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Trail blazers

TBI profiles a quartet of companies at the cutting edge of the kids business



OOBEDOO: AN INTELLIGENT APPROACH TO APPS

With OobEdoO, industry veteran Myke Crosby is attempting to shake up kids entertainment by bringing parenting into the digital age. Crosby was the cofounder of online game Bin Weevils, and says the idea for his new preschool app came about when Apple launched the iPad, and he saw how easily and intuitively his four-year-old daughter interacted with the device.

“I watched her in amazement, but also had issues with what she could access,” Crosby says. “I wanted her to be able to access content ,but also wanted some control and feedback.”

He created OobEdoO, an iOS and Android app for preschoolers

that accentuates the learning elements in series and, via a proprietary DigitalParenting feedback system, gives parents details of what kids have watched, and what they have learned along the way.

After watching a show, kids can engage in games and learning-based add-ons. Parents can get an email with details of what has been watched and what additional learning has taken place. They can also restrict what is watched and for how long.

“To be a parent of a preschooler means being a digital parent,” Crosby says. “All preschool shows now have a learning component, but those elements are sometimes buried. We try to bring them to the

HOPSTER: SVOD SERVICE GOES INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL

Launching three years ago makes Hopster an old hand in digital terms. The preschool streaming service has just launched on Android and is about to roll out a local-language service in France.

The business case for Hopster has crystallised in recent months, says founder and former Nickelodeon executive Nick Walters. “If you’ve been going to industry events and conferences over the last ten years,” he says, “you will have heard an awful lot about the shift to digital, people asking whether channels cease to exist, or if everything be on-demand. In the last six months I’d say that day has got a lot closer.”

“There has been a real explosion in the on-demand and app space.,” he adds. “When we said in 2012 that the future of TV channels will be apps, people raised their eyebrows. Now [Apple CEO] Tim Cook has said, in 128-point type in a presentation, the same thing.”

Having started out in the UK, Hopster has now expanded to numerous international territories. On its home turf it charges parents £3.99 (US\$6.09) a month and is the number one grossing app for kids on the UK iTunes store.

As mentioned, Hopster got into the market early. It no longer, however, has the space to itself, as others wake up to the kids SVOD opportunity, and the likes of Netflix and Amazon Prime Instant Video bolster their kids line-ups. In the UK, Sky is about to launch a kids app, having added thousand of hours to its on-demand service.

Walters says it is a mixed ecology and its subs are also likely to have Netflix separately. He adds that three years’ worth of data and experience put it at an advantage over kids SVOD newcomers, adding that Hopster sees itself as a tech, not a content, company.

“People can think ‘we have great content, we can go and launch an app’, but it doesn’t work like that,” says Walters. “You also need to know

how the technology works, about customer acquisition, and how to fuse the interactive elements,” he says. “On-demand and apps are the future of consuming content, but content is not enough in itself.”

The Hopster founder says he always envisaged the service as multi-territory. “If you are in this space, you have to plan to be global,” he says. This year the service has rolled out on Apple TV in more than 100 territories. The next stage is localising Hopster in key markets, starting with France. “France has a big App Store and App Store revenues, and a great original content community,” Walters says. “In some places it is important to be in the local language. In others, English is naturally a second language, and parents like that.” Hopster will have *Peppa Pig* on its French service (in French) and local shows including *Didou*.

As debates rage about how to fund traditional kids TV, Walters issues a challenge to the production community to change their thought processes, and engage with what digital platforms want. “It takes a long time to get a TV show made,” he says. “You need a lot of broadcasters on board and it can take years. We’re not interested in that model, and investing at that level. It is important for the content and creative community to realise you do not have

to do that any more to get your show made.”

He cites YouTube series *Baby Bum* as an example of how a digital brand can move into L&M

and become a viable proposition. “The TV production community can learn a lot from the YouTube creators,” he says. “I know this is scary for TV producers, but there are real opportunities out there: you can keep your rights, manage your distribution and your destiny, if you are bold enough to take that opportunity.”



fore; the emotional, social, cognitive and other learning elements.”

Crosby raised the start-up funding before Welsh broadcaster S4C invested, and the company is now developing a Welsh-language version of the OobEdoO app. The core English-language offering is in its third iteration, having been in beta mode for over a year, ahead of a full commercial roll-out in early 2016. The app will cost parents £3.99 (US\$6.09) a month, for which their kids get access to 1,000 episodes of content. A download mode, meanwhile, provides offline access for a seven-day period.

Crosby characterises OobEdoO as an ‘intelligent app’, which means that over time, it will refine search and usage recommendations based on how kids are interacting with it. There are programming deals

with distributors including BBC Worldwide and Hit Entertainment and OobEdoO has shows including *Charlie and Lola*, *Balamory*, *Bob the Builder*, *In the Night Garden* and *Angelina Ballerina*. It offers content owners a minimum guarantee and revenue share.

Ahead of the full launch next year, Crosby says his experience building *Bin Weevils* taught him some valuable lessons. “The biggest thing I learned was that kids will very, very quickly tell you what they do and don’t like,” he says. “You have to understand the community and the feedback you get.”

Down the track, the OobEdoO founder says there are plans to launch internationally, with a lot of acquired content already available dubbed, but 2016 is all about making the service work in the UK.

KABILLION: EARLY VOD PLAYER WEIGHS ITS OPTIONS

Kabillion started out in 2007 as an ad-supported VOD service on Comcast. Move the clock forward to 2015 and the Splash Entertainment-owned service has launched a YouTube channel and a preschool app, and is in 51 million homes in the US via pay TV platforms. How it develops from here is the burning question for the exec running it, company president Nicolas Atlan. “We’re deciding how to evolve Kabillion, and we need to decide whether to stay free or take an SVOD route,” he says.

In February, the service created its first app, Kabillion Jr., for preschool viewers in the US. The monthly subscription model it offered was a departure for Kabillion, and the app sits alongside its free YouTube channel, which launched last year.

The core Kabillion service is, Atlan says, an ad-supported marketing platform for content owners to reach into the US. “We don’t try to compete with Amazon Prime Instant Video or Netflix [Splash struck a deal this year with Netflix for toon series *Kulipari*]. We offer a different way of promoting content, to build awareness, and then it can go on iTunes or Amazon and people can buy more episodes.”

Girl-skewed toon *Wendy* (right) is a good example. The Red Kite-produced show had proved popular on broadcasters including France Télévisions and Germany’s ZDF before launching in the US on Kabillion and then transferring to Hulu. That was part of a wider deal with Dish Network and Hulu that saw the pay TV platform and catch-up streaming service take *Wendy* and Kabillion’s Latin-inspired series *El Chavo*.



It is clear that with its YouTube, SVOD and third-party deals, Atlan is evaluating what is next for Kabillion. “One next step is to go D2C and we’re trying to work out if we do that as a mix with SVOD,” he says.

International expansion would be a stretch, unless the right partner is found, Atlan warns. “We could look for a strategic partner and develop the brand internationally, and we are talking to companies in Latin America and the UK,” he says. “But we are a small indie and there are just four [staff].”

Meanwhile, the Kabillion chief says of traditional TV: “Classic TV is not broken, it just takes people a lot of time to make a decision. TV still has the viewer and marketing reach, but I wish the decision-making was faster.”

MOMEDIA: DIGITAL SPECIALIST BETS BIG ON KIDS

Momedia helps content owners make money from their content on digital platforms and is deeply involved in the kids business. That involvement is, however, about to get deeper still, says founder Lucas Bertrand. “About 50% of our business is kids and youth at the moment, and it will only get bigger,” he says. “We’re heavily focusing on kids content and we think it is a space we can own.”

