

# TBI Kids

Television Business International

**Public interest**  
BBC's kids chief  
on reclaiming  
local animation  
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**Going global**  
Tracking a Chinese  
animation's journey  
to MIPCOM  
**Page 8**

# Tobie Lolness

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TOO**



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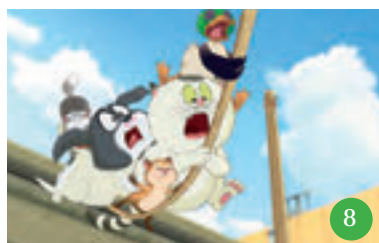
**YES!**



# TBI Kids October/November 2023



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## Tech & Analysis Tim Westcott

# Why FAST is suited to children's audiences

**“While children’s channels certainly have a niche on FAST TV, the economics do not support originals on any but the lowest of budgets”**

Some time ago, we surveyed the children’s programming on UK TV channels for a presentation. One of the UK public service channels was scheduling episodes of the same pre-school show around the clock. At the time, this seemed to be a waste of valuable broadcast spectrum, but it now turns out that channel was just a few years ahead of its time.

The rise of FAST channels has been one of the talking points of the last year or so in media, even though the general concept has been around for longer. The acronym stands for free ad-supported streaming television. Unlike traditional linear ad-funded channels, FAST channels are fully distributed via digital networks that are fully addressable and are therefore perfectly suited to targeted advertising.

FAST platforms include PlutoTV, part of the Paramount empire, consumer electronics manufacturers LG, Roku and Samsung (the growth of smart TVs has been a key dynamic in the rise of FAST) and newcomers like Plex and Rlaxx.

Channels available on FAST services are a mix of brands that have moved from traditional TV distribution platforms and channels that originated as on-demand services (usually YouTube in the children’s space). Many are single-IP channels: Nickelodeon’s archive is particularly prominent in FAST, with *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *iCarly*, *Dora The Explorer* and *Blue’s Clues* channels among a raft of others.

Crucially, channels are curated rather than being algorithm driven. In many ways, they tap into a consumer preference for passive, ‘lean-back’ viewing as an alternative to on-demand services. The children’s audience – generally more prone to watch back-to-back episodes of the same show on repeat (as parents of young children will wearily attest) – is perfectly suited to FAST.

Omdia’s snapshot of FAST channels in Q1 this year identified 85 children’s FAST channels in the US, 53 in Germany and 39 in the UK. The pre-eminence of the US is no surprise given that it is well in advance of other markets in terms of development, with the US and Canada combined accounting for 90% of global FAST channel ad revenues.

The main platform for the genre in the US is PlutoTV, with Nick-based channels featuring prominently, as well as Moonbug’s *Little Baby Bum*, the Lego Channel and *Yu-Gi-Oh*. Roku is also a key player in the US with 26 children’s channels, while LG has 24. Some 23 of the children’s channels are single-IP – the others feature a mixture of content.

The next largest FAST markets outside the US are Germany and the UK, and here Pluto TV is also the leading player in children’s FAST, with 30 channels in Germany and 10 in the UK. Rakuten TV is active in both countries, with 10 channels in the UK and seven in Germany, and Samsung has seven children’s FAST channels in both countries.

After Paramount, the most active children’s channel owners in the FAST channel space are WildBrain, Toon Goggles, Moonbug and Mattel. These are mostly companies that have a sizeable archive of programming available, ideally with an established audience and strong branding. Channel operators have told us that 100-150 hours of content is a minimum for a FAST channel. The schedule also needs to be refreshed, and many single-IP channels will have a limited shelf life.

There are a variety of business models for FAST channels. Typically, content owners would share revenues from their channel with the platform owner (with another cut going to the technology partner). The split is usually 60/40 in favour of the channel provider. The other major model is inventory share, where the channel owner sells some of the advertising itself. A less frequent model sees the platform paying an annual fee to the content owner and keeping 100% of ad revenues.

While children’s channels certainly have a niche on FAST TV, the model will not work for all types of content and the economics certainly do not support original production on any but the lowest of budgets. Omdia’s consumer research also indicates that while the heaviest users of FAST skew young, families with children under-index as FAST users. Children’s channels account for just 5% of the overall FAST channel offer in the US and 7% in the UK. **TBI**

Tim Westcott is senior principal analyst, digital content & channels, at research powerhouse Omdia. TBI and Omdia are both owned by Informa

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# A licence to thrill

In a wide-ranging conversation, Mark Layton talks to BBC kids' chief Patricia Hidalgo about the UK pubcaster's content demands, the myriad challenges facing the children's sector and her mission to create more local animation

**A**s director of children's and education for the BBC, Patricia Hidalgo holds arguably one of the most important roles in shaping the landscape of kids' programming in the UK.

In her position at the public broadcaster, which is the biggest commissioner of children's content in the country, Hidalgo is responsible for leading the department's operations and content strategy across the BBC's Bitesize, CBeebies and CBBC services, as well as for kids programming on VOD platform, BBC iPlayer.

