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engaging the global children's entertainment industry

Q4 2025



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ANIME'S RISE

Surging demand is opening doors for buyers and producers

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Why one-offs are the smartest format in kids content right now





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OUR SOLD COVER sports an ad from Kedoo for *Booba*, while our editorial cover features ZAG Entertainment's new spinoff series *Miraculous Chibi*.



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When fandom sings

When I walked into the singalong screening of *KPop Demon Hunters*, I thought I knew what to expect. I'd seen the movie at home. I knew the characters and the songs. But being there, in a packed theater full of kids, teens and families buzzing with anticipation, was a reminder that content isn't just about what's on the screen—it's about the communities that form around it.

As soon as the opening number started, the entire theater exploded. Kids leapt out of their seats to dance, parents smiled as they fumbled through lyrics, and whole rows belted out choruses like they'd been rehearsing for weeks. The film's story, steeped in fantasy and action, was almost secondary in that moment. What mattered was the energy, the collective joy of a shared experience.

That's something the industry is starting to rediscover. Recent research shows that Gen Alpha actually loves the ritual of going to the movies. They may be digital natives who've grown up with tablets in their hands, but they value the social energy of sitting in a darkened theater, surrounded by friends and strangers. The *KPop Demon Hunters* singalong tapped right into that desire, transforming a piece of content into a participatory event that streaming alone can't replicate.

For an industry that spends so much time focused on algorithms, discoverability and monetization, it was striking to see how deeply the audience simply wanted to join in. The songs didn't just fill the background; they became rallying cries. The choreography wasn't just spectacle; it was an invitation. And the singalong format offered something rare in today's fractured media landscape: a sense of belonging.

The community piece is especially powerful because it shows us where fandom is headed. For kids and teens, the line between watching, playing and belonging is increasingly blurred. They don't just want to consume; they want to perform, remix, share and connect. That's why user-generated ecosystems like Roblox and TikTok thrive. *KPop Demon Hunters* tapped into the same instinct, only this time through the ritual of going to the movies together.

For creators and execs in kids entertainment, the takeaway isn't that every show needs a singalong release. It's that experiences that encourage active participation—whether through music, interactivity or live events—can amplify an IP in pop culture far beyond a streaming launch.

Community isn't a bolt-on marketing strategy; it's core to how kids build relationships with the brands they love.

Leaving the theater, I couldn't help thinking about how rare it is these days to be in a room full of strangers who all know the same words to the same songs. It felt old-fashioned and forward-looking all at once. Old-fashioned because it evoked the communal thrill of a Saturday morning cartoon block or a big Disney release. Forward-looking because it showed how Gen Alpha's love for moviegoing, combined with their hunger for participation, could redefine what success looks like in kids entertainment.

In that sense, *KPop Demon Hunters* wasn't just a fun night out. It was a reminder that the real magic happens when stories and songs create moments of connection that can't be replicated by an algorithm, a scroll, or even the coziest night on the couch.

—Jocelyn Christie

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THE LIST

10 things on our radar this month



1 The future is Paramount

The merger of Paramount Global and Skydance Media is now complete, leaving the industry with some major unanswered questions. Chief among them for the children's media sector: What happens to kids content—and to Nickelodeon—under the new leadership? Nick is home to some of the world's biggest kids brands, including *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. But will management continue to see value in children's programming, or move away from it? Chairman and CEO David Ellison has promised support, though what that means for budgets and greenlights remains unclear.

This US$8-billion deal has wide-ranging implications, from potential layoffs in November—possibly as many as 2,000 to 3,000, according to reports—to new big-screen ambitions. Paramount Pictures co-chairs Josh Greenstein and Dana Goldberg have signaled a focus on four-quadrant family films, but the lingering question is whether those titles will head to theaters or debut on streaming.

For now, this merger adds another layer of uncertainty to an already unsettled time in the industry. It could bring more opportunities for kids media—or it could shrink them. Time will tell. Meanwhile, Paramount Skydance is prepping a bid for Warner Bros. Discovery that would make it an even bigger media player. But again, the industry has to ask, will this benefit kids?



6 Oh, Canada!

The country's kids media sector was hit hard this summer, with WildBrain shutting down its channels business and Corus pausing new series from Nelvana. With declining commissions and tougher market conditions harming producers, now is a good time for the CRTC to step in and address the industry's challenges.



7 Saving public media

With federal funding slashed, PBS has been busy minimizing the damage. It eliminated roughly 100 jobs this summer (including 25% of PBS KIDS positions) and reduced station dues to help ease their budgeting pressures. And one Michigan politician introduced a SAVE ELMO Act to help fund local stations.



2 Taming AI

Netflix has mapped out how its producers and content suppliers can—and can't—use generative AI. Under this new precedent-setting policy, outputs must not infringe copyright (makes sense), and the tools can't be used to replace talent without consent. Other companies could follow the mighty streamer's lead in setting safeguards to try and tame the AI Wild West.



3 Using your Noggin

After an unceremonious closure at the hands of Paramount Global, the SVOD that once boasted two million lifetime subscribers is returning in a new form. Kristen Kane, CEO of the new Noggin, plans to grow the app into a streamer and gaming platform that acquires and commissions new content. If it takes off, Noggin could be a future partner to many.



4 Star power

Nintendo has rebranded one of its subsidiaries as Nintendo Stars, which is now charged with driving new licensing business for the gameco's growing film slate, not just the Kirby franchise. Next up, Nintendo Stars is on the hunt for licensees to support Illumination's *The Super Mario Galaxy Movie* and a live-action adaptation of The Legend of Zelda from Sony Pictures Entertainment.



5 Sharing is caring

A slew of carriage deals between streamers and European broadcasters have followed Netflix's June agreement to carry France's TF1. It's a mutually beneficial strategy, helping linear channels stem the tide of audience erosion and giving global SVOD platforms more of a local flavor. But how this TV trend will influence commissioning activity (particularly in the kids genre) remains to be seen.



8

Big-screen draws

Gen Alpha loves going to the movies even more than older generations, according to an August NRG survey. Kids see it as a social experience, a FOMO antidote and a fandom medium for immersive events like sing-alongs. No wonder *KPop Demon Hunters* won the US box office during its limited release!



9

Live-action flex

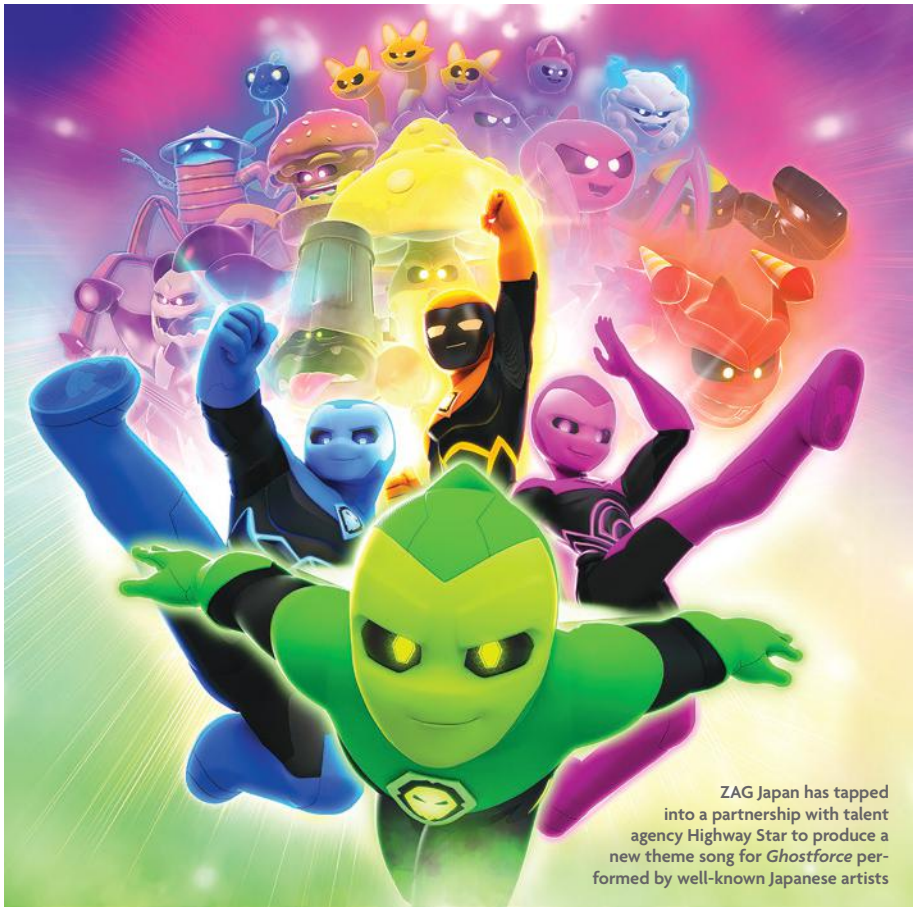
While kids movies continued to perform well at the summer box office, most of this year's top 10 grossers came from the live-action side—including *A Minecraft Movie, Lilo & Stitch* and *How to Train Your Dragon*. But don't count animation out yet, with *Zootopia 2* just around the Thanksgiving corner.



10

The Oz effect

The Las Vegas Sphere is blowing audiences away with its 4D, multi-sensory reimagining of 1939 musical *The Wizard of Oz*. This AI-enhanced film is bringing in more than US$2 million a day, marking a new opportunity for other brand owners to give their classic family features a second life on the strip.



ZAG Japan has tapped into a partnership with talent agency Highway Star to produce a new theme song for *Ghostforce* performed by well-known Japanese artists

Made in Japan

ZAG's Tokyo launch marks more than just an expansion—it's a bold new chapter in blending anime, music and multi-format storytelling for global audiences.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

Paris-based ZAG made an important strategic move this year, launching a new unit in Tokyo. It's a natural next step for the banner behind the juggernaut Miraculous franchise—and company founder and CEO Jeremy Zag has big plans to tap into Japanese anime and musical influences.

In a sense, Japan has always been a part of ZAG's DNA, says Zag. "Our creative vision has been shaped by a mix of influences [including] American animation, European talent and, most importantly, Japanese culture—especially manga and anime," he says. (A prime example is *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir*, which has drawn inspiration from the "magical girl" subgenre of Japanese fantasy media.) ZAG Japan's key strategy focuses on adapting and expanding existing IPs into anime and manga formats, a move that also supports the company's broader goal of crafting more emotional and layered content.

"We're particularly excited about embracing traditional 2D animation and exploring storytelling that goes deeper [into] the narrative style of Japanese anime," says Zag, hinting at content that could resonate with slightly older audiences while still maintaining multi-generational appeal.

Heading up the new outpost is chief operating officer Kanji Kazahaya, who has extensive expertise in the global anime sector. He previously spent 15 years at Toei Animation (*Sailor Moon*) in various senior roles, including serving as the director of its international department.

Having a presence in the region opens doors for authentic "made in Japan" content created in collaboration with local talent—part of Zag's ambitious plan to create original IPs that can exist across more than one format to reach the widest possible audience.

"Our approach is to explore a property from multiple creative angles, developing parallel formats like anime and traditional CG-animated series that complement each other and enrich the overall universe."

However, these parallel formats won't necessarily launch simultaneously, he adds. And the goal in most cases will be to explore different timelines within the same universe. "For example, one [series] might be set in Neo Tokyo in the year 3000, while the anime could explore the year 2000. It's about expanding the mythology from different narrative points of view."

Zag's flagship Miraculous brand is already testing these waters with a new anime-inspired spinoff in the works at Miraculous Corp and slated for a 2027 launch on Disney Channel and Disney+. Shifting settings from Paris to Tokyo, *Miraculous Stellar Force* will feature a 2D hand-drawn look and include popular tropes like kung fu comedy.

Another space Zag wants to explore further is the music side of content, ranging from catchy anime soundtracks to trendy J-pop elements. And to that end, the company is already working with top Japanese talent agency Highway Star to partner with homegrown artists.

For example, Hironobu Kageyama and Nami Tamaki—who sing the title tracks of iconic anime series *Dragon Ball Z* and *Mobile Suit Gundam SEED*—will perform a new theme song for four-year-old ZAG series *Ghostforce*.