Momedia takes kids TV brands and gets them on transactional and subscription digital platforms around the world, using its proprietary platform to manage a matrix of windows, platforms and rights. The obvious question is, in a world where execs are increasingly savvy about digital opportunities, why would they pass off that responsibility to Momedia?

The answer, Bertrand says, is that sweating IP across numerous EST, DTO and SVOD platforms around the world is too much work for traditional media companies, when for a few hundred dollars Momedia will get an indie’s show on ten platforms.

“Our pain-point is managing content on EST and DTO platforms,” says Bertrand. “It can be expensive to get content onto these platforms, and then it is a revenue share and you need to manage pricing and beg Apple or Google to promote your content. It is a lot of labour for a small return. We take that problem away.”

The company is working with Hasbro Studios and DreamWorks Classics (if you’ve seen *He-Man* on Facebook recently, it is most likely

down to Momedia).

The flip side of that part of the business is taking digital content into traditional platforms. The company has just done a deal with Israel-based Twist Animation to distribute *TuTiTu* (below), the YouTube preschool kids series that has had 2.8 billion views. Momedia, which is minority-backed by Endemol Shine Group, will repackage the three-minute episodes into TV- and SVOD-friendly formats and sell them into these channels and services. It has also just done a deal for *Pocoyo*, which has been a TV and YouTube hit and will take it to new transactional platforms.

D2C is a buzzword across all content sectors at the moment as content owners seek to harness digital and reach fans and customers directly. “We are launching D2C as a way to further the licensing opportunity for YouTube brands,” says Bertrand. “We’ll launch *TuTiTu* as a standalone app and download, and if that works we’ll do it with other content.” **TBI**



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On the move

TBI takes a look at the latest comings and goings in the international television business and reports on who's moving where

Sky has recruited children's TV producer LUCY MURPHY as head of kids, the first time the UK pay TV operator has had a dedicated chief for the genre. Murphy counts *Horrid Henry*, on her production credits. Besides her production work, Murphy has also been creative director and head of content Azoomee, the soon-to-launch UK kids VOD service



Canadian media firm Corus has restructured its senior management team. COLIN BOHM will be executive VP and head of Corus Kids in a new senior team, running the YTV, Nickelodeon, Teletoon and Treehouse channels. He will also be in charge of Nelvana. Scott Dyer becomes executive VP, chief technology officer and president of Nelvana

The Jim Henson Company has recruited ANNA MOOREFIELD as director, global distribution. She joins from independent film and TV studio Lionsgate Entertainment and will be in place at Henson by MIPJunior. At Lionsgate, Moorefield was manager, international TV and digital distribution



Turner Broadcasting System has poached Viacom International Media Networks's VANESSA BROOKMAN to become VP, content and creative, in the UK and northern Europe. She will focus on content strategy for the media giant's bouquet of kids and entertainment channels in the UK, Nordic and Baltic territories, which include Cartoon Network and TNT

BBC Children's has restructured, with SARAH MULLER taking the new role of creative director, scripted animation and coproduction at the CBBC channel, and Jackie Edwards named head of BBC Children's acquisitions and independent animation. Alison Stewart, head of production at CBeebies, will now focus on in-house productions and copros



New Zealand's Pukeko Pictures has named a new CEO after Andrew Smith took a post as chief executive of a mobile services developer. CLIVE SPINK is upped from COO to become new chief exec at the *Thunderbirds Are Go* production company

Canada-based kids producer and distributor 9 Story Media Group has hired CLAUDIA BALZER SCOTT-HANSEN from Hit Entertainment for a newly-created sales role. She will be vice president, distribution, reporting to managing director Natalie Osborne. At Hit, Scott-Hansen was a senior VP



Sesame Workshop has recruited KAY WILSON STALLINGS as senior VP, content development. The former Nickelodeon executive will oversee development activity at Sesame as well pilot and series production

Former Turner Broadcasting System EMEA senior VP and COO PETE FLAMMAN has joined Viacom International Media Networks' northern Europe operation. He takes on a newly-created role of senior VP of brands for northern Europe at VIMN Northern Europe. He left Turner last year as part of a wide restructuring in the EMEA business



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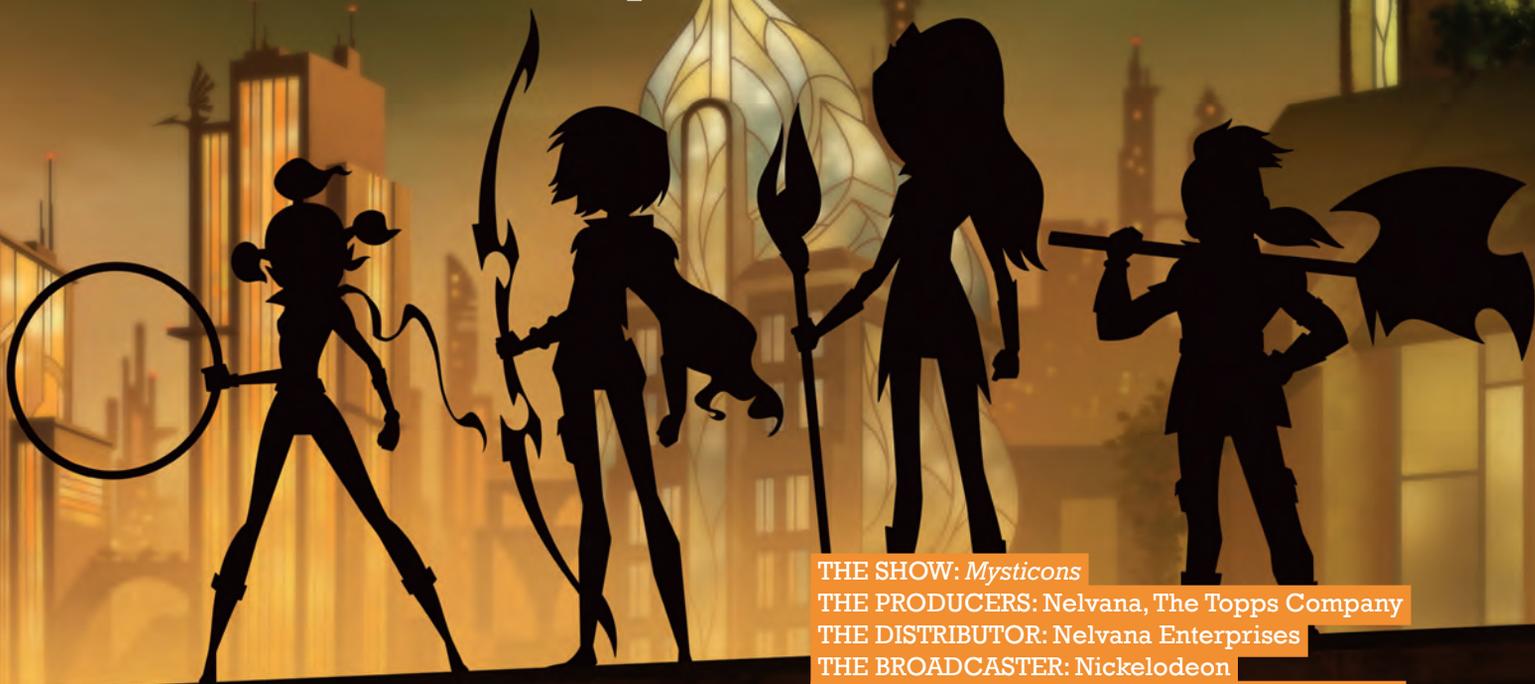
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Mysticons to battle Winx in girls fantasy-action battle



THE SHOW: *Mysticons*

THE PRODUCERS: Nelvana, The Topps Company

THE DISTRIBUTOR: Nelvana Enterprises

THE BROADCASTER: Nickelodeon

THE CONCEPT: Fantasy adventure series, which has been reworked with female protagonists

The *Mysticons* will be taking on the girls of *Winx Club* when it launches on Nickelodeon in the US and around the world in 2017. Originally a fantasy-action adventure with boy heroes, the whole project has been reworked, and the main protagonists are now four girls who transform into the titular legendary warriors.

