends*. The emotional DNA—friendship, curiosity, kindness and problem-solving through teamwork—remains fully intact. To craft this new adaptation, we focused on assembling the best creative team possible. We have Linda Woolverton, the visionary screenwriter behind *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Maleficent*, on board as executive producer. Emmy Award-nominated television writer and *New York Times* best-selling author Elise Allen will serve as showrunner. John Rivoli, the celebrated creative force behind consumer-product programs for Harry Potter, Batman, *The Lord of the Rings* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*, is the creative director. With this series, we are innovating in pacing, tone and design. Today's preschool audiences are accustomed to slightly faster storytelling and more visually vibrant worlds, so we've crafted stories that are a bit more dynamic while still retaining Pooh's unhurried charm. The dialogue reflects contemporary sensibilities while honoring the lyrical simplicity of the original books. It's a careful balance: refreshing the property without losing the soul that has made Pooh endure for nearly a century.

TV KIDS: Tell us about the themes you'll be exploring in the series, as well as the look you have crafted.

MATHIEU: The development of the themes, led by Linda and Elise, will celebrate emotional intelligence, resilience, imagination and the power of friendship. Each

story gently models social-emotional learning moments—like empathy, problem-solving and managing big feelings—in age-appropriate ways. We also emphasize curiosity about the natural world, with storylines rooted in play and discovery.

Visually, under John's direction, the design of the series features a soft, yarn-like, storybook-inspired world with warm textures, painterly backgrounds and expressive character animation. It's instantly recognizable as Winnie-the-Pooh, yet it feels fresh, contemporary and immersive for young viewers. We're producing *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* in high-end CG animation.

TV KIDS: What's the international roll-out strategy for the IP?

MATHIEU: From the start, this has been developed as a truly global project. We're structuring deals in multiple phases: first, we are focusing on key partners in the U.S. and major broadcasters in Europe, and then we will rapidly expand into territories around the world to build brand awareness and audience engagement. We've already had significant interest from leading broadcasters and platforms worldwide. Because Winnie-the-Pooh is a universally recognized property, our approach is about cultural sensitivity and localization rather than market education—we can go wide very quickly while tailoring marketing and language to each region.

TV KIDS: What are your overall brand plans across L&M and digital? What extensions are you pursuing?

MATHIEU: We have Disney licensing veteran Chris DeMoulin leading the development and execution of the global consumer-products program for the brand, building a strategy across toys, publishing, apparel, accessories, home and live experiences. The unique color and texture of *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* is key to product differentiation: soft, yarn-like, cuddly, friendly and inclusive.

Digital extensions will also be core: companion apps, educational, minigames and music content will help bring the series to life beyond the screen. We're also planning immersive brand activations, from themed pop-ups to family-friendly live shows, ensuring children can experience Winnie-the-Pooh's world in real life.

TV KIDS: How are you looking to use YouTube and other social platforms to help launch the show?

MATHIEU: YouTube will be the tip of the spear in our launch strategy. We're producing exclusive short-form



content designed for YouTube's preschool ecosystem to seed the characters, build familiarity and drive anticipation. We'll complement that with TikTok, Instagram and Facebook campaigns aimed at parents and caregivers, focusing on nostalgia, behind-the-scenes looks and co-viewing moments. Social will serve as both an awareness driver and an engagement platform—keeping the brand top of mind between content drops.

TV KIDS: What's your overall mission for this MIPCOM and MIPJunior?

MATHIEU: Our mission with *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* is to introduce this reimagined Winnie-the-Pooh to the global market and build strong strategic partnerships across broadcast, streaming, consumer products and brand experiences.

MIPCOM and MIPJunior are where the world's leading kids' content stakeholders gather, and we see it as the perfect stage to present this vision. We're looking to spark excitement, lock in early partnerships and lay the foundation for *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* to become one of the most significant preschool franchises of the coming decade. ■

Kartoon Studios is introducing the new animated series *Hundred Acre Wood's Winnie and Friends* at MIPCOM and MIPJunior.