"We'd love to launch a J-pop group in Japan and collaborate with iconic artists," Zag teases as a future possibility. "Music will be a key element in how we build emotional connections with our audience." K

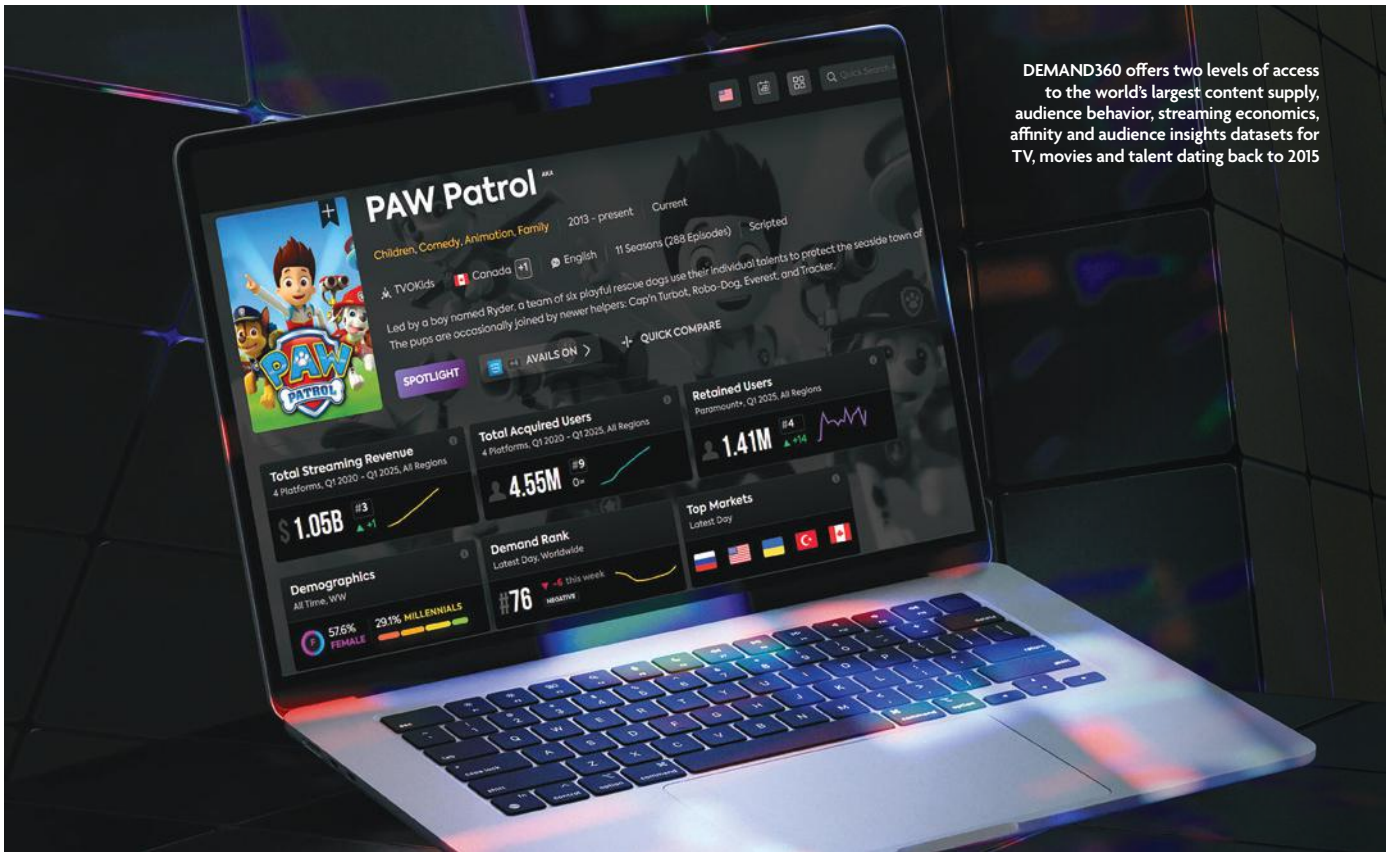


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DEMAND360 offers two levels of access to the world's largest content supply, audience behavior, streaming economics, affinity and audience insights datasets for TV, movies and talent dating back to 2015

In the demand business

Parrot Analytics's DEMAND360 helps kidcos turn real-time audience and market data into brand strategy.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

IN this age of information overload and fluctuating content trends, data that keeps pace is a definite advantage. That's the thinking behind Parrot Analytics' DEMAND360 suite—a subscription-based platform designed to help entertainment brand managers navigate a crowded marketplace with greater clarity and confidence.

DEMAND360 offers real-time access to global audience demand data across three core verticals: TV, movies and talent. Covering more than 50 markets and updated daily, the platform lets clients track trends with precision. In addition to the full-featured DEMAND360 Enterprise platform designed for studios and networks, Parrot Analytics also offers DEMAND360 Lite—a streamlined version built for individual producers and smaller teams.

The platform's tools and interactive charts are extensive and continuously refreshed. Features include rankings of legacy and new titles across platforms; tools to evaluate audience demand for actors; regional audience trend maps; side-by-side comparison tables for TV series; and real-time tracking for everything from an AVOD rollout to an influencer activation.

With a simple toggle, DEMAND360 users can get answers to key strategic questions such as: What's the most in-demand kids show in the world today? Which countries are driving the latest spike in *Stranger Things* viewership? What were yesterday's top-performing Apple TV+ titles in Bangladesh? How does audience demand compare between two Disney series in different regions?

The service also delivers a deeper look into how audiences are engaging with individual IPs across platforms and territories—an invaluable asset for brand owners looking to demonstrate a property's strength and benchmark it against competitors in meetings with broadcasters, streamers and licensees.

Lite includes a curated entertainment newsfeed, too, along with access to exclusive webinars and original insights from Parrot Analytics. Strategy-focused reports have explored topics like *How Paramount+ Has Become A Contender In The Streaming Wars* and *Why Netflix Is Investing Heavily In Foreign-Language Series*.

DEMAND360 helps brand owners stay informed and make smarter decisions—and it's especially valuable for kids content executives, says Chris Hamilton, industry insights manager at Parrot Analytics. "Just quickly glancing at the data, three different



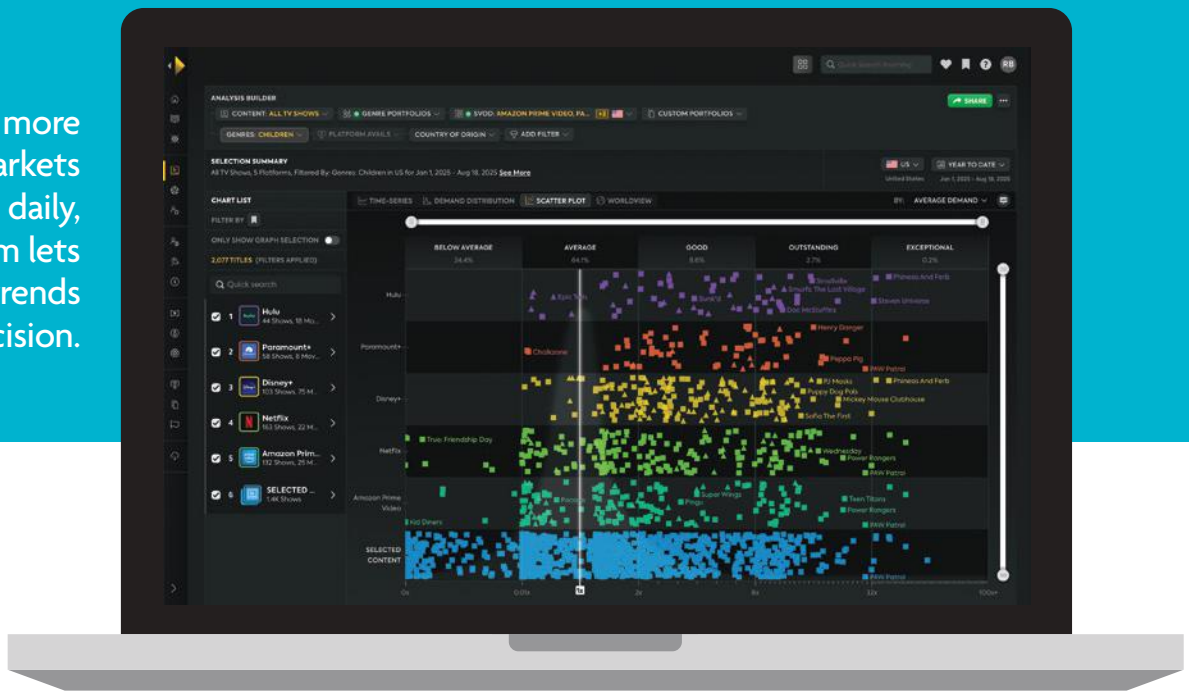
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Covering more than 50 markets and updated daily, the platform lets clients track trends with precision.



series have been the most in-demand preschool show globally in the past three years. That underscores how quickly momentum can shift for kids IPs," he notes.

"DEMAND360 gives kids industry professionals a clear, independent view of how audiences are engaging with their favorite content and characters in real time," Hamilton adds. "That means stronger conversations with licensees and retailers, sharper competitive positioning, and the ability to prove with data why a brand deserves shelf space, screen time and long-term investment."

Maria Doolan, head of content partnerships and distribution at Miraculous Corp, points to the value of real-time data in day-to-day decision-making: "The real value comes from the clarity it provides in fast-moving situations. Instead of waiting on delayed ratings or trying to piece together fragmented signals, teams can see in real time where audiences are leaning in, which markets are showing momentum, and where things might not be landing as strongly."

That makes it easier to know whether to double down on a strategy or shift gears quickly, she adds, noting that the data has helped her team eliminate a lot of guesswork and find clarity in complex audience behavior. "Whether it's prioritizing investments or tailoring campaigns for different regions, it helps teams act with confidence."

Seeing the direct impact that the company's content partners have on demand in a given market is another important takeaway. "If the data shows a dip, we can quickly support their efforts with additional activations to rebuild momentum."

Florida-based consultancy Brighter Path's founder and chief strategist Chris Colombo has also used DEMAND360 in working with some of his entertainment clients. The Mattel alum echoes Doolan in saying that the product helps identify the markets punching above (or below) their weight and showcases how talent, genres or themes tie into audience interest.

"That has helped guide release timing, support licensing negotiations, shape casting with regional context in mind, and sync marketing or product launches with natural peaks in engagement," says Colombo. "It's not perfect—the granularity can be limited—but paired with other sources, it provides a grounded view of how to extend value across a title's lifecycle."

> "The real value comes from the clarity it provides in fast-moving situations."
>
> —Maria Doolan, Miraculous Corp

As an example, he recalls an anime studio that was looking to license a series and start a consumer products program in Europe, with France planned as the obvious first market to launch. "But when we looked at per-capita demand in DEMAND360, Spain actually showed stronger audience interest relative to its size. That gave the studio leverage to push for better terms in Spain, and it reassured the local CP partner that there was real demand to back the investment."

In terms of pricing, Lite costs US$99 per month, or $59 per month with an annual subscription. The Enterprise model starts at US$10,000 per product per month with a minimum one-year term—and the price is subject to various add-ons, optional subscriptions and number of markets covered.

To learn more about the DEMAND360 service or to set up a meeting with the Parrot Analytics team at MIPCOM, reach out to: contact@parrotanalytics.com. k


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BIG GIG



Marco Balsamo

THE BIG GIG: President and CEO of TeamTO

CONCURRENTLY: COO/co-founder of RIVA Studios and Film Launchpad (since 2023)

CREATIVE MIND: Marco Balsamo got his first taste of the entertainment biz as a film extra, but quickly moved up the ranks as a PA, location manager and associate producer. Over the years, he has nurtured both a creative eye and a strong business instinct—even his decade-long tenure as chief creative officer of Indonesia's MSV Studio came about from a passionate pitch he delivered at MIFA in 2012 for *Akira's Flying Wheelchair*, a Miyazaki-style 2D-animated fantasy-adventure film concept he wrote in college about a paralyzed former child soccer prodigy who regains his will to live when a wacky inventor builds him a wheelchair that flies.

Heading up one of France's leading animation studios isn't something Balsamo would have predicted he'd be doing a year ago. But RIVA Studios' last-minute acquisition of TeamTO in December paved the way for him to step into this key leadership role in February—and he's already planning some big moves.

RENEWED VISION: "Our short-term priority is stability and restoring confidence," he says of his plans for TeamTO 2.0. The 20-year-old company is buzzing with startup-like energy again for Balsamo, who's preparing to make a big push into original IPs and high-quality service work, for starters. And to reach wider audiences, he's eager for TeamTO to produce more teen/YA content and 2D animation.