From boys-action specialist Nelvana and The Topps Company, part of Michael Eisner's The Tornante Company, the series was adapted from the ground up, explains Nelvana Enterprises co-chief Andrew Kerr. "After *Bakugan* and *Beyblade*, which have generated over a billion dollars in merchandising, this was going to be the next big boy's-action brand. But then there was a recognition from the partners that at this moment in time the project would be better served if we had female protagonists."

Winx, whose parent Rainbow counts Viacom as a shareholder, has been on Nick in the US without attaining the same success it has had elsewhere, and the channel is looking for an action toon for girls in the 6-to-9s.

"Nick is a key partner and also wanted to be in that girls space," Kerr says. "All of the partners know that if you can get that girl audience, boys will come along for the ride too. You can see that from various comic-based movies, or DC's *DC Super Hero Girls*, and TV shows such as *Ladybug*."

The roster of partners is rounded out by Playmates Toys, which is behind the latest range of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* merchandise.

The half-hour show follows the *Mysticons* on their quest to reach the fabled Codex before their nemesis, Necrafa, Queen of the Undead.

The IP was developed by Topps and inspired in part by their trading-card games. Set in a 'Manhattan-meets-Middle Earth' urban-fantasy environment, the show will be a mix of 2D and CGI animation when it enters production later this year.

Former Disney boss Eisner is among the exec producers, and the first scripts are in, with Sean Jara (*Naturally Sadie*, *The League of Super Evil*) on writing detail. Flipping the heroes to girls also allows for a slightly different kind of narrative, Kerr says. "Without stereotyping, it does allow for a different kind of storytelling," says Kerr. "It can be more nuanced and more centred on the relationships in there, as many girls are more advanced than boys at this age."

Nelvana and Nick teamed for the international roll-out of *Little Charmers*, and with the Viacom channel launching *Mysticons* globally, a lot of rights have been taken off the table. At MIPJr, however, Nelvana Enterprises, which is distributing, will be having early-stage talks with buyers about second windows and territories not covered by the Nick deal.

We'll find out in 2017 whether the *Mysticons* are a match for the *Winx* girls and whether they can succeed where *Winx* has not, in breaking the US market. Kerr says: "*Winx* really speaks to its audience and has done well in Europe, but we expect *Mysticons* to succeed globally." **TBI**

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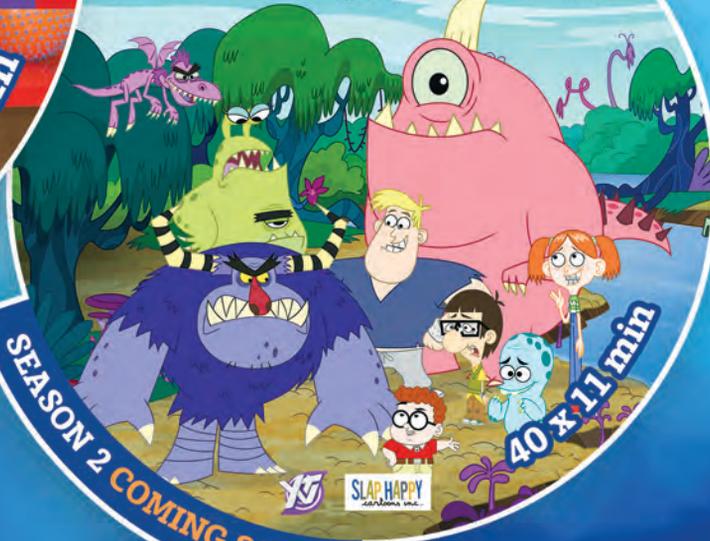


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ABC has a new Wiggle in Cannes

The line-up of The Wiggles has changed over the years, with Emma Watkins joining in 2010 as the Australian song-and-dance troupe's first female member. The distribution arm of Australian public broadcaster the ABC, ABC Commercial, is selling the show internationally and launching it at MIPJunior. Sharon Ramsay-Luck, head of sales and business development for the distributor, tells TBI about the new *Wiggles* spin-off

The Wiggles has been a massive success. What are the similarities and differences between this new show and the original?

The biggest difference between this programme and the original *Wiggles* is that there is now a new line-up of entertainers with the only original member being Anthony Wiggle, which includes the first-ever female Wiggle – Emma, and she now has her own show.

One of the similarities is that the wonderful Emma Wiggle showcases the winning formula of warmth, entertainment and educational values of the classic *Wiggles* programmes along with their signature music and dance. This is as popular today as it was when *The Wiggles* first began.

Is Emma already well-known in Australia?

Emma is an outstanding star among Australian preschoolers: her young fans are known as the 'Emma Army' and, given her huge popularity, it is only logical that *The Wiggles* showcase her in her own series. She not only appeals to the female demographic of preschoolers being a strong female character, but the boys love her just as much.

How do you anticipate broadcasters programming this four-minute series?

The short duration of the series – 30x4mins – makes it flexible. It can be placed as a stand-alone series or as a filler. It is also the perfect complement to a package of *Wiggles* programmes.

Where does this type of live-action music-based show perform well?

The Wiggles have a wide global appeal across a range of broadcast platforms – and kids worldwide engage, dance and sing wherever they are.

How did it perform on ABC Kids?

It premiered on ABC Kids on Monday, June 1, 2015. The series aired in the morning and afternoon, at 9.55am and 3.55pm, and in its first month achieved 57% audience share among



THE SHOW: *Emma*
THE PRODUCER: *The Wiggles*
THE DISTRIBUTOR: ABC Commercial
THE BROADCASTER: ABC (Australia)
THE CONCEPT: Emma Watkins from *The Wiggles* gets her own spin-off

children aged 0-4 in morning slot. It has been a hit digitally as well, and in its first month was downloaded over half a million times.

Are you selling it as part of a Wiggles package – and, for example, in tandem with the new Wiggles Meet the Orchestra one-off?

Yes we are selling it as a one-off and part of a

Wiggles package which includes *Ready, Steady, Wiggle!* and the new one-hour programme *The Wiggles Meet the Orchestra*.

I can't overstate how popular Emma has become, and her popularity has underpinned the rejuvenation of *The Wiggles* in Australia and returned *The Wiggles* to the number one position in ABC DVD and digital sales. **TBI**



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Call to live-action



Dixi

Alison Homewood speaks to broadcasters and producers about the impact that the new kids live-action tax break is having on a challenged UK industry

Six months ago, the last in a clutch of UK production tax breaks came into force, offering 25% relief on children's TV shows complying with a points-based 'UK Cultural Test'.