Her division commissions and acquires content for children aged 0-12 across all genres, from cartoons to news, with a remit to broadcast shows that inform, educate and entertain young audiences through local commissions. What she is looking for right now is "scripted comedy and drama, original UK animation and compelling, ambitious, factual entertainment covering the whole breadth of contemporary children's interests," Hidalgo tells TBI.

BBC Children's and Education will be ordering around 350 hours of original content for 2023/24, but those slots have almost already been filled, she says.

"In the case of factual, entertainment and drama, timing for commissioning of this content can be from six months to one year before we need the show on-air. On the other hand, when it comes to animation, we do tend to commission much further in advance, sometimes up to two years before we need it."

These lead times are only expanding, says the exec, with it becoming "harder and harder to find all the third-party funding we need to commission some of our shows." For this reason, the gap between commission and production is getting longer, she adds.

Money is tight all round, with the rising cost of production hitting the whole industry. Added to that, the UK TV licence fee, the BBC's primary source of funding, was frozen by the government until 2024, compounding the issue for the pubcaster.

What the BBC can contribute towards a production "really depends on the show, where it is produced, how much the producer can raise, if it is a UK show or a foreign commission, if it is hyper-local, or if it has got potential to find international sales or co-producers," says Hidalgo, who joined from WarnerMedia in 2020.

**"BBC Children's is known for taking risks and making new formats and shows no commercial channel would dare make for children"**



"Our needs are many, our funds are limited and we have a set of obligations. Our primary remit is to bring the best content to our UK audience whilst we also support the UK creative industry, so our contribution will take all these parameters into consideration before we decide how much we can or should invest."

## Seeking partnerships

One way in which Hidalgo is looking to make her budget go further is "by increasing our co-pro partnerships and by looking very carefully at what we greenlight. There is no space for shows that don't help us build iPlayer."

There is also a balance to be had: "BBC Children's is known for taking risks and making new formats and shows that no commercial channel would dare make for children," says Hidalgo. But that doesn't

mean shows can't return, with ground-breaking titles of their time such as *Numberblocks*, which teaches mathematics to children from the age of four, and historical sketch comedy show *Horrible Histories*, "which after 13 years... is still a huge success."

Hidalgo tells TBI that co-productions have become "an essential part of our strategy" and highlights three projects for which she is actively seeking partners: pre-school series *The Underglow*; animated comedy adventure for 7-9-year-olds *Captain Onion's Buoyant Academy For Wayward Youth*; and dialogue-free slapstick animated comedy *Duck And Frog*.

These three shows are the animation finalists from the Ignite initiative, launched by Hidalgo in 2021 to unearth new animation talent and create more homegrown series that reflect the lives and culture of UK kids – and to specifically offer young viewers an alternative to imported American cartoons.

"Animation is the most watched and loved medium in TV for kids. The UK is one of the most talented and creative countries in the world when it comes to making TV programmes, and especially those for children. So many world classics and big TV animated pre-school children's brands have been created by British writers, creators and animation talent, from *Winnie The Pooh* to *Peppa Pig*.

"But one thing that's missing today is enough British animated titles for those aged seven and older. Most animated TV shows that kids consume today are coming from the US. The common language is our biggest problem. It means easy access for US studios and cheaper shows for most UK broadcasters to just acquire this US content."

Hidalgo says it is "imperative" that children over the age of seven start watching locally produced animation that has "British values and represents the UK culture."

### Original content focus

While BBC Children's and Education does acquire international content, it represents "a small percentage of our total content spend".

Australian animation *Vegesaurs* and evergreen Japanese favourite *Pokémon* are currently among the BBC's most successful acquisitions, but the primary focus remains on originals.

International hit *Bluey*, which is a co-commission between Australia's ABC and BBC Studios, and *Hey Duggee* and *Bing*, are doing "great numbers" for pre-schoolers on CBeebies, while *Supertato*, co-produced by BBC Studios Kids & Family and China's Tencent



*Phoenix Rise* (above) is a top performer with teen viewers, while *Bluey* (below) continues to be a hit with audiences

has also proved popular.

Then, for the 7-10 age group, live action comedy *Odd Squad* and animation *Boy Girl Dog Cat Mouse Cheese*, factual entertainment shows *Horrible Histories* and *Operation Ouch!* and period dramas *Dodger* and *Mallory Towers* are all top performers.

"Older kids, 10-12, have also reacted very positively to new seasons of our ongoing football drama *Jamie Johnson*, as well as a new entry *A Kid of Spark*, both titles hitting top CBBC spots on iPlayer," while school drama *Phoenix Rise* and *The Next Step* have "done phenomenally well" with the harder to reach 13-15 demos.

### Kids sector challenges

American imports are not the only thing pulling children away from local programming, with digital platforms such as YouTube, gaming and social media all competing for their attention. The BBC knows it needs to be on these platforms to maintain and grow brand awareness, says Hidalgo.

"We have devised a strategy to reach them in these other platforms, whether it is with an event to view the first episode of the new season of *The Next Step* live with the cast on TikTok, or a new themed game of *Jamie Johnson* on Roblox."

And these efforts appear to be paying off, reveals the exec: "We recently launched a *Newsround* channel on TikTok, which is actively bringing back audiences to our *Newsround* online offer every day and that's very encouraging."