Expansions are also playing out geographically. In contrast to TeamTO's past focus on working primarily within France, Balsamo wants to transform the studio into more of an international player—and to that end, he and his team are already in negotiations for a co-pro deal with an Indian partner, he teases.

STRATEGIC PLAYS: Balsamo is bullish about steering a now-stabilized TeamTO to not just survive but thrive in today's tough TV market. "Buying a distressed asset came with its fair share of surprises," he admits. "Coming in so quickly with the funding to save and reposition it in a matter of months has been a heavy lift."

Looking ahead, he's betting big on video game adaptations (where TeamTO can fuel the storytelling), localization (personalizing TeamTO shows for different regions) and mining the company's rich animation back catalogue.

In addition to his executive role, Balsamo will also continue to be involved as a creator, writer, showrunner and director. On that front, he's especially excited about TeamTO's development slate, which includes *Akira's Flying Wheelchair* and a preschool series called *What's Up Eesha?* that's in the works with France Télévisions. —Sadhana Bharanidharan

Know your audience

BY: JIM BENTON





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Something special

One-offs are opening up fresh opportunities to eventize IPs, boost discoverability and reach underserved audiences.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

In an industry that's typically dominated by series and feature films, one-off specials are quietly becoming one of the most strategic formats in kids entertainment. Once largely reserved for holiday windows, they now serve a broader purpose—boosting discoverability for platforms, filling seasonal gaps for studios, and giving franchises a sandbox to test new tones, characters and formats.

And their value has only grown in these challenging times. With financing sources drying up, budgets shrinking and co-viewing habits on the rise, specials offer a flexible, scalable way to test out new ideas and breathe fresh life into existing properties.

For Netflix—which has curated a largely IP-driven catalogue of kids specials—this format is proving to be an especially strong performer. The streamer's top 50 kids & family specials generated more than 600 million views last year, according to its 2024 *What We Watched* data. And its most-viewed titles overall included *Trolls Holiday, The Bad Guys: Haunted Heist, Chip and Potato: Chip's Holiday* and *The Bad Guys: A Very Bad Holiday*. Plus, Illumination's bite-sized special *Sing: Thriller* ranked as Netflix's most-watched kids film in the second half of 2024.

Not to be outdone, Nickelodeon ordered a batch of five hour-long specials in May for Spin Master's *PAW Patrol* series, and Apple TV+ commissioned more music-driven one-offs for its kids catalogue—recent releases have included book-based *Lulu Is a Rhinoceros* and the first original Peanuts musical special in 35 years, *Snoopy Presents: A Summer Musical*.

In the UK, Magic Light Pictures—best known for adapting the books of Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler—has also seen growth in this part of its business. Its latest BBC specials drew more than a million viewers each—up 20% from the previous year. This rise in demand is a reflection of shifting viewer habits, says co-MD Martin Pope.

"There is an [increased] sense of people wanting to be together, so shared viewing is very important."

Fortified franchises

Spin Master Entertainment has been experimenting with specials for nearly a decade, using them as a way to "eventize" *PAW Patrol*, explains president Jennifer Dodge. She underlines several benefits from a franchise planning standpoint, including their strong repeatability and linear marketing pushes when a special is about to air.

"In the streaming world, they create another entry for discovery and engagement because the special has its own thumbnail—which means multiple thumbnails for your series," she says.

Specials also appeal to older kids who may not want to tune in for regular episodes, but are more open to watching a one-off, even if it's younger-skewing. "When something is a holiday special, we all have permission to watch it," Dodge explains.

Iceland-based Tulipop Studios is leaning on specials to strengthen its flagship series *Tulipop Tales* between seasons,



Though Tracker isn't one of the *PAW Patrol* regulars, Spin Master saw an opportunity to give the fan-favorite chihuahua more time in the spotlight through a special

while also using them to create a theatrical revenue stream. The indie studio is working on a three x 30-minute package of "Tulipop Seasons" specials—*A Midwinter Tale, Pumpkin Pip* and *Whoosh!*—each aligned with a different time of year.

This push beyond the traditional holiday window is a clear sign of broader opportunities in the market. For example, consider that Spin Master strategically released its *Unicorn Academy: Legendary Summer* special on Netflix in April 2025—typically when the target demo starts feeling excited about the upcoming summer break.

For Tulipop, its project began when Icelandic cinema chain Sambíó asked for short-form kids content for morning screenings. The team initially simply repackaged existing episodes, but quickly saw the potential to develop specials tailored to that specific need.

While Tulipop's three specials have a theatrical-first distribution approach, they're designed to keep brand awareness going all year long, supplying their commissioners—Nordic broadcasters RÚV (Iceland), NRK (Norway), SVT (Sweden), DRTV (Denmark) and YLE (Finland)—with family-friendly content to fill gaps in their schedules, explains Tulipop co-founder Helga Árnadóttir.

"For families with preschoolers, a half-hour special hits the sweet spot of being long enough to be eventful, but short enough to fit into busy routines," she notes.

A Midwinter Tale will hit Icelandic cinemas in November, in advance of a Christmas broadcast on RÚV. And the plan is to add

Toying with Specials



Two years ago, Hasbro took a swing at a consumer products tie-in for a special when it released toys related to *Peppa Pig Cruise Ship Special*, its 20-minute one-off that tags along with Peppa and George on a cruise with their grandparents. After the title's June 2023 premiere on Nick Jr., Hasbro launched a cruise ship toy set with 13 accessories and three unique character figures (pictured above).

Specials are "event moments" in the eyes of kid audiences, says Kristin McKay, Hasbro's SVP and GM of global brands, fashion and preschool. "Connecting a toy to that kind of storytelling gives it added meaning and value, often turning it into a must-have."

In this case, it also meant mining the toyetic potential of everything from Peppa's floral look on vacation, to the ship's many rooms. "A holiday adventure naturally lends itself well to play [since] it's full of movement, exploration and imagination," notes McKay.

Hasbro declined to disclose sales data, but McKay says the company is looking to align more product launches with standout entertainment events like special episodes. "It's a model that strengthens brand connection and enhances engagement, and it will continue to be part of our long-term brand storytelling strategy." –SB



The four-part *Peppa Pig Cruise* special launched on Nickelodeon and Nick Jr. in June 2023, followed closely by Peppa's Cruise Ship playset, which rolled out a few months later



Iceland's Tulipop Studios is expanding its flagship *Tulipop Tales* series with a trio of seasonal specials designed to run at different times of the year



La Cabane and Thuristar's upcoming family special *A Lamb's Stew* made waves as the best-attended co-pro pitch at Cartoon Forum last year



Spooky one-off *Sing: Thriller* was the top kids title on Netflix's list of the 10 most-watched movies in the second half of 2024, with 77 million views

event-oriented elements to the theatrical screenings, including mascot appearances and hands-on activities for kids.

This test will allow Tulipop to fine-tune the content on a local level, leading up to a broader global rollout in 2026 and beyond. Árnadóttir is seeing increasing global interest in this kind of event cinema, with theater chains in Italy, France and the UK already in talks to run the Tulipop specials.

Format expansion

In some cases, a one-off can promote franchise growth by helping to lay the foundation for a TV show. The iconic Adventure Time franchise, for example, began as a short film in 2007 before being picked up by Cartoon Network in 2010.

Successes like that are why sister prodcos Paris-based La Cabane and Belgium's Thuristar decided to expand their 15-minute short *Luce and the Rock* to build out the upcoming series *Luce in the Lovely Land*.

"It served as a proof-of-concept that we could refer to when pitching the series," says La Cabane/Thuristar founder Perrine Gauthier. "And since broadcasters like France Télévisions and VRT-Ketnet had already bought the short, they were on board to develop the expanded series as well."

The studios' latest one-off, *A Lamb's Stew*, quickly gained traction after it was deemed the best-attended co-pro pitch at Cartoon Forum 2024. This 26-minute CG-animated special has been presold to Canal+, ZDF, RTS and VRT-Ketnet. "Several buyers also asked about and expressed an interest in a follow-up series," adds Gauthier.

Backed by Creative Europe MEDIA, the CNC, the Flanders Audiovisual Fund, Procirep and Angoa, La Cabane and Thuristar are currently focused on the special itself, but its Beastshire world—featuring a young lamb, misunderstood wolf and colorful animal residents—is ripe for expansion.

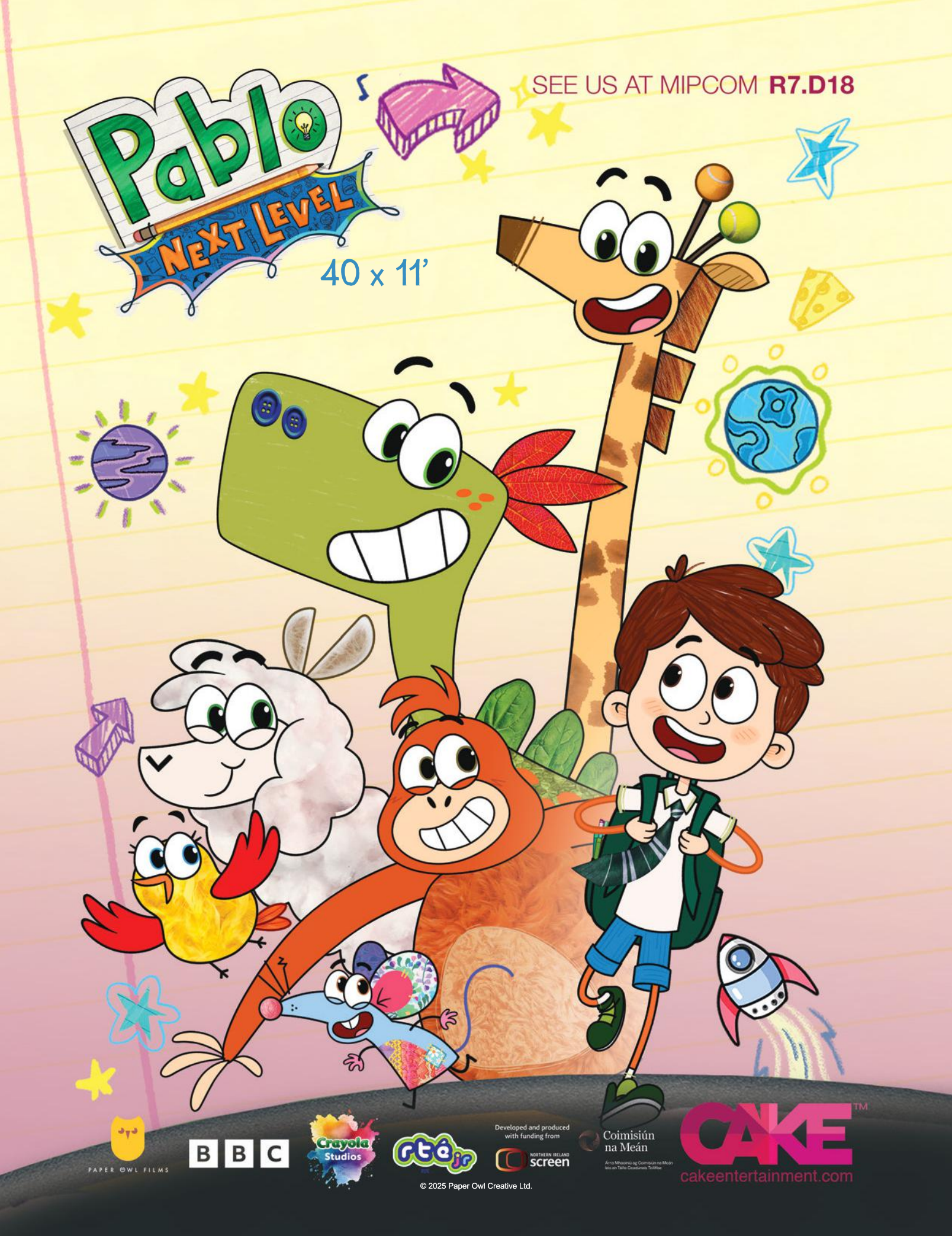
Even without a series tie-in, specials can be financially viable. *Luce and the Rock* generated revenue with its theatrical run in France and international sales through distributor Miyu Distribution. "It wasn't a business play initially," says Gauthier, but it led to roughly 120,000 total tickets sold.