The main beneficiary was expected to be live-action drama, given that a similar scheme for high-end primetime drama introduced in 2013 has been a runaway success, resulting in £79 (US\$122 million) million of tax credits being given out in the first year. Indigenous series including *Sherlock* and *Downton Abbey* benefitted, but also many foreign productions, including *24* and *Game of Thrones*, crossed the pond. The payout was against a production expenditure of £394 million in 2013/14, up from a mere £50 million in the previous year.

So will this gilt-edged incentive usher in a

new golden age of UK children's drama? Lime Pictures' joint-managing director, Kate Little, thinks so.

"The children's tax credit may stimulate drama production even more than in the primetime sector," she says. "There was a far greater need for it within the children's live-action environment than there was for high-end drama, so the success should be far greater."

Anne Brogan, co-director of Kindle Entertainment, isn't so sure. "Kids production is a different issue," she says. "There is a decrease, not an increase, in production. Foreign shows are unlikely to shoot here, as the overall budgets don't usually make it an enticing economic proposition to move the cast and production team to another country, even with a tax break. So in the kids area, I very much doubt the tax

break will increase production."

Zodiak Kids Studios' CEO, Michael Carrington, disagrees. "The minute it was announced, you could see people clambering for live-action production," he says. "We've been contacted by indies and broadcasters in other countries; people are definitely looking at the UK now. We've already greenlit two series using it – *Millie Inbetween* and *The Secret Life of Boys* – and it has definitely helped us.

Both Zodiak shows are commissioned by CBBC. The channel, which serves 6-12 year-olds, is the main UK home for locally produced drama. In 2014, it aired 1,170 drama hours, of which 89 were original first-run and 990 were produced in the UK. Of CBBC's £58 million commissioning budget, around 40% went on live-action.

“It’s becoming increasingly hard to fund drama at the level of sophistication we want to make it,” says CBBC controller Cheryl Taylor. “The audience demand and so the tax credit is important because closing the gap in the funding is often really hard to do; it’s instrumental in pushing that last piece through.”

Taylor is credited with re-invigorating CBBC kids drama since her arrival from BBC Comedy two years ago; commissions such as *Wolfblood*, *4 O’Clock Club*, *Hetty Feather* and *Hank Zipzer* are hugely popular.

Recently she announced a new initiative: ‘Fewer Bigger Better’. “We’ve been too quick to commission new shows and have not been sweating our assets,” she says. “I want to reduce our level of churn, so for this year and next I’ve commissioned new series of existing shows to give them time to build. Then you can reward the viewers with extended runs, but also tell more complex stories and let the audience grow with them.”

This is great news for producers behind existing shows, but not for other industry players. *Kindle* is a beneficiary because the

company is currently in production on the third series of both *Dixi* (see sidebar) and *Hank Zipzer*. The series is based on Henry ‘the Fonz’ Winkler’s best-selling books about the adventures of a 14-year-old dyslexic boy (distributed internationally by DHX Media). Anne Brogan warns, however: “Things are great for us as we have a lot of production on; but from an industry point of view, the contraction in commissioning hours is really quite devastating. With the commercial public service broadcasters doing almost nothing and the squeeze on the BBC, which we aren’t really even feeling yet, things are going to get worse than they are at the moment.”

Brogan also notes that the success of the high-end primetime drama sector has had an unwelcome knock-on effect on kids live-action production budgets, which she estimates have increased by 10% in the last two years. “Britain is a wonderful place to come and shoot drama, and the quality of the crew and the production teams is second-to-none: that’s recognised by companies around the world. But now skilled people are hugely in demand and can increase

their rates, and there are some grades – script editors, producers, sound – where there’s a real shortfall.”

Trying to address that shortfall is Sarah Joyce, children’s TV partnership manager at Creative Skillset, a government-funded agency that uses the TV Skills Fund to train production staff. The BBC Academy is the biggest contributor to the fund, along with Channel 4. It also receives a small amount from Channel 5, and £625,000 from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Productions that qualify for tax relief and contribute to the Skills Levy, a pot that is supposed to replace government funding that stops in March 2017, can take on subsidised trainees, as well as get funding to help junior staff transition to the next grade. Contributions to the Skills Levy are voluntary, however, and so far only one company has paid in, although Joyce is talking to four others. “It’s early days for children’s producers and we need to get the message out,” she says. “You get back 25% in tax credit and you invest 0.5% in skills, and there are loads of benefits on the production.”



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IN FOCUS: DIXI

One of CBBC's most original drama offerings is an online series called *Dixi*. Created by Kindle Entertainment's Melanie Stokes, a third series of 15 x 3'30" has just started production. "*Dixi* is an equivalent of Facebook," says Stokes. "It's a faux social website"

The show was born after an online bullying incident upset Stokes' 11-year-old daughter. "We were shocked, and it made me realise that this kind of behaviour goes on in schools all the time out of the teachers' line of sight. The kids involved don't make the connection between what they have written online and how the person concerned is affected. We wanted to create a show that's an etiquette guide to living a life online that would do what the older generation isn't doing yet: taking them by the hand to navigate them through that world and think about some of the things that might go wrong in that space, but also think about all the brilliant things you can do there"

Stokes took it to CBBC's Cheryl Taylor as a

traditional TV show with longer episodes. Taylor said she would rather put it online, 'the medium where it belongs'. "I had to make the episodes much shorter and get my head around what it means to create something that's truly interactive," says Stokes. "You are engaging with the audience in a very different way. They have a more intimate, personal connection with the material. They have voice, they want to comment and share, feel involved."

She decided a mystery storyline would provide the most interactive opportunities. Protagonist Shari's 'Dixi' account is 'jacked', her memories deleted, her password stolen and mean graffiti posted over her page, and she can't get back in to restore it. She feels online ego has been 'murdered', and she has to find the perpetrator. This is attemptint to teach kids to created passports that can't be cracked, and the soft message is how devastating this kind of event can be.

Season one cost just over £400,000, fully

funded by CBBC. It launched on Safer Internet Day, and two episodes were posted a day over 15 days on CBBC's YouTube channel. "The audience just found it," says Stokes. "*Dixi* was soon getting more hits than established brands." CBBC's Taylor backs this up: "Seasons one and two got over 300,000 unique visitors, with over 50% watching 75% of the assets, and we had 7,000 comments submitted on the 'Join In' page, with poems and stories, so viewers were properly immersed!"

There's been interest in the format, distributed by Zodiak Kids, from commercial and PSB stations around the world, but most don't have websites with the capacity to play the amount of video material, while the ABC in Australia has bought it to air on linear TV. In January 2016, the first two seasons will be repackaged into 11-minute episodes, incorporating some of the online audience's comments, and aired on CBBC. In the wake of *Dixi's* success, Taylor has commissioned another online series, *The Secret Life of Boys*, from Zodiak prodco The Foundation.

Joyce echoes Brogan's caution about the tax credit. "It's fantastic, but unless there are more commissions from more broadcasters then it isn't really going to make a difference," she says. "It has had a huge impact on wider high-end drama, but we haven't yet seen that trickle down with children's, and I think that's an issue."

And therein lies the rub. A ban on junk-food advertising during children's programming introduced in 2006 saw an almost instant withdrawal of ITV from kids TV, while Channel 4, another commercial PSB, largely ignores its remit to provide programming for teens. Milkshake! on Channel 5 is a preschool block that achieves high ratings through acquisitions rather than commissions; the older age group is not served. The claim that in terms of commissioning drama, CBBC is 'the only game in town' is heard all too regularly. But is it true?