There's also the competition from global streamers, with their deep pockets and even deeper children's programming libraries, but Hidalgo is confident in the BBC's position as a broadcaster straddling both linear and digital to differentiate its offering.

"It's a very competitive landscape out there, and yes, we have suffered like everyone else from the increased competition as well as the flood of new children's content coming from the US that UK kids have access to today. We do have one thing US streamers don't, and that's both a linear and a VOD platform that can complement each other."

BBC Children's uses its linear channels as family co-viewing opportunities and marketing windows, and Hidalgo says there has been a correlation between new children's brands being launched and promoted on these channels and their immediate pick-up by viewers when then launched on VOD service iPlayer.

The kids' exec is not averse to co-producing with the streamers either, so long as it doesn't compromise the public broadcasting remit.

"We have done quite a few [co-productions] and share acquired content between us," she says. "Disney, like us, also acquired *Bluey* for the UK, and we have a couple of co-pros with Netflix, *The Worst Witch* and *Get Even*."

"But we will not do co-pros with content that clearly defines who we are."

"It all depends on what, when, as well as how much we are investing, but yes, we are very much open to sharing acquired content and co-producing new shows with everyone."

## Tax incentives required

The challenges faced by the UK children's content industry are myriad: while streamers and new media are drawing audiences away, the biggest problem for producers, as ever, is financing.

Many in the sector lamented the loss of the BFI's Young Audiences Content Fund last year (though the BBC did not join the scheme), which saw rivals ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 use government money to support the creation of content for young viewers.

"In general, the BBC doesn't believe contestable funds are the best way to address failure within the market, which is why we did not participate. The government also felt that a contestable fund was not the most suitable way forward either," says Hidalgo.

The exec instead suggests that there are other initiatives that could help to solve the problem of the lack of investment in "culturally relevant British content" for children.

"We recently saw a change to UK production tax



Hidalgo is seeking partners for Ignite finalists *Captain Onion's Buoyant Academy For Wayward Youth* (top) and *Duck And Frog* (bottom)

credits. Whilst we welcomed this increase, unfortunately it is still not competitive enough if compared to the European Union (EU).

"I believe we can go further; an extra tax incentive to take the current UK tax rebate to somewhere between 30% to 35% to match what other EU markets have, which is linked directly to a point system to deliver enhanced culturally relevant content for UK children.

"This would generate further investment in British content made primarily for a British audience, but which could also have international appeal, increasing co-pro possibilities between broadcasters in the UK and other countries," says the former Disney exec.

Whatever the future holds, Hidalgo doesn't believe "this failing children's industry" is out of the woods yet. "In the last 10 years, new streamers and pay-TV competitor channels have been commissioning, producing and acquiring so much more content for children than ever before, but they have now stopped doing as much.

"The UK TV industry is not just local; it is global, and anyone you talk to is in the same position – there is less investment and less money overall for children's content. I think we are going to see more consolidation of studios and TV networks and more sharing of programmes and rights across the board globally." **TBI**



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## Paws-itive about pets

In the first instalment of a new strand of articles exploring how local shows are reaching new shores, Mark Layton goes behind the scenes at China's *Pet Hotel* to find out how the animated series made its way to MIPCOM





Robin Guo was inspired to create *Pet Hotel* after rescuing an array of animals

The 2D animated series, which is aimed at children aged 7–9, has already proven popular in its home country, taking the number one spot for family co-viewing during its debut on Tencent last year.

Produced by Tencent Video and animation studio Miaow's House, alongside GZ Art-land, the show follows the adventures of Lili the dog, Bubu the guinea pig and cats Nai Nai and Vicky as they welcome new animal friends to their home.

Unlike other hotels, the Pet Hotel, which has been converted from an old grocery store, is filled with high-tech inventions created by the pets' caregiver and hotel owner, Robin, with massage tables and automatic feeders on offer.

The animal buddies and their young owner face various quirky customers and their wacky pets every day, with life lessons being learned along the way.

Canada's WildBrain picked up the series for international distribution, outside of China, in August and Caroline Tyre, VP of global sales & rights strategy, tells TBI that the series stands out due to its "laugh-out-loud comedy, cleverly exploring the unique characteristics of different animals to deliver entertainment and humour, all the while teaching kids how to care for their pets."

### Bringing home strays

The original idea for the show came from Robin Guo, chairman of the board of Miaow's House and director of series, who was inspired to create *Pet Hotel* by the many stray animals that he has given a home.

"I have rescued over a dozen stray cats – and basically all the fluffy creatures around my neighborhood are waiting for me to start dinner every day. They all have their own unique personalities, but they all have one thing in common: they eat and then



**I**t has been almost 18 months since China's Tencent Video opened the doors to *Pet Hotel* and its colourful cast of furry friends are now looking for new homes on the international market by way of the Croisette.



leave, totally free,” shares Guo.

“One of the strays, a piebald tom, loved to be close to me and decided to live in my home. At first, I wanted to call it ‘奶奶’, which means Grandma, but I didn’t think it was the right name for him, so with a little word play I changed it to ‘乃乃’, which has the same pronunciation and is how Nai Nai, the protagonist in *Pet Hotel*, got his name,” Guo tells TBI.