For its part, Magic Light is also going the special-to-series route, with a CG-animated series in the works that follows up on two successful BBC specials: *Zog* (2018) and *Zog and the Flying Doctors* (2020). The latter title, in particular—about three dysfunctional doctor friends (a princess, a knight and a dragon) who fly around helping people—emerged as "a fantastic starting point for the sequel to develop as a series," explains joint MD Michael Rose.

"The special was, undoubtedly, a fantastic sort of shop window that showed us that the characters were popular."

Specials can also be a creative playground, offering space to explore new ideas, expand lore or spotlight side characters with growing fan appeal. One example is a recent PAW Patrol special from Nickelodeon that gives Tracker—the bilingual, jungle-dwelling chihuahua who has long been a fan-favorite—some time in the spotlight.

"He's not one of our regular pups, but fans love him," says Dodge. "He has a great location in the jungle and speaks Spanish—which


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[appeals] to a large part of our audience—so we saw [the opportunity for a special] just to tell a great story about Tracker."

Finding new markets

While public broadcasters have historically been the biggest investors in specials, seasonal viewership increases for this format are inviting new players into the space. They include US-based Holiday Channel, which is set to launch its SVOD platform later this year, featuring festive content year-round, with a major focus on kids specials.

"As we plan for the 2025 holiday season, creating content for a younger audience is a key factor," says president of streaming Todd Schwarzschild, who has been spearheading acquisition efforts since joining Holiday Channel in January.

"We know viewership among two- to 11-year-olds jumps by as much as a third during the traditional holiday season."

But the platform isn't just focused on Christmas. It's also actively looking for one-offs that celebrate multicultural traditions—from Hinduism's Holi and Diwali, to Thailand's Songkran water festival and Midsummer in Sweden. Even quirky observances like National Pizza Day are on the table.

Holiday Channel is looking for one-offs and snackable films featuring "traditions and celebrations that audiences may not have seen or experienced before," says CEO Reesa Ryder.

It's part of a strategy to provide an "armchair travel" experience, along with a feel-good, everyday-can-be-a-holiday vibe. "A large part of the impetus of our programming is to try and unearth those hidden gems of holiday specials from around the world," she adds.

As studios, streamers and indie creators continue to adapt to a shifting media landscape, one-off specials are proving to be more than just seasonal treats or stop-gaps in between seasons. They're becoming flexible tools for experimentation, brand extension and global discovery—meeting audiences where they are and offering new ways to build emotional connection. And in a climate where attention is scarce and budgets are tight, specials may just be the format that's best-suited to punch above its weight. k



FROM FESTIVAL TO FILM

Even titles that might not seem all that commercial can find a way into today's special-to-series pipeline. One recent example is the 2D-animated *My Life in Versailles* (pictured) from France's Films Grand Huit. Originally released theatrically in 2020, this half-hour family special sold more than 50,000 tickets locally before airing on France Télévisions.

Its story revolves around an eight-year-old orphan girl who goes to live with her gruff uncle—a maintenance worker at the Palace of Versailles—and the two find new kinds of fun and family in the spectacular setting.

Garnering strong reviews and more than 20 prizes at international festivals, *My Life in Versailles* quickly captured the attention of Xilam Animation, according to EVP of distribution Safaa Benazzouz. In 2023, France Télévisions ordered a five x 26-minute series based on the special, which Xilam signed on to co-produce and distribute.

Starting with a special was beneficial when it came time to finance the TV adaptation, notes Films Grand Huit producer Lionel Massol. "We [budgeted] around EUR€3.4 million (US$3.9 million) for the series because we had the TV special as proof that it was really good content. But on the other hand, it was also more complicated because the [TV show] had to be at the same artistic level as the special."

Even before production had wrapped on the series, Massol and his team started building more entry points for the budding franchise, securing a publishing agreement with L'École des Loisirs for six books that sold more than 40,000 copies in France.

In today's risk-averse TV landscape, the more well-known something is, the better its chances of attracting buyers, says Benazzouz. "Having *My Life In Versailles* as a one-off that was very established was very reassuring." However, she cautions that the TV marketplace and its financing avenues remain extremely strained.

One strategy Benazzouz has been mulling over—although she hasn't yet acted on it—is using specials as a playground to test revivals. "Having a special could be a great way to test your content in a new format or to reboot a brand."

Meanwhile, the Versailles franchise is still in expansion mode, with a 78-minute feature film now in production. Films Grand Huit and Mélusine Productions are lead producers on *My Life in Versailles—The Movie*, with Xilam Animation and Miyu Productions on board as co-pro partners.

In a key partnership forged this summer, the team has tapped Dandelooo Cinema to handle exclusive global distribution rights for the film (excluding France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and the UK). And French distributor Jour2Fête is planning a domestic theatrical release near the end of this year. –SB

COMING SOON

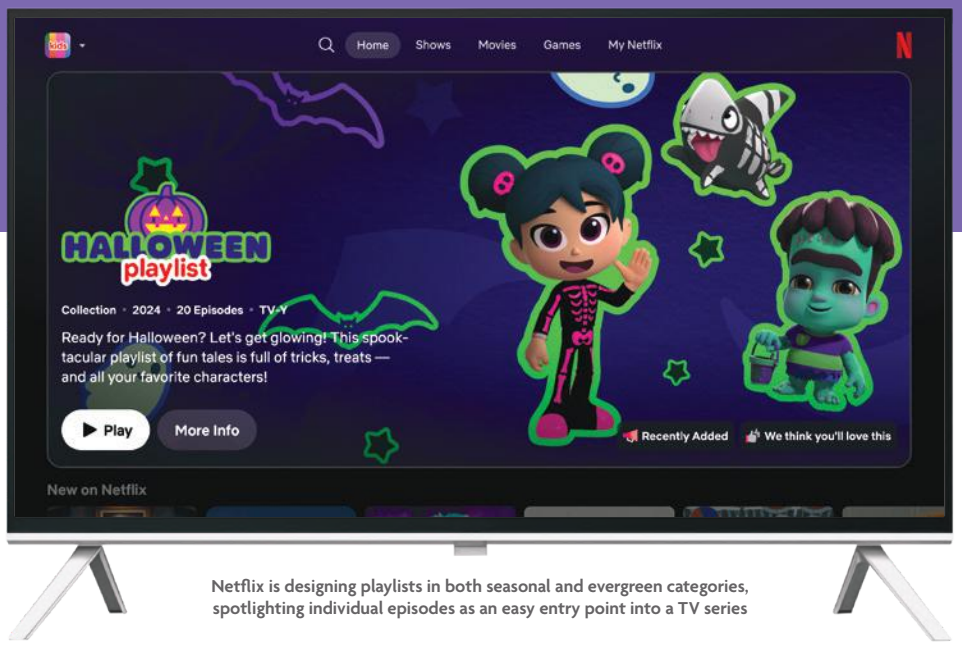


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Netflix is designing playlists in both seasonal and evergreen categories, spotlighting individual episodes as an easy entry point into a TV series

Pushing play on playlists

Netflix shifts its categorization strategy to help kids and parents cut through choice overload and discover shows faster.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

AS streaming libraries continue to balloon with endless options, Netflix is leaning into playlists as a way of making kids content easier to find and faster to play.

Fine-tuning content delivery for this audience is more important than ever with the recent addition of heavy-hitter IPs such as Sesame Street, Ms. Rachel and Dr. Seuss. Thankfully, kids shows are relatively easy to curate, says Netflix kids product discovery lead Jessica Schein. "With adult TV shows, you have to watch episode one to understand episode two, and so on. But kids shows aren't like that, [so they can watch them out of order]."

After quietly testing a holiday-themed playlist in December 2023—a trial that took the streamer by surprise with its level of success—Netflix formally rolled out the feature in fall 2024 with preschool episode collections built around specific themes.

To step outside the festive period and include more evergreen concepts, Schein and her team are focusing on creating rewatchable playlists based on simple, familiar themes that kids enjoy (think animals, trucks and dinosaurs).

The approach has "exceeded expectations" as a discovery tool, she says, pointing to CG-animated *Trash Truck* as a standout example. Though this series originally debuted in 2020, it generated more than 18 million views in the second half of 2024 (doubling its first-half views), thanks to its playlist placement.

"The data to define success will always depend upon a specific activation—but members finding new shows to watch is really a key metric for us, and a critical way to think about whether or not we want to continue these playlists in the future."

Over the past year, Netflix has rolled out seasonal playlists tied to Earth Day, summer break and back to school, and its first-ever Halloween playlist is set to launch this month. The service is also adding non-seasonal categories—such as kindness and big feelings—to the content rows on its kids profile homepage this fall in order to spotlight more episodes from various shows.

The curatorial process involves finding a concept that caters to a specific need, then pulling titles from the catalogue to match. For instance, the "big feelings" category is aimed at parents who are looking to help their kids learn to manage tough emotions (like jealousy or frustration) by watching their favorite characters deal with them.

That said, Netflix still relies strongly on personalized recommendations, so even a new show or movie will only receive a push on a profile if it aligns with that member's tastes. And search data (such as whether members start looking up Halloween content in September or October) factors into determining the best time to launch seasonal playlists.

"Our consumer insights team has done interviews with kids and parents, which really helps us understand the moments and types of content that are resonating with our members," says Schein.

Looking ahead, Netflix is exploring an aged-up version of its preschool content hub that launched in April, Schein teases. Designed as a go-to for busy parents and caregivers, the hub organizes content around specific needs—whether that's time constraints (like finding a 30-minute movie) or travel (pulling up the fastest downloadable content if you're moments away from getting on a plane without Wi-Fi).

"We're going to [potentially build this same model] for an elementary school audience going forward, since these kids have different needs than three- to five-year-olds." k



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The compact Tikino video projector is easy to use and offers a library of playful and educational kids content

Seeing the bigger picture

The company behind kid-friendly projector Tikino is looking to acquire a diverse content library to power up its at-home cinematic experience.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Paris-based Tikino is on a mission to create an immersive at-home viewing experience for families with its same-name projector system—and it's in the process of acquiring a broad range of content to support this goal.

Designed for kids ages three to 10, the portable Tikino projector was developed during the pandemic by three moms who were concerned about their children's increasing screen time on handheld devices.

The product is currently available in France and Belgium for around US$200 (€170), but Tikino has ambitious plans to expand into additional markets. As part of that push, co-founder Aliénor Bouvier-Lewi attended the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas earlier this year to spark international interest and secure distribution partners.

Part of Tikino's appeal is that it brings the moviegoing experience into the home and encourages kids to disconnect from phones and computer screens, says Bouvier-Lewi. It also offers a unique co-viewing opportunity for families, she adds. "It creates a mini-cinema experience, and it really encourages families to gather and connect. We want to fight isolation and create something immersive and collective."

Tikino rolled out in July 2022 and has since moved "several thousand" units, according to Bouvier-Lewi. The company has also made more than 300,000 content transactions through its online library, where users can purchase videos to download onto their projectors. Brand owners receive a share of each sale.

In terms of next steps, the company is looking to build out its content library—which already includes 300 titles—by acquiring TVOD rights to a variety of animated kids TV series and films.

To create a varied viewing experience, Tikino is looking for content that fits into three buckets: imagination (fictional stories and fairy tales), education (anything from history to understanding emotions) and play (songs and puppets). Most of its content is in French or dialogue-free, with around 10% currently in English—though the company is actively working to expand its English-language offerings, says Bouvier-Lewi.

Most Tikino titles run between three and 45 minutes, but the company is open to longer formats. At the top of its wish list is slow-paced animation that won't overstimulate kids under age seven.

TV specials, short films and series are all welcome, and the company is especially interested in book-based content. It has already acquired a few such titles, including Illuminated Film Company's adaptation of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Fuzzy Friends* from Vooks.

Tikino is mostly offering licensed content but has also produced a few originals, including a series about Greek mythology (*The Trojan War*). To expand its production slate, the company is keen to develop new content with third-party partners.

While the projector is primarily a device for in-home use, Bouvier-Lewi sees opportunities in expanding further afield. For example, it could be a valuable tool in schools and particularly hospitals—where its ability to project onto ceilings makes it ideal for children lying in bed. Tikino is already in talks to bring it into both types of venues.

"In the longer term, [the goal is to] become a key player in kids video content that's recognized for putting the child's well-being, along with family connection, at the center of the [viewing] experience."