Gino Guzzardo

Disney Branded Television

By Mansha Daswani

Legacy broadcasters are utilizing various methods to harness the potential for reaching new fans and deepening engagement on YouTube. At Disney Branded Television, the multiplatform approach has meant developing a huge volume of shorts built around the company's powerhouse of new and returning IPs. As the VP of multiplatform content, Gino Guzzardo has overseen the roll-out of such beloved short-form franchise formats as **Chiverse**, **How Not To Draw** and **Theme Song Takeover**. At the TV Kids Summer Festival, Guzzardo, a longtime Disney content executive, discussed how the company is using social to engage with audiences in new ways.

TV KIDS: How do you define multiplatform content at Disney Branded Television?

GUZZARDO: It's been such a rewarding experience to build a team here at Disney. You have seasoned pros and up-and-coming talent who possess the sensibilities of YouTube and TikTok—those storytelling styles. It's been amazing to see these two worlds come together in this dynamic. You can see it in the work. With multiplatform, we're a little like the Little Mermaid—we want to be where the people are! People are on YouTube, TikTok, Disney+ and Disney Channel. Multiplatform means getting our content and characters out there, wherever people watch, on all those different platforms.

TV KIDS: Tell us about the slate of shorts you have developed for YouTube.

GUZZARDO: Shorts as a unit of storytelling are an efficient and portable way to get the characters out there. Shorts as a medium are in Disney's DNA. You've heard the saying, "It all started with a mouse." It was all started by a short of a mouse. Go back to a place and time when Mickey Mouse did not exist. How is [Walt Disney] going to get it out there? He used shorts as a vehicle to bring Mickey to the biggest platform around: movie theaters. What we do now is a lot more complex with all these different platforms, but it's essentially the same approach. We are using shorts to bring our characters out into the world, win over fans and then bring them back [to our platforms].

TV KIDS: What's guiding your development approach for short-form?

GUZZARDO: Recurring, proven anthology formats. We like to find a hook that will immediately grab the audience and carry them through. The anthology formats also allow us to release on a recurring cadence, so we're always on. We don't like to let more than a month go by between releasing an episode of that format. We're always engaging the viewer. We look at season breaks and push through. If a show has aired, if the show has sunset, if it's a show that's maybe three, four years old or longer, but there are still fans, those are characters that we want to bring back out and keep them always on for viewers who find them on Disney+. From their perspective, those characters are just as vibrant and relevant today as they were when the show first came out.

TV KIDS: You've built up incredible volumes on some of these, like *Chibi Tiny Tales*. What's the key to that longevity, and how are you building out that universe even further?

GUZZARDO: *Chibi Tiny Tales* started as *Big Hero 6* shorts. As we were making them, I had the sense that perhaps there was something more to it. It was taking familiar characters, but subverting them in a way. You see the thumbnail, and it'll raise a question in your mind: Why don't they look like they usually look? Are there others? I started thinking there was a format where we could focus on all of our shows and even movies, any Disney story, as a "Chibi." The variety helps keep the audience's attention. The subversion of the familiar. Where do the Chibis live? Why are they Chibis? They're scientists who have taken all of the Disney stories, props, scripts and everything that's out there, and they've crammed them into this mashup machine. And then the mashup machine compresses them down to this tiny little bean of a planet. And then they use their microscopes to look in. Those are the stories we get to tell. That's the *Chiverse*, a 7-minute series that we produce. We package them into three for every half-hour to be part of our long-form slate. I didn't know we were going there when we started with *Big Hero 6*, but it evolved. By looking at the metrics, watching them constantly and seeing what the audience wants and what they're responding to, we found something that worked and evolved it into the *Chiverse*.

TV KIDS: How do you build out characters further with shorts?

GUZZARDO: We get the chance to lean into a character the audience likes. The long-form series could take a while to produce. If we start seeing that one character is popping or there's interest in a backstory that wasn't answered in the canon of the series, we have an opportunity to work with the showrunner, answer those questions and get the short out. In *Theme Song Takeover*, we take villains or fan-favorite characters and let them take over show theme songs—new lyrics, new instrumentation, new visuals. That's another example of subverting what you expect in a different context.