One development has been the introduction of live-action drama to CBeebies by Controller Kay Benbow. Spurred on by her own childhood memories of watching *Heidi* and *White Horses*, she put a call out to the industry for drama pitches. "I wanted something that was considered drama or filmic in a way our other shows weren't," she says.

The appeal resulted in *Topsy and Tim*,

produced by Darrall Macqueen, and *Katy Morag* from Scotland's *Move On Up*. Both have done well: *Topsy and Tim* is the channel's top-rating show, while *Katy Morag* has won seven awards including the 2014 BAFTA for Best Children's Drama. Benbow put the majority of the funding into both series. "I won't pretend it's been easy, it's hard on a limited budget," she says. "The challenge for preschool drama is that the content is sufficiently demanding, but

not scary or worrying. Both those series have proved that our audience can deal with quite complex things, as they have quite complex things going on in their lives."

A third series proposed to Benbow was *Jamillah & Aladdin*, an original idea from Kindle. Jamillah is a contemporary British Asian girl who finds a lamp in her attic, which takes her back to ancient Baghdad where she meets Aladdin. As Benbow was considering it, Cheryl



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Taylor joined CBBC, and the pair decided to co-commission it as a show that ‘bridges’ from CBeebies to CBBC. It was shot in South Africa to get the Baghdad sunshine; coproducer Toonz

produced feature-quality special effects in its studios in southern India, and the soundtrack, by Montreal-based company Dazmo, uses Middle Eastern and American composers to

bring an authentic fusion. The Muslim element was carefully considered. “Anne and the team talked to imams, and took it very seriously and there’s a range of diverse writers,” says Benbow. “You don’t want to sit there and think this is an all-white team making this, and it absolutely isn’t. It’s just there; it’s not something that’s particularly mentioned. The jeopardy and the tension come from Jamillah bringing 21st century things into that ancient world.”

It took Brogan a long time to get the show into production. “There were a lot of times when people said no,” she says, “But I thought, ‘you’re wrong, I know kids will love it – magic, adventure, a boy and girl, contemporary, classical’ – I just knew it was a great combination.” Two 52x15mins series were commissioned back-to-back and distributor Imira Entertainment is launching it this MIPCOM.

The tax credit appears to have galvanised the two big US pay channels into action. “It has ‘unlocked’ our commissioning strategy – it was the linchpin for greenlighting *The Evermoor*

CONTESTABLE FUNDING

A phrase much touted in UK children’s TV circles is ‘contestable funding’. While not a new idea, it is significant that for the first time it is being floated in connection with children’s programming in the current government Green Paper on the renewal of the charter that outlines the remit of the BBC.

So what is it, and is it likely to provide a solution to the problems facing the industry? Kindle Entertainment’s Anne Brogan says: “Tax relief doesn’t create commissions, so we come back to the fundamental issue: if the spend is reduced massively the industry suffers, with or without tax relief.”

Children’s Media Foundation’s Anna Home says the introduction of the tax credit was a “welcome initiative from the government, but on its own, it will not be enough to redress the balance and restore the missing £55 million, which has disappeared from the kids sector since the 2003 Communications Act stopped ring-fencing children’s programming, and the subsequent junk-food advertising ban. Nor will it necessarily solve the local issue of providing culturally specific UK kids content”.

Simply put, the BBC finds itself in a monopoly position, not of its own making or desire, when

it comes to commissioning kids live-action drama. This is because ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 no longer care about an audience that constitutes just 18% of the population.

A contestable fund would be an additional pot of money that would encourage more production, and no one has any issue with that. The downside is that there is no detail in the Green Paper, but the fact it is mentioned there has made many in the industry fear that the fund would be expected to come from the BBC licence fee – and even, in the worst of all possible worlds, from the existing £72 million BBC Children’s annual budget.

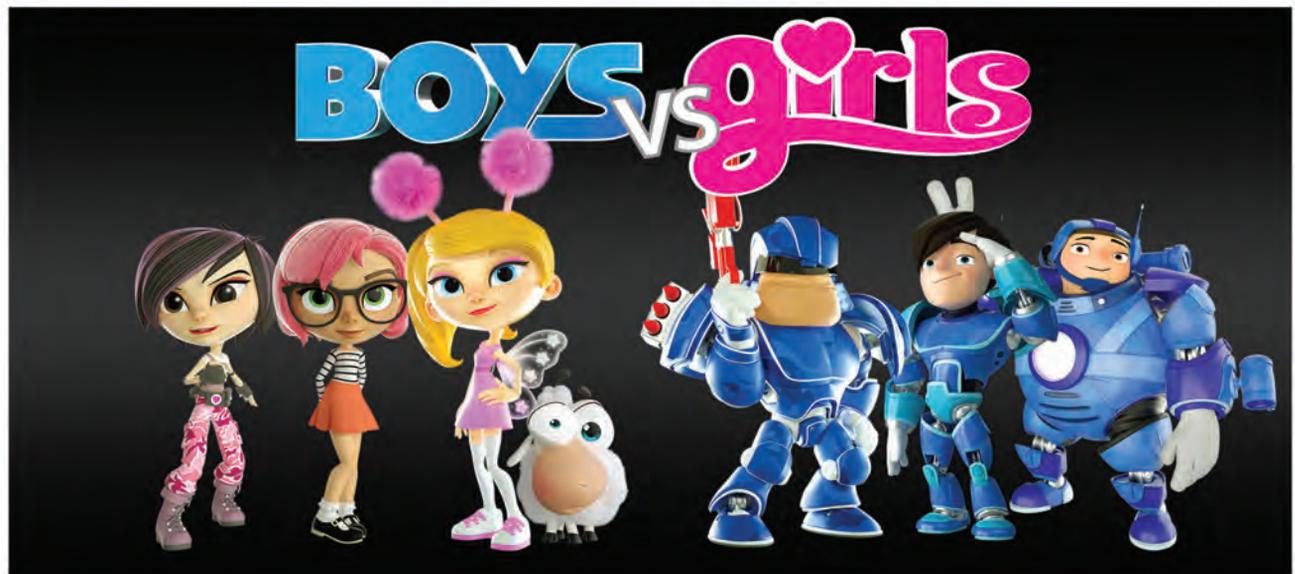
“If it’s top-slicing the BBC, it’s ridiculous, but if it’s an external fund, how will it work?” questions says Zodiak Kids Studios’ Michael Carrington. “Is it broadcasters, advertisers and toy companies paying into a fund? A lot of work needs to be done, but any dedicated fund for children’s drama has to be a good thing.”

Kindle’s Brogan claims the amount spent on original kids drama has decreased absolutely “phenomenally” from ten years ago. “So the kids lose out, but Britain as a leader in creative exports loses, too, because if we don’t create enough content, we can’t sell it around the

world and bring money back into the UK economy,” she says. “It is a win-win situation to spend more money on kids, but if a contestable fund does materialise, the commercial PSBs should match-fund the amount of money they receive from it.”

“If a contestable fund reduces the pot of available funding for children’s commissions by taking it from BBC Children’s, we’ll be vehemently opposed to that,” says Lime Pictures’ Kate Little. “The biggest challenge we have is finding buyers in the UK for our content, and that’s where the tax break has been helpful, because it’s opening up more international buyers for our content. However, we also need slots and funding from the major UK broadcasters. If a contestable fund is a route for CBBC or the other PSBs to have more money to spend on children’s content, fantastic”.