“In addition to supervising my work, Nai Nai also likes to socialise – the puppies and other small animals around the house all know Nai Nai, and he is not shy about bringing them to the house for dinner and to the yard to play and rest.

“Surrounded by such a friendly and warm

The animated series has already proven a co-viewing hit for Tencent Video



atmosphere, I was inspired to create an animated sitcom with animals as the main characters. This was how *Pet Hotel* was born.”

## Pet problems

As for the animated animals and their adventures, Guo says that each of the fluffy characters face different challenges over the course of the series.

“For example, there’s the beautiful Arctic fox who has to cool down indoors and a social media influencer dog who gets anxious away from his cell phone,” Guo explains.

“Then there’s the twin rabbits who look almost exactly the same but have totally opposite personalities, the chameleon who is a master of hide-and-seek, and the little penguin who was supposed to go to Antarctica but got wrongly delivered.

“Even Robin, the hotel’s owner, has to worry about maintaining his relationship with his girlfriend. No matter how much of a mess they make, they all become good friends in the end, and the concept of ‘love’ overflows in every episode of *Pet Hotel*.”

Guo tells TBI that the focus of the series is on the relationship between pets and people.

“The core concept is that pets are irreplaceable family members. It popularises the scientific knowledge of animals and pet-loving and pet-keeping, transmits the goodness and virtue of human beings, and positively guides children’s hearts towards goodness through the way of getting along with small animals. Kindness and tolerance, sharing and giving - these are the core themes of this show.”

## New shores

The series made its debut in China on Tencent Video in February 2022, where it has been “a big success so far, proving well-loved by many pet lovers and family viewers alike,” says Selina She, director of kids’ IP, development and programming, at the streamer.

“Comedy is an important part of our original content offering and the universally hilarious humour in *Pet Hotel* that stems from the relationships between pets and humans has proved hugely popular,” She explains to TBI.

The Tencent exec adds that the show has also found a following in “children and grown-ups alike”, with its “cast of quirky characters” proving popular among multiple demos.

Having made an impact in China, WildBrain and Guo are now hoping that “the entertaining efforts”, as She puts it, of the *Pet Hotel* inhabitants will engage a new wave of buyers looking to book a stay. **TBI**



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# TBI Kids Distributor's Survey 2023

TBI's annual survey delving into the latest developments around global distribution is back and bigger than ever. In this children's content-focused excerpt, we examine the biggest obstacles and opportunities facing the sector



# Steady growth

Children's content distributors have been expanding their catalogues and increasing their profits over the past 12 months, but changing studio strategies may mean fresh competition in the market

**A** strong children's content offering remains vital for global streamers and local broadcasters alike, though depleted budgets and shifting strategies have caused some turbulence in the sector over the past year, TBI's Distributor Survey has found.

The US studios' move from locking in their content on D2C services back to the old model of third-party sales does mean further competition, but revenue and profit appears to be steadily growing for these firms (mostly, see below) while maturing AVOD and FAST channels are providing new distribution avenues.

## Profit and loss

For the most part, kids content distributors reported a healthy 12 months, with three-quarters of all those surveyed reporting that both revenue and profits had risen over the past financial year.

A little over a quarter of respondents (26%) had seen revenue and profits increase by 20% or more, with a further 48% reporting rises of up to 19%. However, it wasn't all positive news, as a further 18% of respondents said that these figures were down by more than 20% on last year.

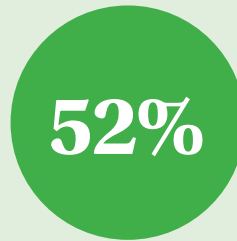
This is a step backwards from the results recorded in last year's Survey, which found that demand for kids' content had increased revenue and profits for all respondents by around the same percentages as this year, demonstrating roughly consistent growth were it not for the outliers.

While kids' content clearly remains in high demand, this inconsistency can probably be attributed to several factors, but perhaps most likely the financial strains being felt across the sector and the buyers now playing it safe with their acquisitions.

Indeed, risk aversion was identified as the greatest issue facing kids' distributors, with 63% of respondents identifying it as one of the greatest challenges of the past 12 months.

Other hurdles highlighted by respondents include market consolidation and the global rights models of streaming services, as well as delayed payments from these clients.