Bouvier-Lewi handles content acquisitions, and interested producers and distributors can reach out to her at alienor@tikino.fr. k

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Edgar Spielmann, 2BeNamed co-founder and CEO



The channel scooped up season two of regional nature-centric show *Hola Flinko* for a fall launch



Several Moonbug titles joined the KidOO library this summer, including preschool series *Meekah*



KidOO wants to support Spanish dubs of acquired content, as it did with *The Future Chicken Today Show*

THE HOOKUP

Kidscreen checks in with new, established and evolving kids content buyers to find out what they're looking for right now.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

Linear pay-TV channel KidOO is barely a year old, but it already reaches 7.5 million households in Latin America—with more markets and new content in the forecast. Mediaco 2BeNamed launched this ad-free channel for three- to nine-year-olds in April 2024. "We saw an opportunity to add value to the traditional pay-TV offering at a time when all eyes were on streaming," says CEO and co-founder Edgar Spielmann, adding that linear broadcasting is still a go-to media option for families in Latin America, which has roughly 110 million kids in the 10-and-under bracket (Statista, 2023).

Targeting this population, KidOO features a mix of international titles and local content, leaning heavily on acquisitions to build out its nascent library, which currently features 35 franchises. "By far, *Pororo the Little Penguin* and *Tayo the Little Bus*, both from South Korea's Iconix, are our strongest performers," Spielmann notes, describing these two music-driven toons as tentpoles of the channel's programming lineup.

KidOO is currently operating in eight countries (Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, Uruguay and Peru) and will expand into more markets next year.

What is KidOO looking for?

The team is on the hunt for short-format content (11-minute eps or less) with proven engagement on digital platforms like YouTube, or in countries with viewing behavior similar to LatAm, says Spielmann. "We prefer shows that are bright, energetic and non-violent." While animation is a top priority, the channel is open to unscripted live-action content that taps into such subjects as science, exploration, nature and crafts. Scripted live-actioners are not high on the shopping list at the moment, unless they're short and highly character-driven.

Acquired content must be dubbed in neutral Latin American Spanish. For example, KidOO launched Wind Sun Sky's *The Future Chicken Today Show* (16 x 12 minutes) in April under a partnership that saw the channel facilitate collaborative dubbing work and supervise the process. "We plan to continue supporting high-quality localization of international content for the region," says Spielmann.

Another new strategy for KidOO is a shift into more commissioning and originals. "We're absolutely interested in early-stage development. Our current focus is on expanding across LatAm, but as we grow, we [want] to collaborate with producers to help shape KidOO's [unique] identity."

Recent releases

In June, the channel licensed multiple Moonbug Entertainment shows spanning 10 preschool franchises—including CG-animated *CoComelon: Nina's Familia* (16 x three minutes) and live-action series *Meekah* (19 x 14 minutes)—to air throughout the summer. Coming up next is the second season of *Hola Flinko* (26 x five minutes), an original homegrown series that stars a curious platypus on a mission to discover native animals in the region. Season two is slated to launch this fall.

KidOO is also developing an app that will be available exclusively to pay-TV subscribers who already access the channel. "This will offer a TV everywhere/digital TV model," says Spielmann. "Children will enjoy the content across multiple devices, while [still] reinforcing the value of pay-TV and broadband bundles." k



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Knocking it out of the park

With record MLB viewership and surging demand for family activations, kids brands are finding new ways to score with fans on and off the field.

BY: COLE WATSON



Whether it's a bases-loaded homer, a game-saving catch or a last-second RBI, the roar of the crowd is part of what makes live baseball a memorable experience for kids and parents alike. Families gather at the ballpark—or around the TV at home—to cheer on their favorite teams and share in the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.

With that kind of passion at play, it's no surprise that kids brand owners are eager to get their characters onto the field. And while activations are happening across many sports, baseball is leading the way as the most important stage for reaching families.

"MLB is the best option for these types of activations with families because baseball games are slower-paced compared to other sports," says Katie Huber, senior director of licensing for Fred Rogers Productions. And short breaks between innings give kids more opportunities to do things like engage with Jumbotron content, enjoy branded activities and shop for merch.

Intrinsic advantages aside, MLB has recently implemented several new initiatives that are helping the cause, such as rule changes designed to speed up play, expanded international games in emerging markets, and perhaps most notably, a slate of branded sponsorships aimed at improving the ballpark experience so more families will pony up for season passes.

Three months in, broadcasters have reported double-digit gains in viewership compared to last year—with ESPN up 22%, TBS up 16% and FOX up 10%—putting this season on track to be MLB's most-watched in eight years.

First-round draft pick

Two-year-old Hidden Pigeon Company (HPC) may be a rookie in the kids space, but it has already executed five MLB game days for Mo Willems' beloved picture book franchises—each coming to play with a full mix of characters, special events and consumer products.

HPC launched its first activation last year with the New York Yankees, with Willems and his iconic character The Pigeon taking the mound for the ceremonial first pitch and appearing throughout the game as the team's honorary mascots.

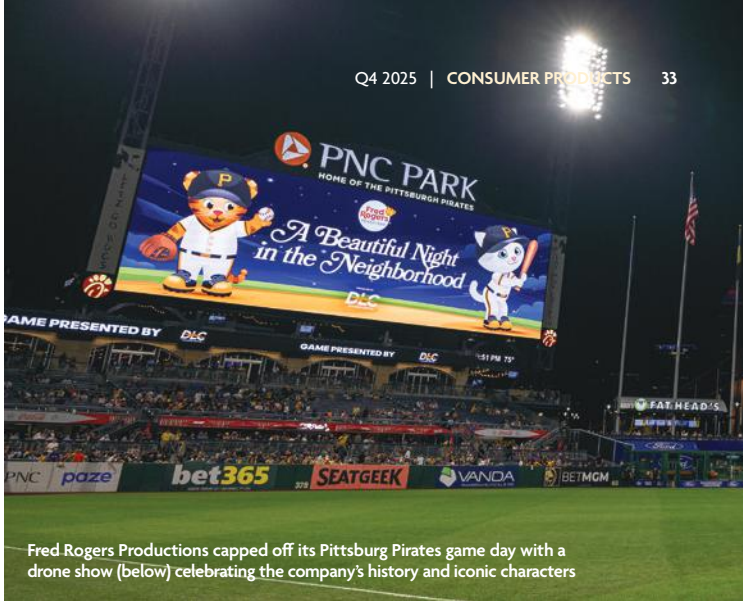
"Our connection with the Yankees had formed before HPC was even founded," says SVP of franchise management Tori Cook. "Mo had done a smaller activation with the Brooklyn Cyclones from the minor leagues [in 2022], and that led to them approaching us with our first branded game when they saw the potential our characters have to bring families into the stadium."

In just two years, the company has held a total of five branded game days between the Yankees and the Kansas City Royals. And what began as simple mascot appearances has quickly evolved to include co-branded merchandise, custom scoreboard graphics, in-stadium events, and meet-and-greet opportunities for kids to snap photos with The Pigeon or the dynamic duo of Elephant and Piggie.

Each activation took about seven months to plan with the team's promotions and marketing department, beginning with choosing the dates, says Cook. From there, HPC worked with the team, its licensees and the MLB (in some cases) to produce exclusive merchandise—ranging from free giveaways like pins



Big Bird, Elmo and Cookie Monster got into the game at several major and minor league baseball parks over the summer as part of Sesame Workshop's Road Trip Across America



Fred Rogers Productions capped off its Pittsburg Pirates game day with a drone show (below) celebrating the company's history and iconic characters



and collectibles, to premium co-branded jerseys and hats—designed to showcase team spirit.

"When building a program like this, you have to think beyond the premium offering to how you make this an unforgettable experience for the child and their family," says Cook. "The products are there to act as a tangible souvenir and powerful memento that families can look back on years after the game and recall all those memories they made together that day with our brands."

All five games that HPC has participated in so far have been sell-out successes—both in the stands and at the merch booth, adds Cook. Each game was attended by more than 37,000 guests, and that momentum is carrying over off the field, driving stronger licensed product sales and fueling demand on social media for more appearances by HPC's characters.

Looking at such stellar results, Cook is eager to expand these game days to more major and minor league teams next year.

Throwing a curveball

Game day collaborations with newcomers like HPC—along with more established players such as Sesame Workshop, Toei Animation, Peanuts Worldwide and Warner Bros. Discovery—have opened the door for more kids brands to step onto the MLB stage. For example, Fred Rogers Productions (FRP) recently teamed up with the Pittsburgh Pirates to host "A Beautiful Night in the Neighborhood" in March.

To prepare for this Mister Rogers-themed event, FRP and the Pirates spent four months developing the largest drone show ever staged at PNC Park, the Pirates' home turf. This was the perfect opportunity to test the waters with MLB and prove that the Fred Rogers brands have the pull to bring families into the ballpark, says Huber.

She adds that FRP is now looking to go beyond an after-game drone show and fully host MLB games, complete with co-branded merchandise and giveaways.

"FRP built up to this moment over a couple of years through its Be My Neighbor events, which we host with PBS and various minor league sports teams," Huber explains. "When the opportunity came up with the Pirates, it really clicked that we have a shared goal of building and uniting our communities through fun experiences."

The June 27 game against the New York Mets drew more than 29,000 fans and featured a drone light show after the final out. This display paid tribute to FRP's legacy, featuring images of Mister Rogers, Daniel Tiger, Donkey Hodie and Katerina Kittycat shining in the night sky.

Working with the Duquesne Light Company, Huber says a ballpark activation like the one for Mister Rogers can cost as much as US$100,000 and takes at least three months to plan, including new asset creation, music production and approvals on the playful transitions between characters.

However, the biggest challenge turned out to be the weather, because heavy rain on game night threatened to derail the show.

"Thankfully, it was only a 20-minute delay, but weather analysts were calling for thunderstorms all week, which was something completely out of our control," says Huber. "Besides that, we were also worried about how the drones would translate the storyboards. Of course we had finalized them behind the scenes, but it was a magical experience when we saw the drones fly in the sky that night."

Huber's best advice for brand owners planning a game day takeover is to target Friday or Saturday games. These matchups not only draw bigger crowds, they also give families more freedom to enjoy the full experience without worrying about school night bedtimes or having to work the next day.

The closer

Breaking into the big leagues is one thing...but staying there is another. For kids franchises, the challenge is figuring out how to become a recurring partner season after season. The key is to keep evolving the fan experience with fresh engagement hooks, as well as making the collaboration process as seamless as possible for teams, says Sesame Workshop's SVP and head of marketing Aaron Bisman.

"How we approach sports collabs now is by creating a menu of pre-approved assets and materials that the teams can pick out for their family days," adds Bisman. "From there, we work with the marketing and merchandising teams to design exclusives, premium offerings and individualized experiences that they think would have the most impact with the audience."

This year, Sesame Workshop is putting this model to the test with its Road Trip Across America. This nationwide summer/fall campaign featuring Elmo, Cookie Monster, Big Bird and the rest of the Sesame Street gang highlighting healthy habits and routines families can adopt is making 56 stops—including eight MLB games, as well as zoos, state fairs and farms.

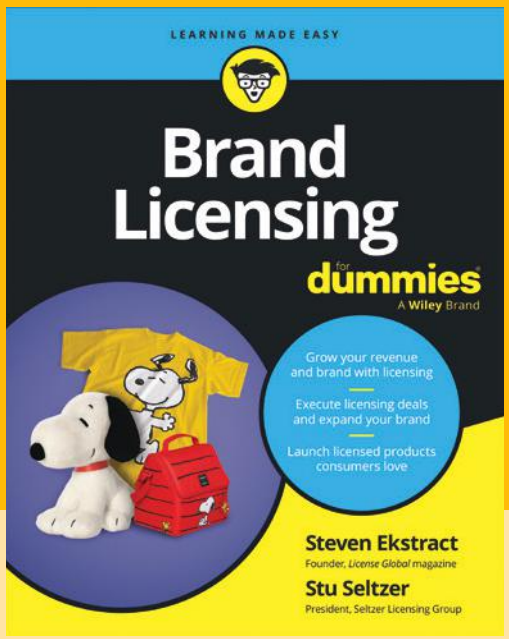
Activations like these are critical for keeping legacy brands such as Sesame Street relevant in today's zeitgeist, says Bisman. The goal isn't just merchandise sales, but embedding the IPs more deeply in the fandom and the wider community by offering experiences families can share—whether it's through trivia, unique giveaways, photo ops or playtime with the characters.