Children’s TV spokesman Oli Hyatt, from Blue Zoo Animation, is calling for an industry-wide working group, including representatives from industry regulator Ofcom, producers’ group PACT and all UK broadcasters, to sit down with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to thrash out the detail, opportunities and risks of a contestable fund, once and for all.



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Chronicles from Lime Pictures,” says David Levine, VP, programming and general manager of UK channels at Disney EMEA.

Lime’s Kate Little trumpets being the first company to sign up for the credit. “*Evermoor* is what tax breaks are all about,” she says. “Apart from the American lead, all the cast are British. We shoot in a stately home in the North West; the studio work is done in the middle of an industrial estate in Warrington, a town that’s definitely seen better times. You open a warehouse door and it’s like a mini-Burbank! We’re using the local resource – the steelworks opposite, local taxi firms and hotels – to deliver an extraordinary piece of television while investing in the local economy.”

Proving that this is indeed part of a new strategy, Disney EMEA has just announced *North Star*, a fully-funded 13x22mins commission from The Foundation, part of Zodiac Kids Studio. It is a remake of a successful Disney Israel format, and like The Foundation’s other productions, it will be shot in Northern Ireland, a part of the UK that is definitely benefitting from the increase in drama production. Disney’s Levine says: “We’re

keen to develop complementary content to what is produced out of our LA hub, which tends to be sitcom formats. We know content that’s a bit more dramatic and that can be serialised has a strong appeal for our UK and European audiences.”

Nickelodeon International’s senior VP, production and development, Nina Hahn, agrees. The Viacom channel’s last big live-action series was the successful *House of Anubis*. “UK kids are raised on drama,” she says. “American kids and other kids around the world are not, so it’s our job to figure out how to make UK drama travel, and I think *Anubis* was one of the first to try and do that. We wouldn’t shoot a multi-cam sitcom in England – what comes from here are fantastic mysteries and iconography that the world adores.”

Hahn will shortly announce the company’s first UK “dramedy” to be greenlit using the tax credit. “It’s such a great support of the production model here,” she says. “The direct hit on a per-episode basis is of immense interest to us given we are building a global

content business that can supplement the full-freight LA Hollywood model.”

As the tax credit scheme shakes down, there will doubtless be tensions between broadcasters and producers as to where the benefit actually goes. Zodiac’s Carrington says: “There’s a danger people see it as revenue, and I don’t think the spirit of a tax credit is revenue. We are putting it on screen, not in our pockets, and broadcasters will have to think carefully about how much they fund us and not reduce their licence fees based on the tax credit we happen to get down the road. There’s pressure on them to get value for money and pressure on us to reduce production costs, and somewhere in all that we have to be grown up about it.”

One solution is more coproduction. CBBC’s Cheryl Taylor says kids are “used to these amazingly gorgeous games and copper-bottomed movies with special effects, and so their appetite for high-end is getting bigger and bigger, and we are going to be relying more and more on copros to keep up with that appetite”.

CBBC has even made two acquisitions: *The Next Step*, a dance-school reality drama from Temple Street Productions in Canada, and *Nowhere Boys* from NBCUniversal-owned Australian prodcos Matchbox Pictures.

Unless the commercial PSBs can be persuaded to re-enter the children’s market via a new ‘contestable fund’ (see sidebar), UK drama producers pursuing local ideas will have to contend with the BBC’s finite cash and airtime hours. However, for companies with a more varied slate, the tax credit offers opportunities in the form of foreign broadcaster commissions, as long as they take the advice of Nickelodeon’s Hahn. “Our strategy is to make for the global taste-bud, and in order to do that, producers and creators who want a commission must come up with a voice, a POV and an idea that will be relevant to the global kid and not just the regional kid,” she says.

Lime Pictures’ Little is up for the challenge. “Kids’ drama is part of our international growth strategy,” she says. “What’s brilliant is being able to produce for the US market from the UK.”

“We’re working with new broadcasters, particularly Disney, so we feel stimulated,” says Zodiac’s Carrington. “We’ve also been talking to Netflix and Amazon. The top 20 programmes in the world for 4-15 year olds are mostly live-action shows, and all platforms want to deliver to their audience what they want, and they want live action.” **TBI**



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Forum focus: animation ages up

Preschool projects have dominated Cartoon Forum since it moved to Toulouse on a permanent basis in 2012. This year, producers wanted to show there are older age groups hungry for animation, too. Jesse Whittock reports



Cartoon Forum organiser Marc Vanderweyer began this year's Cartoon Forum in Toulouse, France, with a bold assertion: some 36% of all projects that have come through the 25-year-old annual European pitching event have gone to receive financing as a direct result of their representation, with the number rising to 42% in the past ten years. In all, 645 projects have been financed to the tune of a combined €2.2 billion (US\$2.5 billion).

It's statistics such as these that saw the 2015 edition of the Forum welcome a record 900 delegates for the first time. Producers,

especially in the animation game, struggle greatly to finance their programming the world over, and the opportunity to meet with potential partners and – more importantly – money men and women is one too great to turn down.

For the past few years, however, it has seemed like most of that money has been directed in just one direction: preschool. Animation for the youngest age group has dominated pitching sessions for some time now, with one broadcaster quipping to TBI last month: "Pick two random names out the air, make one a friendly monster and you'll be a hit at the Forum."

This year's market had 29 preschool entries, just down on the 31 from a year before, but there was a sense this batch was more diverse, making these efforts stand out more. It also suggests that development trends are moving in more experimental directions.

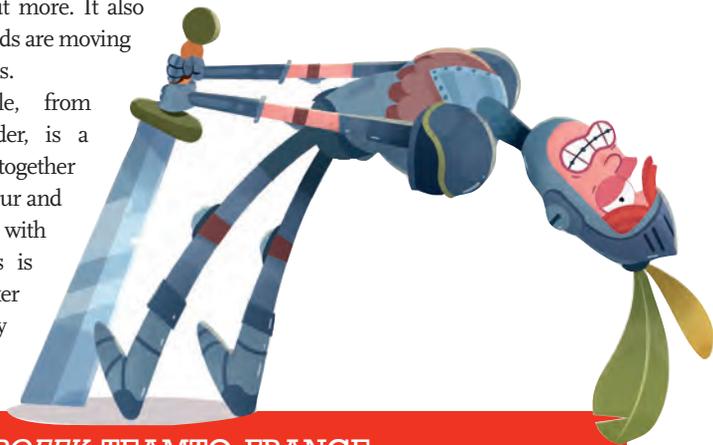
Animanimals, for example, from Germany's Studio Film Bilder, is a 26x4mins show bringing together bright colours, absurdist humour and animal stories. Coproduced with Switzerland's SFR, the series is from upcoming kids filmmaker Julia Ocker and has a relatively modest budget of €750,000.

"Julia has a lovely talent for short-form preschool animation," said RTÉjr's executive producer, animation and independent commissioning, Pauline MacNamara.

Meanwhile, *Little Wild Worlds*, which is from Scandinavia's Studio Auto and Norway-based British producer/biologist Ruth Dyson, is planned to run to 26 episodes of seven minutes and uses a cut-out animation style to tell stories of babies as they learn to become fully-grown animals. The World Wildlife Fund is already involved, and Alison Stewart, head of production at preschool channel CBeebies, said it was "great to see animals depicted naturally in their habitats". Elin Raustøl from NRK was also full of praise, noting she had been tracking it "since the beginning", while Vicky



Max & Maestro



TOON FOCUS *HEROEK*, TEAMTO, FRANCE

Corinne Kouper on an animated comedy that looks into the domestic life of a superhero who lives in a flat with his friends

Why would buyers be interested in *HeroEek*? What makes it unique?