It's telling then, that looking to the year ahead,



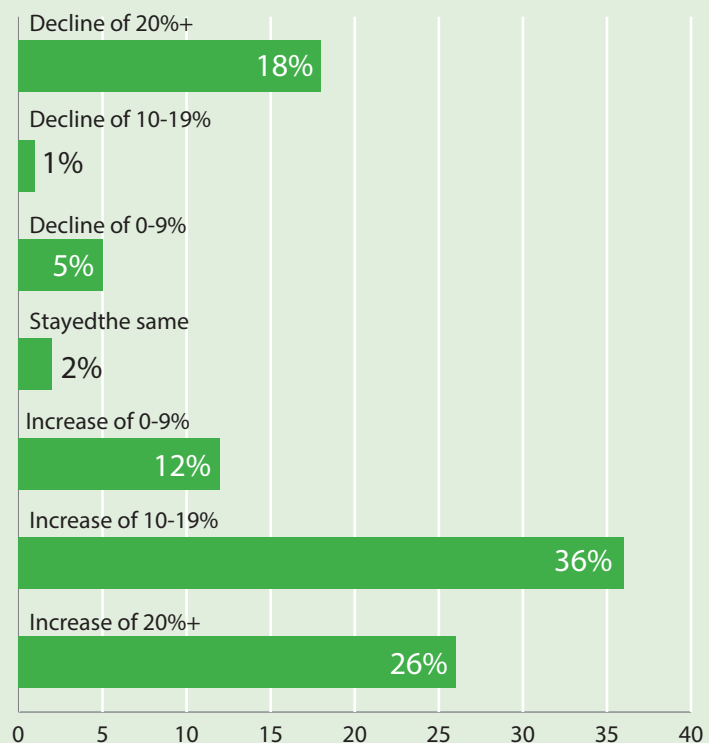
**52%**  
of kids' distributors are commissioning IP without a broadcast or streaming partner

a growing number of Survey respondents - 38% in total - are expecting to see declines in revenue of 20% or more, far more than the 18% drops seen over 2022/23. For those predicting revenue growth, the rate of increase expected is lower than last year.

Nevertheless, 77% reported that they have expanded their catalogues in the past year, while 64% said they believe the market will improve in the coming months.

Sharing their reasoning, respondents highlighted the opportunities created by streamers and broadcasters having less budget to spend on original content, the end to structural changes at major commissioners over the past 12 months and optimism that digital ad revenue will increase as audiences continue to shift to new methods of consumption.

## How did your annual revenue change in 2022/23 compared with the previous year?



“We finally feel that all the streamers have finished their reorganisation and they’re settled in place,” commented Monica Levy, co-chief of distribution at Federation Kids & Family, whose sales catalogue includes *Spellbound*, *Theodosia* and *Find Me In Paris*. “We expect the channels will need content and we will be here with our great shows.”

## Old competitors

Animation continues to be in higher demand than live action children’s programming, with 76% of respondents reporting that it is selling best. That is no surprise, but it is an increase on figures from last year’s Survey, when around two-thirds of distributors said that animation was more greatly sought.

The US, UK, France and Germany were all named as the biggest buyers of children’s content, while distributors also highlighted a growing demand from the Middle East, as well as steady business from the Nordics and Central and Eastern Europe.

Despite grabbing a generous number of headlines over the past few months, the Hollywood strikes have not had much of an impact of kids’ content distribution and most respondents don’t seem to be expecting any big knock-on effect.

However, some did share their belief that US streamers in need of content will soon turn to distributors from other countries in the coming months as they seek fresh titles for their services.

Keeping the US in mind, 73% of respondents said that they are expecting the US studios to make more product available over the next 12 months than in



of respondents said animation is selling better than live action content

the previous year.

As one respondent, Sophie Prigent, head of sales for Paris-based *Grizzy & The Lemmings* and *Mystery Lane* distributor Hari, noted: “This means new strong competitors will enter the market, taking share in an already crowded space.

“We don’t expect to be significantly impacted because we distribute only our own IPs, for which we have a premium production outfit, and the trust of our partners who wouldn’t consider our content less qualitative or less of an audience-driver.

“That said, output deals with entire slots filled with studio content would be more of an issue as we can’t create airtime that isn’t available anymore.”

## New sales avenues

The emergence of FAST is of growing importance to kids’ distributors (read more about this on page 2), with an eyebrow raising 12% of respondents revealing that more than 50% of their revenues come from FAST. A further 38% said they receive around 10% of their revenue from these services but that still leaves 50% who indicated that they do not sell via FAST at all. However, as more services crop up – something 88% of respondents expect to see in the coming year – new distribution avenues will increase further opening up.

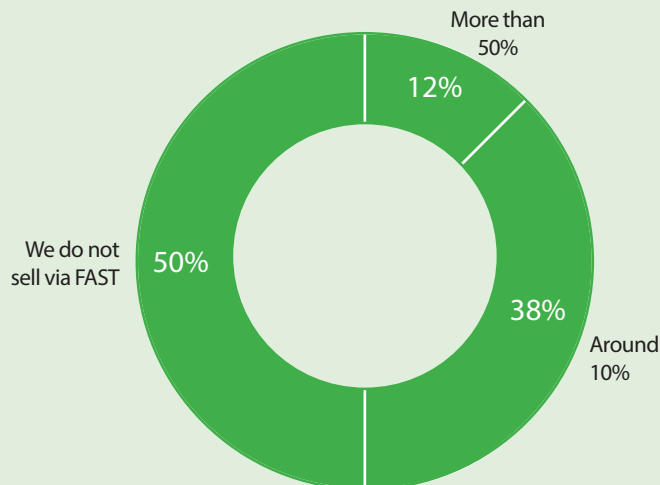
AVOD, meanwhile, is bringing in 10% revenue or more for 77% of kids’ distributors, with 26% revealing that AVOD services contribute more than 50% of their revenue. And it was a fairly even split when it came to windowing, with 51% of firms selling more windows than they were last year.