"We didn't launch our first theme days until 2022, so it's still a relatively new experience for Sesame Workshop," Bisman notes. "Each opportunity we've had has ramped up the demand for more themed days from sports teams and organizations that see how families are reacting to the partnerships on and off the field.

"[In 2022], we were working with four teams; now we've expanded to eight major league and five minor league clubs. And we even opened the door [to motor sports] with Nascar this year. We can't wait to see where this leads us next." k

BOOK REVIEW

Brand Licensing for Dummies



Licensing gurus Steven Ekstract and Stu Seltzer recently teamed up to pen a new standard in industry primers with *Brand Licensing For Dummies*.

Published in May, this 256-page how-to guide is designed to teach the ins and outs of licensing, helping industry newcomers understand the dynamics of discovering potential franchises, signing deals, building partnerships and expanding product distribution into new markets. The signature "For Dummies" writing style is in full effect here, making the subject matter accessible by keeping the language simple and introducing industry terminology at a gradual but steady pace.

Chapters five through eight are standouts, diving deep into the deal-making process. This is great "inside baseball" material that teaches the foundational aspects that licensees need to consider when drafting their contracts, from proposing royalty rates and understanding minimum guarantees, to the importance of territory rights and sell-off periods.

In between information-dense sections, the authors smartly break away periodically to give real-life examples of how a particular strategy has been used in the past. For instance, in chapter 11, Ekstract explores the licensing tie-in program for the Batman movie franchise, starting with the surprising runaway success of the iconic 1985 blockbuster, moving on to the commercial failure of *Batman Returns*, and then breaking down the course correction that returned the program to a winning formula for *Batman Forever*.

For brand owners looking to evolve their IPs into full-fledged franchises, this book is a valuable tool to get up to speed and navigate the licensing world like a pro. —CW

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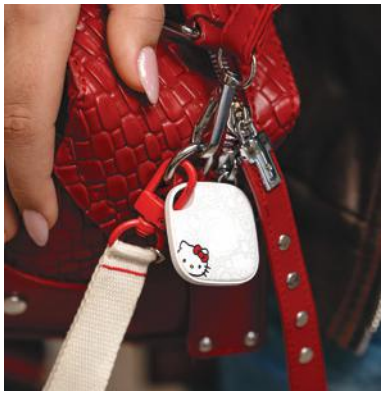
Keeping tabs

Life360 is leading the way in licensed Bluetooth trackers that help families stay safe and connected.

BY: COLE WATSON



Life360 chose Sanrio as its first licensing partner because of Hello Kitty's global appeal as a lifestyle and family brand





When the US military deployed the first GPS receiver in 1977, it weighed in at more than 270 pounds. Since then, tracking devices have evolved to the point where they now fit on a keychain, so anyone can comfortably carry one around in their wallet or bag. For parents, these Bluetooth trackers are an invaluable tool for keeping tabs on where their kids are in the world beyond home, and they can even send help alerts in emergency situations. For brand owners, this creates a new family-focused licensing opportunity in an emerging product category.

In March, California-based Life360 became the first Bluetooth tracker app developer to dip its toes into licensing, forging a deal with Sanrio to make limited-edition Hello Kitty versions of its Tile Mate and Tile Slim products (with retail prices ranging from US$24.99 to US$39.99). This collab was a major success, with both Hello Kitty SKUs selling out within a month of rolling out on Life360's e-commerce site, according to chief marketing officer Mike Zeman.

"We began exploring licensing partnerships shortly after launching our upgraded Tile product line in late 2024," says Zeman. "The enthusiastic response to the new color options showed us that consumers wanted more than just functionality from their trackers—it signaled an opportunity to lean further into personalization through brand collaborations that bring more personality into the category."

Life360 is now swinging the door wide open on licensing, working on a second limited-edition Sanrio drop with more SKUs that will roll out later this year. And looking ahead, Zeman sees this strategy as a key growth pillar that will help the company reach new audiences and position its trackers as a fun, giftable accessory.

Life360 is looking to partner with brands that have strong cultural relevance so that parents and kids will be excited to clip the licensed tags onto backpacks, lunch boxes, jackets, suitcases and everything in between. The company saw Hello Kitty as a natural fit because the iconic character bundles together nostalgia, charm and multigenerational appeal in one cute package.

Life360 has sold more than 45 million trackers since it acquired the Tile brand and assets in 2021 for US$205 million. Zeman says one in eight smartphone users in the US currently uses the Life360 app to keep track of family members. And he predicts that trackers will eventually shift beyond mere gadgets to become essential tools for staying organized, protected and connected.

"We're seeing growing demand for connected experiences and products that do more than just help you find lost items," he teases, but adds that details about updates and new products aren't available yet. "Consumers want devices that fit into a broader ecosystem of safety and peace of mind. By integrating Tile into the Life360 platform, we're allowing families to keep track of people, pets and things, all in one place."

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Stitching up a new market

Why brand owners are exploring crochet kits as a product category for licensing expansion.

BY: COLE WATSON

Crocheting dates back to the 17th century, originating as a simpler way to create dolls, blankets, bags and scarves from colorful yarns. But this very traditional craft is enjoying a vibrant revival today among younger generations—turning a timeless pastime into a fresh licensing opportunity for brand owners to explore.

One company that's positioning itself to cash in is North Carolina's The Woobles, which has been gaining ground at considerable speed in the licensed arts & crafts market with its beginner-friendly crochet kits that let kids make their own plush animals, dinosaurs and mythical creatures. And while the US$30 kits primarily target a 10-plus crowd, younger crafters can also pick up the techniques with help and supervision from a parent.

They've become a gateway product for newcomers to the hobby by including easy-to-work-with yarn that resists splitting, stitch markers tracking where to go next, and a pre-started "magic ring" (a crocheted circle with no hole in the center) to eliminate one of the trickiest steps for beginners.





Since making its entry into licensing with Pac-Man two years ago, The Woobles has added Hello Kitty & Friends (below) and others to its branded character kits

The packaging also contains a QR code that links to a step-by-step tutorial.

Married partners Justine Tiu and Adrian Zhang launched The Woobles in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, when many locked-down people were exploring new pastimes. The company's mission revolves around the Italian word "fiero"—that feeling of pride that comes with learning a new skill or overcoming a difficult challenge, explains Zhang.

According to UK-based research firm Technavio, the global crochet and knitting market is expected to expand by 6.9% annually until 2029, resulting in US$12.28 billion in new revenue.

Crocheting has historically been the most popular with seniors, but that has shifted rapidly, and the 18 to 35 demo now accounts for 73% of all related annual sales. Zhang notes that both kids and young parents are embracing the hobby as a fun way to craft their own collectibles and create handmade gifts for friends and family members.

In the years since the pandemic, The Woobles has grown into a 200-person operation that designs, manufactures and distributes crochet kits widely in North America through its direct e-commerce site. At Licensing Expo 2023, it inked its first licensing deal with Bandai Namco to make a branded crochet kit based on video game icon Pac-Man.

"We were incredibly fortunate to score a deal at that show, because we had no experience in licensing and hadn't booked any appointments," says Zhang. "We were taking our products and pitching our hearts out to receptionists first, just to get a meeting with any executive we could."

Those grassroots efforts were successful, and the company's licensing portfolio has since expanded significantly. Today, DC superheroes, Hello Kitty & Friends, Harry Potter, Minecraft and Care Bears account for more than 50% of The Woobles' product offering.

And its latest collab is with BBC Studios for preschool phenom Bluey—kits featuring the blue heeler pup and her family are set to launch on the company's e-commerce site in time for the 2025 holiday season.

Zhang expects licensing to continue to play a pivotal role in the company's growth, as it expands its cast of characters even more to reach new fandoms with fresh branded crochet kits. And The Woobles is also planning in-person events to create gathering points for its growing community and to introduce the hobby to more crafters worldwide.

"Our edge is that when we work with different brands, we always pay respect to [their] characters and create an engaging product for our consumers," says Zhang. "For us, licensing plays a big role in building our community, because it creates a lot of excitement when we bring all of these different fandoms together through one shared experience." k

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ON TREND

Euro toys

Pokémon has been the top-selling and top-gaining toy property in Europe over the past year—proof that the right IP can stand the test of time. "At nearly three decades old, Pokémon is truly everywhere: video games, toys, movies, streaming, apparel, stationery... you name it," says Frédérique Tutt, global toys industry advisor at Circana. "Pokémon's success is also linked to its broad fanbase, as it is incredibly popular with both kids and adults."

Circana data also shows that while licensed toys continue to drive market growth in the EU7 countries of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, the sources of toyetic brands are evolving beyond TV and movies, with franchises springing up from the worlds of gaming (Fortnite, Minecraft), sports (Formula 1) and anime (My Hero Academia).

LICENSED TOYS AT A GLANCE

In Europe, licensed toy sales have grown by 7% in the past 12 months—with growth in every EU7 country—and now account for 30% of total toy industry sales.



Sales of licensed toys have grown the fastest in the Netherlands, where they are up 19%.



Licensed toys account for the highest share of industry sales in the UK, at 33% of total toy sales.



The fastest-growing entertainment IP types in Europe's toy market over the past 12 months were video games (up 15%) and sports properties (up 59%).

TOP 10 TOY PROPERTIES IN THE EU7

Pokémon ranks as the top-selling property in the toy category for six of the EU7 countries (with Funko Pop! claiming that honor in Spain).

1 Pokémon



2 Star Wars





3 Marvel Universe



4 LEGO Technic

5 LEGO Star Wars





6 Barbie



7 PAW Patrol

8 LEGO City



9 Hot Wheels



10 Harry Potter/ Fantastic Beasts



Source: Circana, Retail Tracking Service, EU7, Toys, based on value sales, 12 months ending April 2025

A leading advisor on the complexity of consumer behavior, **Circana** uses technology, advanced analytics, cross-industry data and deep expertise to help nearly 7,000 market-leading brands and retailers take action and unlock business growth.

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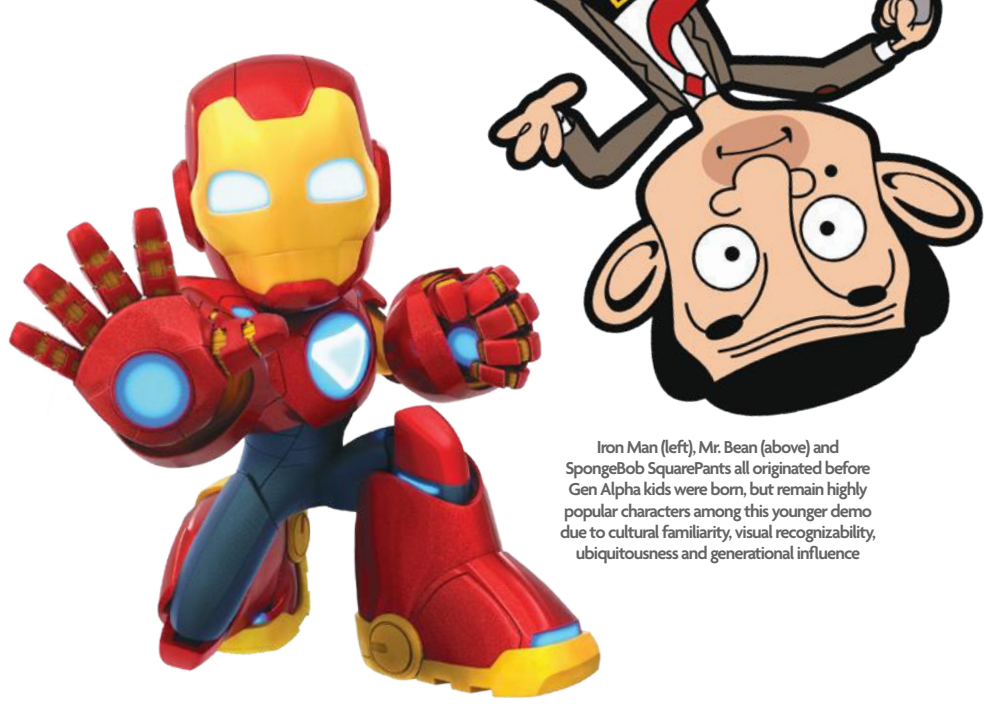
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Rewind culture

Why nostalgia isn't just for Millennials anymore.