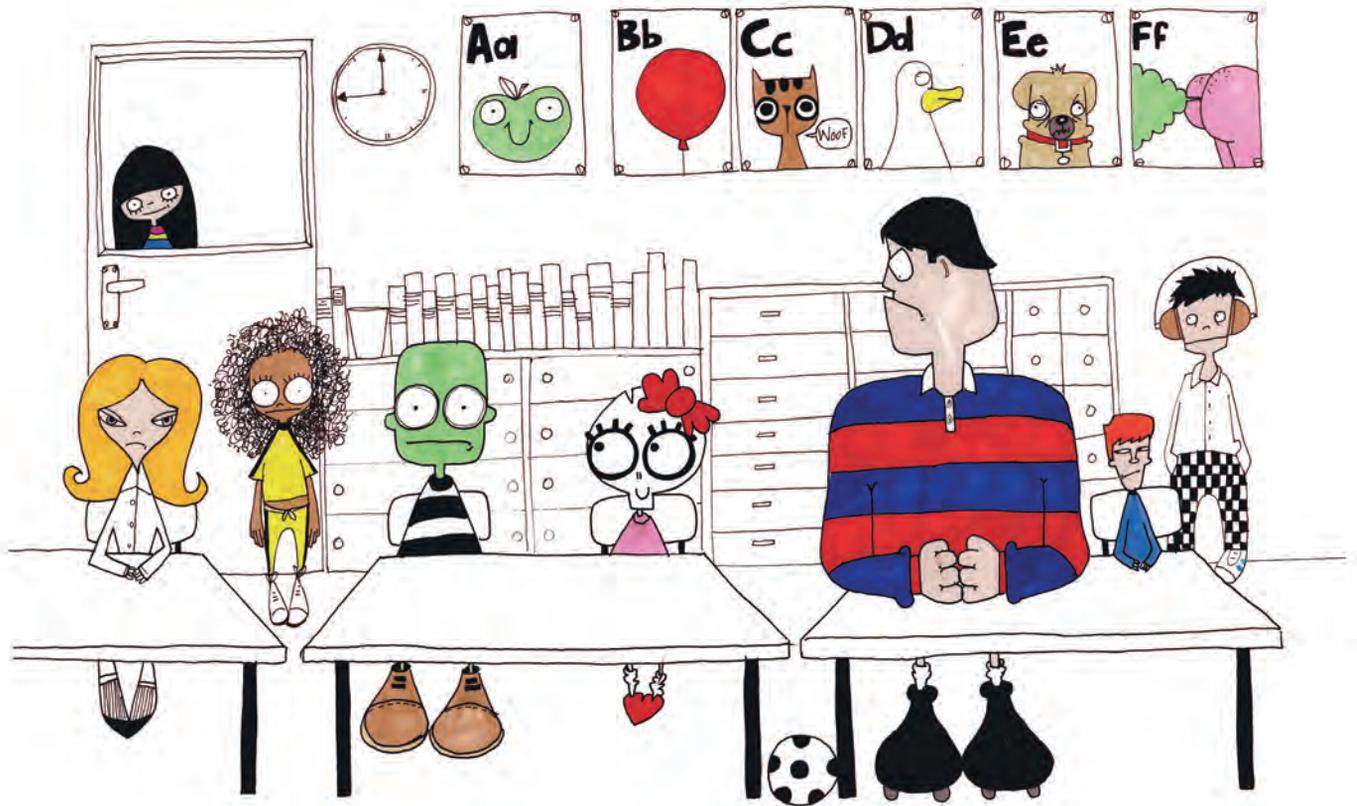
This is a project at the crossroads of several different formats: the best entertainment from the web (those things that make kids laugh even if not made for that target audience) mixed with well-known box-office pop-culture icons such as *Men in Black*, Bruce Lee and *Pirates of the Caribbean* and the buddy sitcoms that are key to the success of any major channel. It's an all-in-one animated show for kids, a concept that does not yet exist.

Who is supporting it and what types of partners do you want?

Given that this series is directed at the YouTube generation and will have some digital assets such as real-life blogs of the characters, the best partners would be strong traditional kids channels with a broadly developed non-linear presence, as well as the new players in TV streaming who are increasingly involved in kids animation.

What are the key challenges in your local market?

Since we produce for international audiences, the challenges in our market are the same as in the rest of the world. This means we have to take into account as much as possible the delinearisation of TV consumption, and for this reason our strategy of concentrating on more unusual and higher-quality projects has become ever more crucial.



Schroderus at Finnish pubcaster YLE liked that ‘real skin’ was used to animate the animals. The show will have a budget of between €1.5 million and €2 million depending where it is produced, Dyson told delegates.

However, a real standout development trend this year was the number of projects in the 6-10 and 9-11 categories. Added together these totaled 47, with most focusing on the 7-9 spectrum.

Opening the Forum’s largest arena, the Blue Room, was *Max & Maestro*, which comes from Monello Productions in France and MPI in Italy. The 52x11mins show follows a hip-hop-loving boy who discovers a love of and talent for classical music through an older musician, who is based on the real-life Argentinian conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim.

With a budget of €7 million planned, Rai Fiction, German pubcaster HR and France Télévisions are attached. A delivery date for the first episodes is scheduled for 2017.

Easily one of the best-received pitches was Sixteen South’s *Frankie and Doris*, a 7-11-skewing comedy about a pair of school age misfit best friends, one a downbeat green boy who has never met his father and the other an excitable skeleton girl orphan.

Canal+ is supporting the show, whose first

TOON FOCUS FRANKIE AND DORIS, SIXTEEN SOUTH, UK

Michelle Forde on a 52x11 mins animated sitcom for 7-11 year olds about a pair of outsiders, a green boy and a boney skeleton girl, who form an unbreakable friendship

Why would buyers be interested? What makes it unique?

Frankie and Doris is unique in that it is a comedy but also has lots of heart. The stories are centred on the characters’ real lives and will reflect the lives of our audience. The show also has a unique look: a quality, hand-drawn, 2D-animated series with artwork from Will Broome, who is a prolific designer in the fashion industry and has worked extensively for Marc Jacobs, Gucci, Missoni and Vans.

Who is supporting it and what types of partners do you want?

Our lovely friends at Canal+ supported *Frankie and Doris* at Cartoon Forum. We are looking for more broadcasters to come on board as a prebuy, and we’re also keen to receive offers from consumer-products-licensing partners.

What are the key challenges in your local market?

The UK market, our home market, is as challenging as many others. There are fewer buyers spending less on kids content, and that means we always need to presell to a number of international territories before we can greenlight a project. The BBC is going through a testing time of its own at the moment and we, along with other indie producers, are calling on the UK government and the leadership of the BBC to protect children’s output. The UK tax credit is great for animation and live-action content, but we still need buyers to commit to decent licence fees so we can make the quality content that we so much want to.

TOON FOCUS *JESSY AND NESSY*, JAM MEDIA, IRELAND

John Reynolds on a preschool comedy mystery series revolving around two unlikely best friends: a fun-loving, six-year-old girl and a tall friendly monster that can only be seen when its human pal is wearing special glasses

Why would buyers be interested? What makes it unique?