Claudia Scott-Hansen, principal at Cookbook Media, highlighted that: “AVOD platforms are picking up where linear & SVODs are not supporting shows (for example, limited launches, no promotions or reduced episodes).”

Prigent at Hari, meanwhile, added: “It really depends on the accessibility and popularity of the partners we work with. When thinking about pan-regional players, their penetration sometimes varies from one market to another. The combination of several windows is what really matters. That said, AVOD & FVOD are increasingly significant also because they provide immediate data.”

MIPCOM remains the most important market for children’s distributors, with every respondent marking it as a must-attend event. However, MIPTV is seen as less vital, with only around half of the respondents rating it one of their most important markets, trailing Kidscreen (88%) and Annecy International Animation Festival (63%). **TBI**

## How much revenue do you derive from FAST channels?





# Calling all cats

Banijay Kids & Family CEO, Benoît Di Sabatino, was introduced to *Shasha & Milo* at MIPTV back in 2019. He tells Mark Layton why he was immediately moved to secure the South Korean project



**F**our years ago, Benoît Di Sabatino, CEO of Banijay Kids & Family, watched a presentation from a South Korean production firm.

Pingo CEO Hee Seok Shin and COO Seul Gee Yoo were presenting a project at the Cannes kids' content market and "animal lover" Di Sabatino admits to being instantly hooked. "I took just three minutes to tell them I wanted to be a part of this co-production."

Fast-forward to 2023 and the result of that encounter is *Shasha & Milo*, a CGI animated children's action-comedy co-

produced by Banijay-owned Zodiac Kids & Family France and South Korea's Pingo Entertainment.

**"I took just three minutes to tell them I wanted to be part of this co-production"**

Benoît Di Sabatino,  
Banijay Kids & Family



"The creative work they had done was amazing. I remember during this meeting, they presented a trailer, the animation, the character designs and the concept – everything was on the table."

The admiration was very much mutual, reveals Shin, telling TBI that Zodiac had been his "first choice" partner for a Pingo that was, at that time, a "young company", only being officially registered the prior year, with aspirations to take its project worldwide.

While Pingo brought the art and the idea, Di Sabatino says that Zodiac was able to provide help with the writing and the "international concept to go to a global market."

## Brand aspirations

The 25 x 22-minute and 12 x 2-minute show, aimed at 6-9-year-olds, follows titular 12-year-olds, Shasha and Milo, as they juggle school and their home lives, along with their secret power to transform between human, cat and a formidable hybrid form. The duo are tasked with protecting their island home from villainous cats and their often ridiculous plots to gain ultimate power, while also dealing with the daily complexities of pre-teen life.

The show is executive produced by Di Sabatino and Shin, alongside Banijay's Gary Milne and Yoo attached as co-director and creative producer, and Hyeong Min Kim as co-director.

The series was first picked up by China's Tencent Video in May 2022, and subsequently found pre-sale partners in Warner Bros. Discovery Latin America and Korean public broadcaster EBS – as exclusively revealed by TBI earlier this year.

Pingo Entertainment exclusively controls all rights in Korea, Japan and Southeast Asia, while Zodiac Kids and Family Distribution holds international sales rights, and also handles sales, marketing and consumer products. "We now have a strategy in place with the style guide ready with partners aligned; we've started [talking] pre-sales, and we're really pitching it widely to everybody," Delphine Dumont, CCO of Banijay Kids and Family, tells TBI.

"We're [also] partnering on the commercial aspect because we want to make it a success, to become a brand and and hopefully *Shasha & Milo* ticks a lot of the boxes." **TBI**

# Kids Hot Picks

Our selection of the best and latest kids shows heading to market

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 Top Pick

**Davey & Jonesie's Locker**

**Producer:** Marblemedia

**Distributor:** Distribution360

**Broadcaster:** Hulu (US), Amazon Prime Video (Canada, Australia & New Zealand)

Multiverses are all the rage right now and this new young adult comedy series from Canada's Marblemedia is getting in on the action with the story of the titular Davey and Jonesie, two eccentric high schoolers who embark on a wild adventure after stepping through a portal built by their science teacher.

However, while the friends are initially excited to trade their own reality for another, their travels only ever bring them to bizarre, alternate versions of their high school surrounded by offbeat versions of their classmates.

These new worlds include “a universe where the only food consumed is oranges, a world with no music, and a *Hunger Games* inspired world which pits Davey against Jonesie,” reveals Diane Rankin, executive producer and EVP of rights at Distribution360.

“Davey and Jonesie are always their true selves from universe to universe, but we see them grow in their own relationship and in understanding of their peers as the season progresses.

“In addition, each universe has a distinct look which dictates how the characters present themselves. Creator and showrunner Evany Rosen's

vision drew on B-movies and camp classics to make a weird, fun and curious environment in which the characters can live large,” explains Rankin.

It's not all fun and games though, as the girls are being chased by a highly motivated and severely intense Delinquent Acquisition Deputy (D.A.D) from the Management Organisation of the Multiverse (M.O.M) determined to send Davey and Jonesie to a ‘Detention Dimension’ and permanently erase their memories of each other.