TV KIDS: How do the shorts serve as a funnel to Disney+ and Disney Channel?

GUZZARDO: A funnel needs a big opening. On YouTube, we have 1.1 billion lifetime views. It equates to, in 2024, 25 million views a month, 800,000 to 900,000 views a day. That's the billboard. It is that big funnel that we are pulling viewers in from. Our future fans and current fans are on YouTube, TikTok and all those other platforms. Let's get our characters in front of them there.

TV KIDS: Can you use the short-form to incubate characters that could then spawn the IPs of the future?

GUZZARDO: With both *Big City Greens* and *Kiff*, we surrounded those shows with shorts. We have a slate of proven formats that have proven audiences. In some ways, formats like *How Not To Draw* introduce a character and utilize a preexisting audience. Surrounding those shows with short-form content while they're rolling out, before we roll them out and in between seasons helps build that groundswell of support.

TV KIDS: What advice would you give to traditional content creators looking to embrace opportunities on social media platforms?

GUZZARDO: I would suggest that they find what they should retain and hold on to dearly. What sensibilities can they not give up? And then what do they need to jettison immediately? My recommendation for what that is is preciousness—getting it exactly right. I believe in developing out loud. If we've made this the best we can with the information that we have at this moment, get it out there. There will be more insights that way. Use YouTube and TikTok as your incubation labs. Use it as your focus group. If you get some qualitative data, great. You're going to get quantitative for sure. What's the click-through rate of this character? What's the audience retention rate? Are they dropping off halfway through or right at the beginning? Are they watching all the way through? And then use that information. Become very familiar with the CMS on YouTube or whatever platform you're distributing on and use the native analytics tools for those platforms to understand what your audience is interested in and what they're not, and then take that data back into your writers' room, the next short of that format or a new format that it might inspire.

There are things you shouldn't throw out. Traditional storytelling techniques might need to be compressed.



I'm a fan of Buster Keaton. He still has lessons that teach me today on where your eye is going across the screen. It's very well designed, and the beats are paced out nicely. Something will happen over here that connects to there. You watch him as a live-action cartoon going across the screen. He holds your attention. He's hooked you with the kinetic potential of a moment. And then you have to lean in. His instincts apply to today. Hold onto those storytelling tools. But maybe you don't need an exterior shot that is pulling us into a scene. Maybe just get right into it, and you hook us.

A mistake a lot of people make is that they think you [hook audiences] in the content. I try to hook a viewer in their mind before they've even clicked on your video. Through the thumbnail and headline, the question you post in their mind should be baked in before they've even interacted with it. Once they tap on it, you must deliver on that promise; otherwise, they'll jump off, and the algorithm will pay attention. The click-through rate was high, but the retention is low; they're not delivering on whatever they promised the viewer that got them to click. And then we won't get recommended to more people. So, find that hook that is baked into the conceit and then deliver on it to hold the viewer's attention the whole time. If you follow that process over and over again, over the years, you can't help but perform better because you're using the audience to tell you how to optimize.

TV KIDS: You've had a front-row seat to changes in how kids consume media. What most excites you about serving this demo today?

GUZZARDO: When I first started, we were using Flash as a medium for storytelling. I worked on the Disney Channel games websites. All of that is thrown out. No one uses Flash anymore. We're on shifting tectonic plates in this industry. You could build up whole franchises and production pipelines and vendor ecosystems and then [that technology] disappears and you have to shift to something else. I get excited when I think about how many different things I've had to do and change to entertain kids and families. I find that exciting. It keeps me on my toes. Up-and-coming folks starting their careers should take heart in that. There's a real opportunity because it's a shifting media landscape.

Under the leadership of Ayo Davis [president of Disney Branded Television], we are not only following what Walt originally started with getting our characters out there, but she also coaches and advises us to keep it fresh and to evolve the strategy. It's not, Build it, set it and forget it. We have to always be on our toes and evolve where we're going and where the audience is going. ■

Shorts produced for the *Chibi Tiny Tales* short-form anthology are repackaged for Disney Branded Television's *Chiverse* series.