BY: ADAM WOODGATE



Iron Man (left), Mr. Bean (above) and SpongeBob SquarePants all originated before Gen Alpha kids were born, but remain highly popular characters among this younger demo due to cultural familiarity, visual recognizability, ubiquitousness and generational influence

Given that they were born well after the dial-up buzz of the '90s and the glittery excesses of the '00s, Gen Alpha kids are making entertainment choices that exhibit a surprising amount of familiarity and fondness for times they've never experienced first-hand.

The Insights Family recently looked at this burgeoning trend more closely in survey data of three- to 15-year-olds in the US, the UK and Australia collected in Q1 2025. And our findings have identified some interesting creative and commercial opportunities for the kids content industry to tap into.

What came through loud and clear is that kids in this age bracket are forming strong emotional bonds with entertainment that predates their birth. Scooby-Doo, Power Rangers, SpongeBob SquarePants, Star Wars, Harry Potter and Transformers are just a few examples of currently popular entertainment brands that originated well before the Gen Alpha generation began in 2010.

And while Millennial parents do often introduce retro content into family life, our data reveals that kids are also actively discovering it themselves—especially on social platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram Reels.



Diving deeper into this from a TV standpoint, many of the most popular shows among kids in Q1 2025 hail from earlier times, including *The Simpsons* (1989), *Pokémon* (1997), *SpongeBob SquarePants* (1999), *Dora the Explorer* (2000) and *Ben 10* (2005). Some have been rebooted or refreshed, including *Ben 10* with multiple story arcs and *Pokémon* with evolving characters. But others, like *The Simpsons* and *Tom and Jerry,* remain virtually unchanged, proving that distinctive or relatable characters and well-written humor can be timeless in their appeal.

The same pattern shows up in feature films. Three- to eight-year-olds continue to love classic franchises such as Spider-Man (1959), The Lion King (1994) and Toy Story (1995), which endure through family viewings, streaming and remakes like Disney's live-action *The Little Mermaid* and upcoming *Toy Story 5*. For older kids, Harry Potter and Transformers are still among the top picks, as are '90s staples like Home Alone.

More than 60% of the most-loved characters among three to 12s originated before 2010. And many of these—including Barbie, Spider-Man, SpongeBob SquarePants, Mickey Mouse, Mario and Scooby-Doo—hit the market in the 20th rather than the 21st century.

What explains the enduring appeal of these characters that debuted before 2000? Their success appears to result from consistent reinvention that preserves the original's authenticity. Other possible factors include:

Cultural familiarity: Shared across generations, often introduced by parents.

Visual recognizability: Iconic visuals like Mickey's ears or Barbie's pink palette

Ubiquitousness: Reinforced through brand extensions into TV series, films, video games, toys and consumer products.

How kids find the past

So how does a typical eight-year-old discover 30-year-old entertainment? Today's non-linear, remixable media is shaped by word of mouth, social platforms, algorithms and (for younger kids) parents. TikTok and YouTube are driving the discovery of nostalgic content through video clips. Streaming service menus mix old and new content in their user interfaces, making shows like *Dora the Explorer* feel as current as *Bluey*. Co-viewing also matters—kids often watch *The Simpsons* with parents or play retro video games like *Tony Hawk* with older siblings.

Looking at discovery by age group, friends are influencers for all three brackets, while TikTok and suggestions become increasingly important as kids grow up.

What draws kids to eras they've not lived through? For Gen Alpha, the past is a creative resource. Retro content helps define unique aesthetic-driven identities, offers comfort in uncertain times, and cultivates a belonging through shared experiences with parents and siblings. Nostalgia isn't backwards-looking; it's how kids (with their parents' help) are shaping their present media world.

Parental echoes are also shaping kids' sense of nostalgia. Unlike previous generations of parents, Millennials are active co-curators

of entertainment for their families. They value the early years, often sharing the TV shows and franchises they loved growing up, sparking a resurgence of Millennial-era culture in Gen Alpha's world:

Analogue aesthetics: Pixel graphics, VHS filters and Tamagotchis evoke nostalgic '80s and '90s design, introducing kids to their parents' childhoods.

Video games: Classic game franchises like Mario Kart and Pokémon continue to release hugely popular new products.

Fashion and music: TikTok revives early '00s fashion and '90s pop-punk music, with kids wearing nostalgic styles and bonding with parents over shared playlists.

Tips for IP owners and creators

Rewind culture isn't a passing trend—it's a platform for cross-generational connection. Creators and licensors have the opportunity to deepen their brands' relevance by blending legacy appeal with modern formats. Here are a few tips to bear in mind when creating content for the Gen Alpha generation.

Design for co-viewing: Package content and promotion that resonates across generations.

Respect the original source: Kids care deeply about authenticity, so reboots should honor the spirit of the original, not just the logo.

Enable remix culture: Offer shareable assets and visual elements that allow kids to personalize and circulate nostalgic content—especially with the growing number of kid creators.

Layer discovery paths: Make legacy content accessible on the platforms kids use, like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, Roblox and curated streaming menus.

Rethink merchandising: Toys, clothes and collectibles that revive classic designs (original Pokémon card sets or vintage Barbie dresses, for example) have a cross-generational appeal.

Gen Alpha doesn't see nostalgia as looking back—it's how they connect now. With Millennial parents guiding them, media companies can bridge generations, revive classic IPs and build lasting fandoms together. K

ADAM WOODGATE is VP of research solutions for The Insights Family, the global leader in marketing insights related to kids, parents and young adults. For more information, visit theinsightsfamily.com.



Top five favorite TV shows (Q1 2025)

Pre-2010 IP

	US	UK	AU
3-8	*Bluey* ***SpongeBob SquarePants*** *PAW Patrol* ***Peppa Pig*** ***Tom and Jerry***	*Bluey* *PAW Patrol* ***Peppa Pig*** *PJ Masks* ***SpongeBob SquarePants***	*Bluey* *PAW Patrol* ***Peppa Pig*** ***SpongeBob SquarePants*** *Gabby's Dollhouse*
9-12	***SpongeBob SquarePants*** ***Tom and Jerry*** ***Pokémon*** *PAW Patrol* *Stranger Things*	***The Simpsons*** ***SpongeBob SquarePants*** ***Pokémon*** *Stranger Things* ***Tom and Jerry***	*Bluey* ***Pokémon*** ***The Simpsons*** ***SpongeBob SquarePants*** ***Peppa Pig***

Top five favorite films (Q1 2025)

Pre-2010 IP

	US	UK	AU
3-8	*Frozen* ***Spider-Man*** ***Sonic the Hedgehog*** *Moana* ***Barbie***	***Spider-Man*** *Moana* *Frozen* ***Barbie*** ***Sonic the Hedgehog***	*Moana* *Frozen* ***Sonic the Hedgehog*** *Moana 2* ***Spider-Man***
9-12	*Moana* ***Sonic the Hedgehog*** *Frozen* ***Spider-Man*** ***The Lion King***	***Harry Potter*** ***Barbie*** *Wicked* ***Spider-Man*** *Moana 2*	*Moana* *Wicked* ***Sonic the Hedgehog*** ***Harry Potter*** *Moana 2*

Top five favorite characters (Q1 2025)

Pre-2010 IP

	US	UK	AU
3-8	Bluey Ryder (*PAW Patrol*) **SpongeBob SquarePants** **Barbie** **Spider-Man**	**Spider-Man** Moana **SpongeBob SquarePants** **Barbie** Bluey	**Sonic the Hedgehog** **Harry Potter** Bluey Minions Moana
9-12	**Spider-Man** **Batman** **Iron Man** **Sonic the Hedgehog** Moana	**Harry Potter** **Spider-Man** **Sonic the Hedgehog** Moana **Mr. Bean**	**Harry Potter** **Sonic the Hedgehog** **Mr. Bean** Minions **Garfield**

Source: The Insights Family Kids Insights, January 1 to March 31, 2025





Room for everyone

Rethinking what wealth looks like on screen.

BY: COLLEEN RUSSO JOHNSON, MAKEDA MAYS GREEN & MAYA LENNON

While the media industry has made tremendous progress in recent years to ensure that children of various backgrounds see themselves represented on screen, one area that is often overlooked is wealth.

The characters and settings kids see on TV don't just entertain them—they shape how they think about class, money and success. These portrayals influence how children perceive themselves, how they compare their own lives to others, and even how they imagine their futures.

In a recent research study by Nickelodeon involving more than 1,100 parents and 600 kids ages six to 11, we set out to explore how financial realities show up on screen—and how they do (or don't) reflect kids' own lived experiences. The results are clear: Kids notice wealth. A house isn't just a TV show backdrop—it's a message.

Homes, as it turns out, are one of the very first cues kids use to understand wealth. When we asked children which homes from TV shows and movies felt like theirs, many struggled to name even one. The vast majority of on-screen homes children thought of were big, beautiful...and largely unattainable. Meanwhile, only 5% of kids said their house is bigger than the ones they usually see on TV.

For kids who live in smaller or single-story homes, something as simple as an indoor staircase became a symbol of wealth. They also noticed the home's condition: Is it clean and new-looking? Or cluttered and showing its age? A seven-year-old told us, "I don't know a show [home] that looks like mine. Our house is really old and falling apart, and all the paint is peeling."

These visual cues extended beyond the home as well. Kids in our study pointed to cars, vacations, pools, jobs and birthday parties as other signals of a family's financial situation.

And they're also tuning into how characters are portrayed. Kids perceive rich characters as spoiled, popular, fancy, white and automatically happy. Meanwhile, they perceive poorer characters as sad, lonely and kind, often with single parents and disproportionately Black.

Whether it's intentional or not, these narrow portrayals can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about what it means to be in both a lower and higher income bracket.

UNRELATABLE WEALTH

This limited representation isn't just a visibility problem—it impacts how kids feel. Some kids expressed sadness, envy or embarrassment when watching characters live in big, beautiful houses. One 11-year-old said, "Our house is nice; it's just that we don't have a lot of what we see on TV that I would love to have, like a pool and a fenced-in large yard."

Meanwhile, a 10-year-old girl admitted, "I feel jealous that those kids have more things like clothing and bigger houses. I feel embarrassed that I don't have that many things."

Parents also noted the impact. "A lot of the shows my daughter watches portray things I can't afford," one mom explained. "She asks for what she sees on TV, and it makes me feel like I'm not good enough to give her what she wants."

ASPIRATIONAL WEALTH

But wealth on screen isn't inherently problematic. In fact, depicting financial prosperity in ways that feel realistic and attainable can have a positive impact on kids. It can spark motivation and ambition. For some kids, these portrayals can provide a critical roadmap that they don't see in their daily lives.

"It makes me want to know more about how the family became successful so I can grow up and be successful, too," said an 11-year-old. And a nine-year-old added, "It makes me want to go to college, get a great job, and buy a bigger house."


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TIPS FOR CREATORS

If you're producing kids & family content, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Cast homes with intention



Be deliberate about the homes your characters occupy. Does the size and condition match the family's reality, or is it simply an aspirational default? Even small cues, like shared bedrooms and clutter, can communicate authenticity.

Portray a range of lifestyles

Whether it's within a series or movie, or across an entire programming slate, showcasing diverse lifestyles allows more viewers to see both their experiences and their aspirations reflected.



Focus on aspiration—and ground it



Portray wealth as attainable, highlighting effort and realistic journeys to financial stability. Kids expressed a keen interest in understanding how wealth is earned, and they benefit from seeing varied career paths and realistic portrayals of work.

Flip the script on character wealth portrayals

Avoid tropes of lower-income families as lazy, sad and uneducated people of color. Highlight their strong work ethic, resourcefulness and aspirations. For high-income families, show a range of racial backgrounds and wealth journeys.



Prioritize values over valuables



Depicting low-cost but creative celebrations, vacations and everyday moments underscores that happiness comes from experiences and quality time together, not big spending.

From a parent's POV, one mom noted: "I would like my child to see more of the mansions to inspire her to dream big and strive for greater things. I want her to grow up knowing that beautiful things exist, and every single one of them is within reach."

But when kids never see the effort it takes to achieve those lifestyles, or when the characters seem to be magically wealthy for no reason, it can feel disheartening.

AVERAGE WEALTH

Ultimately, families want more portrayals that reflect average, everyday realities. A dinged-up used car. Birthdays in the backyard with homemade decorations. Parents working and budgeting. Featuring relatable wealth fosters deeper connections with a show's characters and content. Seeing homes and lives that feel familiar helps kids feel seen and understood. For the majority of Americans, this means showing more modest economic lifestyles.