“This character-driven comedy is like nothing else currently on offer for this demographic and that is what our partners at Hulu and Amazon Prime Video told us they were looking for,” said Rankin.

“It really occupies a sweet spot of sophisticated humour that's approachable for younger audiences, with a signature style that feels specifically designed for them. The Davey and Jonesie friendship is both relatable and aspirational; this type of buddy comedy-for-comedy's-sake is a domain most often reserved for boy's stories, so it's fresh to see two wacky, but clever teen girls at the helm.”

### Hold On Gaston!

**Producer:** Dandelooo

**Distributor:** Dandelooo

**Broadcaster:** Canal+ (France)

French producer-distributor Dandelooo has partnered with Aurélie Chien Chow Chine for this adaptation of her popular children's books, *Les Émotions De Gaston*.

The author, working with Chloé Sastre and Romain Gadiou, has turned the stories into a 52 x 11-minute 2D animated series following the titular Gaston, a young unicorn, and his friends, who live in the village of Corneville-la-Joie.

The comedy is “rooted in daily situations,” says Emmanuèle Pétry Sirvin, producer & head of international at Dandelooo, who tells TBI: “Kids will see Gaston going to school, having fun with his friends, making plans with his cousins, visiting his grandparents, but moreover they will be able to identify with Gaston as their own selves, going ‘wild’, being free and being themselves in a secure environment.”

Sirvin adds: “Gaston is a very enthusiastic kid – well a unicorn, really – a very special and super intense unicorn,” with a unique ability: his mane changes colours according to his emotions.

The series, aimed at upper preschoolers, aims to help kids identify and manage their emotions. “Thanks to Gaston’s extreme (visual and funny) embodiment of a given emotion, children will be able to see and feel their own self in a ‘distortion mirror’, which will allow them to laugh and understand the ridicule of each situation,” says Sirvin.

“Being able to put a precise name on each emotion will help them attach a tag to their own reactions when they do feel it themselves,” she adds.





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### Buddybot

**Producer:** Xilam Animation

**Distributor:** Xilam Animation

**Broadcaster:** France Télévisions (France)

Aimed at kids aged between six and 10, this 52 x 11-minute series explores the friendship between Chloe, an ordinary 12-year-old girl, and Buddybot, a little robot from the future.

“Chloe and Buddybot are set on helping the planet, whether it be by planting loads of flowers across town, saving rare caterpillars from a cold wave or trying, dressed up as ghosts, to sway industrial

baddie, Nina Manchkin.

“Our duo knows that every little step counts, which is why they want to convince family, neighbours and other townspeople to start helping the planet too,” reveals Safaa Benazzouz, EVP of distribution at Xilam Animation.

“Chloe is an average girl who wants to play video games, ride her skateboard and spend time with Buddybot. When facing

hardships, she will nonetheless find surprising and relatable solutions to complete her missions. As for Buddybot, he is a robot like no other you’ve ever seen: no superpowers, no high-tech gadgets, just endless optimism and cuteness.”

Created by Vincent Souchon, not only does the 2D animated series introduce young viewers to the issues around climate change, but also teaches them the importance of optimism and perseverance.

“*Buddybot* focuses on the following theme: how do you balance theory with reality? For

instance, how do you complete a noble mission against climate change, when your flaws get in the way? Our characters are imperfect: their desires and fears often give a surprising turn to our stories. But we embrace them as they are: our viewers will feel no sense of guilt or inadequacy watching this series.

“Neither Chloe nor Buddybot are perfect role models or knights in shining armour. Because doing good doesn’t necessarily come easy, and it’s a lot of hard work – but it’s worth it,” says Benazzouz.



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### Mitten & Shoe

**Producer(s):** Matnai Animation, Hotel Hungaria & Jam Media

**Distributor:** Aardman

**Broadcaster:** CBeebies (UK) & Ketnet (Belgium)

Developed with the support of the now defunct Young Audiences Content Fund,

this 52 x 7-minute pre-school animation is set in a playground and follows the titular Mitten

and Shoe and their friends, who are an assortment of children's belongings that were left behind and are now looked after by an umbrella named Mc Drizzle.

It's always playtime at the playground, where Mitten and Shoe meet new visitors from around the world, learning new songs and games.

"They'll get lost in a maze of Mitten's messy things, dig up all sorts of treasures in the sandpit, make stick dens in the park with Sargent Boot, help a lost Santa's hat and save Christmas, have splashy fun in the splashpad next door and learn to beatbox with a pair of flipflops," reveals Robin Gladman, Aardman's head of acquisitions, sharing just a few of the adventures the duo have in store.

The idea for the series came from creator Nai Morris's own experience taking her children to the playground and seeing other kid's belongings – like dummies, hair clips and shoes – left on the fence or dropped on the floor," reveals Gladman.

"This sparked the idea for a mitten and a shoe being left behind and becoming best friends and living in a playground with a family of other left behind characters."

He adds: "It's a comedy for young children, so it'll be full of delightful and playful silliness from Mitten and Shoe and their quirky band of friends.