TVKIDS Screenings Festival

From endearing new preschool shows to compelling comedies for the 6-to-11 set and digital-native titles, there's a wealth of new and returning fare to sample in our MIPCOM and MIPJunior edition of the [TV Kids Screenings Festival](#).

Armorsaurs

A team of teen pilots and their armored dinosaurs are humanity's last line of defense against a sophisticated alien army intent on destroying Earth. Together, they must lead the fight to defend the planet in a heroic battle of survival, millions of years in the making. (CAKE)



Boogie Bugs (Bichikids)

In this musical series, some little bugs suggest tasks, choreographies and funny activities that match the rhythm of cheerful songs. (El Reino Infantil)

Bubblegem

In this hit Korean series, Princess Purple and her mermaid friends must recover magical gems before they fall into the hands of an evil sea witch while learning to navigate life on land. (CAKE)



Cuquín

Cuquín is a tireless, unpredictable, clever, agile and playful baby, a small battery full of infinite energy, always ready to explore and laugh. (Ánima Kitchent Media)



Bugtron

There is an epic battle waging between two factions of highly evolved bugs, and a new group of cadets is thrown right into action. (Lion Forge Entertainment)

Dino Ranch: Island Explorers

The spin-off of the smash-hit *Dino Ranch* propels the Cassidy family into all-new, high-octane adventures on the mysterious and exotic Dino Island. (Boat Rocker Studios)



Louca

Clumsy Louca is no football star—until ghostly Nathan coaches him in sports, school and love, proving victories matter most off the field. (Studio 100 International)

Toys and Colors Kaleidoscope City

Starring global sensation Toys and Colors, a magical world where kids learn to see the world through new perspectives. (pocket.watch)





GUMBALL IS BACK!

Ben Bocquelet and Erik Fountain take TV Kids inside Cartoon Network and Hulu's *The Wonderfully Weird World of Gumball*. By Mansha Daswani

The *Amazing World of Gumball* on Cartoon Network was among the biggest kids' shows of the 2010s. Emerging out of Cartoon Network's then-nascent European development studios, Ben Bocquelet's animated series about 12-year-old cat Gumball Watterson and his adoptive goldfish brother, Darwin, delivered pop-culture-infused comedy, high school antics and family shenanigans for six seasons, ending its run in 2019.

Cartoon Network internationally and Hulu in the U.S. have brought the Watterson clan back in *The Wonderfully Weird World of Gumball*, produced by Hanna-Barbera Studios Europe and with Bocquelet returning to guide the show's creative vision, this time alongside Matt Layzell and Erik Fountain.

The media world has changed drastically since *Gumball*'s first appearance, but much of the original DNA of the series is intact, Bocquelet notes. "*Gumball*'s rhythm was always closer to doom scrolling on TikTok than a traditional, elegant approach to animation storytelling," he quips. "It's probably even more frantic. The world has changed, but people are still humans, they still have the same feelings and problems and social stuff going on with their families and friends. It's just that now we're getting new stuff to riff on, like AI, social media brainwashing, food scarcity and billionaires!"

"Economic inequality, all the fun stuff!" Fountain adds. "For me, it's fun and it's wacky, but it's also the big issues of the world seen through the lens of children. Children a decade ago are different than children now. You've got to talk about the things that kids are affected by now. It's always been part of the DNA of the show to pay homage to the stuff we like, like pop culture, but now there's big pop culture and small pop culture and meme culture. That's become infused. And not just for the sake of referencing it—it's to make the kids feel like kids."

The show has also returned with its signature mixed-media look. "I wish we'd been more technologically savvy to come up with an easier way of doing it," Bocquelet says, "but we're still doing it the same way as before. We have fun with the designs and animate the old school way."