Jessy and Nessy is like no other show they've seen before. We believe



it will resonate with buyers and the target audience, not only through the narrative but also through a strong visual offering. We are using a combination of styles, including 2D, live puppetry, CG, miniature backgrounds and a live-action Jessy, and new formats, to create a world full of humour, drama and mystery.

Who is supporting it and what types of partners do you want?

Jam presented the project for the first time at Cartoon Forum, with the support of our national broadcaster, RTÉ. Our goal is to secure broadcast commitment from like-minded parties who thoroughly buy into the concept and have a sense of ownership from day one as we move the strong development material onto the screen.

What are the key challenges in your local market?

We are lucky to have a very supportive home broadcaster in RTÉ and the backing of the Irish Film Board and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. But due to budget restrictions and the lack of other indigenous broadcasters focusing on kids programming, the main challenge is still securing the necessary funding in order to produce the quality of show we are renowned for. As an Irish company in a position to avail ourselves of tax incentives of up to 32% of the eligible spend through Section 481, we endeavour to reach beyond our borders.

A promotional graphic for the animated series 'Arthur and the Minimoys: The Series'. It features a young girl with orange hair and large eyes, wearing a green dress and a purple flower in her hair. She is looking towards the viewer. To her right is a golden sword with a cross-shaped hilt, resting on a stone base. The background is a lush green forest with large leaves and water droplets. The title 'ARTHUR AND THE MINIMOYS THE SERIES' is written in white, stylized letters. On the left side, there is vertical text: '© 2006 - EUROPA CORP - AVALANCHE PRODUCTIONS.' and the EuropaCorp Television logo. At the bottom left, a purple circle contains the text 'PREVIEW AT MIPCOM 2015 R7.C1'. At the bottom right is the Studio 100 Media logo.

TOON FOCUS *KITCHEN TALES*, OPINIONATED MEDIA, GERMANY

Heiko Schulze on a preschool show set in a world where kitchen utensils come to life when Granny, the easily distracted owner of the kitchen, leaves to have a chat with her neighbours

Why would buyers be interested? What makes it unique?

I think we have some strong points that investors or buyers might find interesting. The project was planned as a coproduction between the Czech Republic and Germany from the beginning. That gives us immediate access to two markets and financial-structuring possibilities. Germany and the Czech Republic have a long tradition of creating animated series. Combining cultural and artistic influences from both countries, we can create something visually interesting that travels well and works in a

lot of European markets.

What are the key challenges in your local market?

For an independent filmmaker, especially in animation, it's hard to enter the market.

Classical film or series formats are usually faster and cheaper to develop and produce than animation, so you have to cope with this problem. The competition is huge, and it's hard to convince broadcasters to take a risk and commit to a new brand.



52x11mins season will cost an estimated €4.1 million. As its producer is UK-based, the show is eligible for the British animation tax break.

The slightly acerbic tone of the series was a surprise to many onlookers, who know producer Sixteen South for softer Cartoon Forum preschool efforts *Claude* and *Lily's Driftwood Bay*, both of which are now in production. "We like the universe and the creativity, and I'm looking

forward to the series and what they do with it," said a TF1 exec in attendance.

The Forum also continued the trend in rebooted classics, with new versions of *Marco Polo*, French novel *Belle & Sebastian* and Finnish characters *The Moomins* on show, the latter two from Gaumont Animation and Canada's PVP, and France's Pictak Cie and Finland's Handle Productions respectively.

Belle & Sebastian has a €6.5 million budget, with France's M6, Switzerland's SRC and RTS, and Belgium's VRT attached. Germany's ZDF has begun negotiations for a broadcast deal.

Elsewhere, buyers expressed interest in *Bubblebit & Miaou*, a comedy detective action series that comes from prolific Polish production company GS Animation; YouTube channel-inspired comedy *Xephos & Honeydew*, which is from Eye Present; 1x26mins special *The Boy Who Switched Off the Sun* from Fourth Wall Creative, a UK commercial and animated brands company that's moving into television IP creation; and *Iggy and the Missing Links*, whose producers have the not-insignificant ambition to make their show "Europe's rival to *SpongeBob SquarePants*".

New British-based firm Adorable Media and post-production company Framestore are coproducers, with Cartoon Network EMEA backing the £6.1 million (US\$9.3 million) project, a slapstick comedy set in the early days of mankind when various species were still evolving.

The series follows a semi-evolved elephant, who is convinced he will become a bird. Production is scheduled to begin next year, with delivery the following year. **TBI**



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LAST WORD



CHRISTOPHER SKALA

‘Why don’t you start your own production company?’

For over 20 years, colleagues and friends have repeatedly asked me, ‘Why don’t you start your own company?’ And for 20 years my answer has always been the same: ‘Because I have no faith in a business model that relies on my ability to persuade broadcasters to let me do the kind of programming I want to do.’ My area of expertise is the global kids content business, and that sector has seen tremendous upheavals caused by online piracy, the proliferation of digital competitors and platforms (thereby slicing and dicing the ad spend), and misguided advertising regulations.

They say that for every action there’s a reaction; and so I find myself at the helm of a new kind of production company – TaDaKids – which I conceived with my cofounders and spent the past 17 months modeling before pitching to a range of potential investors.

We launched on September 1 with little or no fanfare, and with full and significant backing from [private investor] Sandbox Partners.

I couldn’t be happier. I feel as though the future looks brighter than it’s looked for ten years or more. How can this be?

As the traditional content-funding model

imploded, the future, to those of us concerned with a plurality of buyers and a vibrant global creative community, looked bleak. I had no faith that any kind of government intervention could dig us out of the hole (though they could certainly dump us in one). I have kept watch, since 2007, for the tell-tale signs of an emerging, organically-emergent funding model. One began to become apparent around 2011, when at the same time YouTube suddenly announced that it was going to commission a limited number of content channels.

Interestingly, YouTube’s experiment to encourage traditional content creatives to engage with its increasingly successful platform may have sent those creatives off in the wrong direction. By that I mean that YouTube may have encouraged them to misunderstand the fundamental economic rules by which the platform operated. Much of the content commissioned and created didn’t stand a chance of recouping its costs.

For me and my partners, getting to grips with the economic realities of digital content also allowed us to see a new type of content creativity, which we found exciting precisely because no broadcaster would either understand it, or

commission it. Creatives that we’re working with – schooled in traditional concepts of quality, character and story structure – were quick to understand the challenges and opportunities of this new model.

In content-production terms, one’s cost-per-minute for any type of production medium – be it CG-animation, stop-frame animation, live-action puppetry, live-action comedy or whatever – couldn’t be more than US\$500 per minute. Some of TaDaKids content will cost no more than US\$75 per minute.

Make no mistake: this is achievable not by eschewing so-called production values. It’s achievable by a radically different approach to creativity and what exactly constitutes ‘content’.

Successful YouTube children’s content is all about passion and intimacy, and there are some very good, creative and successful preschool channels already out there. They are ‘one-offs’. TaDaKids hopes to generalise from their successes and create a systematic process in order to prove a viable, alternative IP-creation-funding model that can reach an audience directly, without the traditional struggles associated with accommodating broadcasters, brand managers, toy companies and distributors.

In the end, and in a much more direct and transparent manner, the success or otherwise of any idea will be determined by the target demographic. Should we prove successful, it should be good news for everyone involved in content, and not just in the kids space.

My fingers are very firmly crossed. **TBI**

Prior to setting up TaDaKids, Christopher Skala held senior roles at Guinness World Records and Hit Entertainment. He has also been a producer at Tiger Aspect

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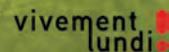
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