"We want the series to be very relatable for preschoolers, about making new friends, kindness, acceptance, and play."

### A Horse Named Steve

**Producer:** Sixteen South & Nelvana

**Distributor:** Sixteen South Rights

**Broadcaster:** RTÉ (Ireland) & Treehouse TV (Canada)

Irish animation studio Sixteen South and Canada's Nelvana co-developed and co-produced this 2D animated series, based on the picture book by author-illustrator Kelly Collier.

Aimed at four- to seven-year-olds, the series follows the titular horse on his mission to be his 'best self'. Steve is a fine horse, but he thinks he could be finer – he wants to be exceptional.

What he lacks in common sense, Steve more than makes up for in positivity and determination. Never daunted by his failures, Steve wears his heart on his hooves and with the help of his friends shows that being yourself is the most exceptional thing you can be.

"Whether it's winning the forest relay race, becoming an 'ever-so-fancy' unicorn or

excelling in the local talent show, Steve throws himself into everything with unbridled enthusiasm and utter self-belief," says Sixteen South's chief exec Colin Williams of the series' comedic equine hero.

"Sometimes life (and Steve's own actions) get in the way but that's all part of the ups and downs of growing up," he continues.

"The second we saw the book cover we fell in love with Kelly Collier's wonderful illustrations. Once we peeked inside the character of Steve came to life and jumped off the page to us," reveals Williams.

"The humour is wonderfully visual and physical, so we knew immediately it was something we wanted to bring to screen.

"There's also an underlying



message of learning how to navigate the world in your own unique way which is something we explore in all the stories we tell," said the exec.

Williams adds that one of the big appeals for young audiences will be Steve's "curious, happy-go-lucky approach to life".

"He's so endearing that you can't help but cheer him on. His world view is very much that of a seven-year-old so it is very relatable to the audience and we know kids will adore following

him along on his laugh out loud adventures.

"The show is absolutely beautiful and we know it's a world that all kids will want to spend a lot of time in with Steve and his friends."

Williams adds that Sixteen South had been looking to partner with Nelvana and its parent company Corus Entertainment "for years".

"We want to make the best shows and Nelvana are one of the best," said Williams. **TBI**



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## Last Word Anna Home & Greg Childs Reclaiming the 'lost audience'

**Following their Children's Media Yearbook article in July that reviewed the UK kids' content scene, Anna Home and Greg Childs update us with stark but optimistic news on recent developments**

Anna Home and Greg Childs are the chair and director, respectively, of The Children's Media Foundation. Both are UK kids' media veterans, with Home having previously served as head of BBC Children's and Childs launching CBBC and CBeebies while head of BBC Children's Digital

**A**s we head into MIPJR and MIPCOM, the kids' industry needs some good news – not just in the UK, but worldwide, because the situation is tough.

Delegates at July's Children's Media Conference (CMC) in Sheffield, which gathers most UK kids' content professionals together, were as upbeat as ever, but also hit hard by the collapse in commissioning in the UK.

With no Young Audiences Content Fund to boost commissions from the commercial public service broadcasters (ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5), the BBC cutting back and focusing on animation, and the cavalry much less likely to come to the rescue – i.e. the streamers cutting their commissioning ambitions too – the situation is probably at its most difficult in living memory.

At the same time there were considerable concerns expressed at CMC about the future for broadcasting and for society, as the young audience deserts linear channels for unregulated SVOD and AVOD services.

The numbers are stark, with average viewing figures on the CITV channel before closure as low as 4,000 per programme. The 'lost audience' is a real and current issue. And it's a threat not just to the business models of companies delivering content to kids, with loss of advertising revenue leading them to spend less. It also potentially impacts on the entire future of public service media across Europe. This has implications for social cohesion, engaged citizenship, life-long learning, well-being, appreciation of impartiality and much more. If a generation grows up with no understanding of public service values and no loyalty to the funding models that underpin public service content, that also threatens a vital source of media funding.

However, concerns at CMC led to action. In an unprecedented move, all sides of the industry have come together to create a proposal to put to government. They're asking politicians to recognise the value that the UK's world-class kids' media industry brings to the economy and culture, and the immense importance for society and individuals that kids and teens can continue to watch a wide range of relevant, appropriate, engaging and stimulating content,

designed for them as young people, and reflecting the diverse society and culture in which they live.

A working group of broadcasters, industry associations and audience advocacy bodies including the Children's Media Foundation has already met and is drafting proposals. Before the end of the year an all-industry summit will be called to build a campaign to persuade government to take action – to increase industry support, give serious thought to new forms of regulation and incentivisation, and protect the future of public service content for young people.



At the Children's Media Foundation, we strongly believe that a healthy UK industry will lead to greater choice and quality of content for the audience. The two areas of concern are interlinked. The lost audience impacts on the commissioning crisis and both issues need to be resolved to support the industry and the audience. And this isn't just an issue for the UK. Already, a number of countries are tackling the 'lost audience' in a variety of ways, including levies, quotas and regulation. It is vital that governments and regulators understand just how much the media landscape has changed, how kids and young people are at the forefront of that change, and how that threatens not just the stability of media businesses but much more besides. **TBI**



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