"It's a lot of rolling up our sleeves and working on things one frame at a time," Fountain adds. "There have been a lot of advancements [in animation technology], but they're in their fledgling state. A season of animation takes a long time to produce. So, even when we started this season, AI was still at the 'Will Smith eating spaghetti' stage. It's not what it is today. And I like doing things. A lot of the animators grew up with *Gumball*. This is their first job, they're working on their beloved property, and you can see their investment and their love for the show. It's got this quality of investment from the animators and the designers. They're fans and now they get to work on it. It's the opposite of technology—you get a sense of human investment."

Gumball's fandom is also rooted in the show's ability to make viewers laugh—whatever their age.

"What kept some of the old fans watching was the fact that it could be funny for an adult to watch," Bocquelet says. "It's always been my dream that people would watch it as a family. I have very fond memories of watching old *Looney Tunes* cartoons with my dad and the two of us laughing out loud. That's a nice thing to experience as a family. We always try to have an allegorical [message] for the adults, and then more cartoony and emotional kid-based storylines."

The multiple levels of humor have helped the show endure, Bocquelet and Fountain explain, but the heart of its multigenerational appeal lies in the fact that it has always been a passion project for the team behind it.

"It's always coming from a personal place," Bocquelet says. "That is maybe the secret recipe to doing something relatable; you offer a vulnerable part of your story for others to enjoy. Or the fact that it's so stupid that you just can't help laughing at it."

"What I always loved about it is it's a feast for the eyes," Fountain adds. "It's got so many different styles, and it all feels integrated and it makes sense. *Gumball* has the pulse of what's going on. It keeps itself relevant, but instead of whipping you into a frenzy, you get to have a release. That's the way to stay relevant, right? Just keep looking at the world around you." ■

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KARTOON STUDIOS BRINGS A TIMELESS TREASURE: A.A. MILNE'S WINNIE-THE-POOH

"HUNDRED ACRE WOOD'S WINNIE AND FRIENDS"

Kartoon Studios is launching the most important new series in years, based on the immortal A.A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh.

- 200 (x) 6 minute
- 5 Holiday specials
- Breakthrough original design of yarn-like characters never seen before
- Original Songs and Dance in Each Episode
- Oscar, Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Olivier Winners and Nominees come together to bring vision to one of the most successful properties ever

This newly imagined adaptation of A.A. Milne's cherished books brings the magic of the Hundred Acre Wood to life through a distinctive animation style. With rich textures, vibrant color palettes, and heartwarming aesthetic, the production breathes fresh life into timeless characters while remaining faithful to the original charm of A.A. Milne's characters and the Hundred Acre Wood, where the stories occur.



An in-depth chat with Ricardo Guise, renown collector of original A.A. Milne Winnie-the-Pooh books



"I'm actually a collector of the original books by A.A. Milne. I very much look forward to watching this new series!" -Ricardo Guise

OSCAR, TONY, GRAMMY, EMMY, AND OLIVIER AWARD WINNERS AND NOMINEES JOIN WINNIE & FRIENDS



Motion picture legends Linda Woolverton and Danny Elfman have come together as Executive Producer and Composer to bring the most beloved children's property ever for a new generation, with a rich, contemporary look, sound and feel. Award winning screenwriter, Linda Woolverton, the writer of Lion King, Beauty and the Beast, Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland starring Johnny Depp, and Maleficent. Danny Elfman is the

renkown Grammy Winner and four time Oscar Nominee, known for Batman, Edward Scissorhands, The Avengers, Beetlejuice, and The Simpsons. Raphaëlle Mathieu is running international sales, and joins Andy Heyward as Co-Executive Producer.

POOH AT CANNES?

PIGLET AND TIGGER CHASED BY PAPARRAZZI ON THE CROISSETTE



Piglet and Tigger turned heads on their press tour stop in Cannes, striking a pose in front of the famed Carlton Hotel. Sporting sleek sunglasses and big smiles, the duo looked dapper and full of excitement as they greeted fans and dodged paparazzi along the Croisette. Tigger bouncing all over the place, and Paparazzi unable to keep up.