However, what matters equally is how lower-to-average-income families are shown. For lower-income portrayals, parents want to see families pursuing dreams and aspirations despite economic hardships, as well as working hard and being happy, resilient and resourceful while budgeting/saving (including not wasting food).

"I wish a more modest family could be shown in a happier light for my small child to relate to," said one mom. "I feel that families in trailer parks are shown as unhappy, or at the very least discontented, and I wish that didn't exist so that my child doesn't grow to feel ashamed of our life."

Parents want content to challenge wealth stereotypes and emphasize that core values and experiences—like kindness, hard work, happiness and quality family time—are attainable by every family and do not depend on money.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Kids are observant, empathetic and deeply influenced by what they see. They're building their understanding of the world—and their place in it—in part through media. When we only show one version of success, we limit their imaginations. But when we show families who live in all kinds of homes, work all kinds of jobs, and find joy in all kinds of ways, we expand what's possible for them.

The goal isn't to eliminate aspiration. It's to make sure that every kid sees a path forward and can imagine themselves on it. k

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Should social media be banned for kids under 16?

Advocate Greg Attwells and kids media expert David Kleeman weigh in.



YES

BY: GREG ATTWELLS

Kids need more time to develop healthy and secure identities before they're exposed to the minefield of social media. There is a direct correlation between the introduction of social media and the rise in anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide among teenagers. The situation is so bad that keeping the status quo while we work on more nuanced remedies is simply negligent.

At 13, children are not yet ready to navigate online social networks safely. The 36 months between 13 and 16 are crucial for them to develop a secure sense of self and social confidence. Social media makes this harder, not easier. Most parents seem to agree that social media is not helping.

THE REALITIES

Each notification, like or comment triggers a dopamine release, creating a reward loop that keeps teenagers engaged and returning for more. The anticipation of receiving these rewards, and the pleasure derived from them, can make social media usage addictive and difficult to resist.

This is why we're urging governments around the world to change their policies and raise the threshold for social media citizenship, delaying the age when teenagers can sign up for social media accounts by 36 months, from age 13 to 16.

We're not trying to be the fun police, stopping young people from communicating via the internet or accessing entertainment and educational resources. The components of social media that we feel qualify a service for greater regulation are:

- Gamified online interaction that makes using the service highly addictive.
- Algorithms that target vulnerabilities in young people and feed unhealthy obsessions.
- The ability for users to share and receive commentary from an open social network, allowing online bullying to grow in the shadows of the service.

Since the Australian government has passed these social media reforms, it has clearly said that the onus will be on social media platforms to enforce an effective age gate. Parents won't be responsible, teenagers won't be responsible, and the government isn't trying to backdoor digital ID to its citizens so it can spy on them.

The creators of the product will be responsible for making sure that access won't be granted to those who shouldn't have it, for their own safety and well-being.

New York University professor Scott Galloway asks: "What's more challenging—figuring out if someone is younger than 16, or building a global real-time communication network that stores a near-infinite amount of text, video and audio retrievable by billions of simultaneous users in milliseconds with 24/7 uptime? The social media giants know where you are, what you're doing, how you're feeling, and if you're experiencing suicidal ideation...but they can't figure out your age? You can't make this shit up."

The platforms could:

- Use AI to estimate when a user is likely underage based on their online behaviors, and seek age verification from at-risk people.
- Use the facial recognition capabilities that are already built into devices to scan a user's face on account sign-up; and if they look underage, ask for ID—just like the clerk at the liquor store would.
- Collect sufficient information to confirm a user's age, then wipe the information from their servers.

To be frank, they already know way more about us than we realize. The reason the platforms haven't implemented these safety measures yet is because "it will reduce their profits, which will suppress their stock prices, and the job of a public company CEO is to increase the stock price. Period, full stop, end of strategic plan," says Galloway.

ON THE EDGE

What about teenagers on the fringe who rely on social media for community? Research indicates that there is a significant link between social comparison and feelings of loneliness. Individuals often assess their social connections by comparing them to others. And upward social comparisons—viewing others as having better or more fulfilling relationships—can intensify feelings of loneliness.

Intentionally or unintentionally, social media trades in comparison, not belonging. Regardless of a platform's promise of connection, the act of comparing your life to the lives of others via your social feed is actually making you feel more lonely.

Recent data indicates that approximately 40% of Australian teenagers report feelings of loneliness. That's two in every five teenagers—a significant increase compared to 2001, when 18.5% of young Australians were classified as lonely. In a world where teenagers have never been more digitally connected, they've also never been more lonely.

Social media is a comparison trap, masquerading as community. A recent YouGov poll found that an overwhelming 77% of Australians support our new social media laws. And Gen Z is as supportive of such restrictions as older generations, if not more so, according to a recent *Media & Entertainment Consumer Insights Report* from Deloitte that asked more than 2,000 Australians across five generations their thoughts on social media age restrictions. This study found that 91% of Gen Zs agreed with the statement, "There should be stronger restrictions on children's access to social media."

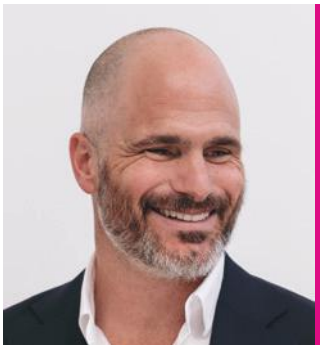
These findings mirror what we've heard and seen as we've visited schools. Gen Zs breathe a sigh of relief when we take away the fear of missing out and the moment-by-moment indication of whether or not they belong in their peer group.

YES TO EDUCATION

Many ask, "Isn't better education a more nuanced solution than a blanket ban?" We agree that a ban alone is not a silver bullet to solve all issues to do with the safety of young people online. But we also believe that we don't need to oppose raising the age for social media access in order to say yes to better education. "Legislation versus education" is a false dichotomy. The right answer is yes to both; one is not a substitute for the other.

We'd also love to lose the word "ban" if we can. We don't call it an "alcohol ban" or a "smoking ban" for teenagers, or a ban on driving before you get your license. Society has simply determined that there needs to be a level of developmental maturity in order to comprehend the risks and engage in these activities safely. Language matters.

We're giving something up in order to gain something better. We're losing social media in order to find social connection. It's only 36 months, but it could change a life for the better.



GREG ATTWELLS is director of 36 Months, a movement for healthy teen development without the influence of social media. The organization was the catalyst behind the new social media legislation in Australia and rallied more than 127,000 petition signatures in less than six months to raise the age of social media citizenship by 36 months, from 13 to 16.

NO

BY: DAVID KLEEMAN

It's important to acknowledge from the start that ubiquitous social media presents issues for many children, teens and families. It can be a time suck, a sleep thief or a distraction; a source of misinformation and disinformation; and a conduit for harassment or bullying. But despite hyperbolic claims, blocking access is unnecessary, impractical, ineffective and unwise, for a variety of reasons.

THE HYPERBOLE

The global movement toward bans has been driven by hair-raising claims from books such as Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation* and Jean Twenge's *iGen*. But scholars including Candice Odgers, Amy Orben and Andrew Przybylski have pushed back with critiques of the data used, citing issues like cherry-picked studies, inconsistent or minimal associations between well-being and social media use, the inability to prove causal connections, shortcomings of cross-sectional (snapshot) studies versus longitudinal ones, and a sole focus on technology as the source of teen anxieties (in a world of war, climate change, economic uncertainty, academic pressure and more).

For politicians and the press, simplifications claiming that phones and social media are to blame are more media-friendly than complex analyses of the content, context, personal circumstances and individual psychology that factor strongly into healthy social-emotional development.

Moral panic related to young people has a long history in the media. In 1961, Wilbur Schramm—who is considered the founder of



communications studies—addressed the complexity and ambiguity of media effects, writing that "some" television is harmful for "some" children under "some" conditions, but beneficial for "other" children under the same conditions, or for the same children under "other" conditions. For "most" children under "most" conditions, "most" television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial. This illuminates that bans are unwise because youth development is not monolithic.

THE NUANCES

Because of individual variations in development, every young person has a unique relationship with technology and social media, so there's not a one-size-fits-all approach. Families best understand when their kids are ready for online engagement, just as some families may decide that PG-13 movies are appropriate for their 12-year-old while others may have a 13-year-old who's not yet ready.

Because of individual differences, social media is a boon for many youth, and a lifeline for some.

Generations Z and Alpha have never known a time without digital media. For young people, what we call a "phone" is a Swiss Army knife—its multiple tools can be used in productive or destructive ways.

As adolescents explore their individuality in hobbies and passions, social media enables them to engage with both broad and niche interest groups, connecting with peers worldwide. Over the course of a day, young people pursue and express different facets of their lives in varied platforms and communities.

Most social media encourages creation, not just consumption. On YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and other social platforms, tweens and teens develop valuable creative skills as they tell their own stories, remix each other's creations, and engage with brand and IP owners (who, if they're smart, pay attention to fans' views).

Many youth *can't* express their authentic personas in real life (e.g., LGBTQ+ teens), so social media communities may be their only opportunity to connect with supportive voices and critical information. And all young people's need for social media's powers of information, connection, empowerment and education is protected by the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child. That's why we need media literacy, not media blackouts.

THE MEDIA MINEFIELD

We can't expect young people to become thoughtful, critical media consumers and creators if we block them from platforms and communities until a chosen age, and then throw teens into deep water. Media literacy is a muscle that's developed with time, teaching and experience; instead of locking the pool, let's offer "swimming lessons" from the earliest ages. (Adults aren't always great at dealing with social media either, so let's make media literacy education a lifelong pursuit!)

The UK government acknowledged this in its recent Draft Statement of Strategic Priorities for Online Safety, writing: "Without the skills to navigate the digital world, users are more exposed to harmful online content and ultimately can disengage from society, with serious and enduring consequences for communities and democracy."

Everyone has a stake and responsibility in making social media safe, so don't let big tech off the hook.

TECH TALK

In the lead-up to Australia's social media ban, a recent research project found that 80% of Australian tweens are on social platforms that are rated 13+—meaning that they were easily able to bypass age-checking systems.

Clearly, tech needs stronger privacy and safety protections at the platform level (and age-tracking at the device level, in my opinion).

A one-size-fits-all ban, however, could give tech companies cover to lessen protections and deprioritize innovation, with plausible deniability that underage users aren't on the platform. Moreover, we know that bans are impractical and have unintended consequences.

Until we have near-foolproof technological and human safety protocols that grant expanding circles of privilege with age and demonstrated responsibility, bans will be fraught with leaks. They give a false sense of security, discourage stakeholder conversation, encourage deception and hacks, and keep young people from vital information and communities—while serving as a boon to non-compliant platforms and the VPN industry.

For too long, we've created devices, applications and platforms without considering young users. And then, when they adopt (and adapt) these technologies in unanticipated ways, we block or regulate them. Going forward, we need to invite young perspectives at the outset—because in the end, youth-engaged design is youth-centered design.



DAVID KLEEMAN is SVP of global trends for Dubit, a research and strategy consultancy and games studio. He's worked in children's media for more than 35 years. (Full disclosure: David serves on a Meta Youth Advisory Board.)

A new narrative riff

Interactive storytelling app Riffio is expanding to let kids create more branded content, and IP owners will get a 40% cut of this extra business.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW



Riffio lets kids remix existing Storybutton shows like *Critter Protectors* (left), *Pixel Quest* (middle) and *Petra the Protector*—and the app is on the hunt for third-party IPs

Some studios spend months—and hundreds of thousands of dollars—making a batch of episodes for a YouTube series, only for kids to binge everything in one afternoon and move on to the next brand. But Riffio wants to flip that script by giving kids tools to keep their favorite franchises alive with endless fresh content.

This new app from South Carolina techco Storybutton uses AI to generate audio stories—with animation on the way—so its eight- to 12-year-old target demo can make new short episodes featuring brands they like.

Riffio launched in May and already has around 2,000 subscribers who pay US$13 per month (or US$100 annually) for enough in-game currency to make 90 minutes of content each month. (Kids who want to make more episodes can buy additional credits.) Brand owners collect 40% of this revenue—providing a revenue stream incentive to offer up more content in the app, says Jim Jacob, founder of Storybutton and Riffio.

Here's how it works in the user experience: Kids pick an IP and then choose from a variety of different characters and locations. AI generates a few possible scenarios, ranging from a mystery story to an action-adventure quest. Users select the one they want, and the app generates seven 90-second audio stories (roughly 10 minutes of content in total). And at the end of each episode, kids have the option to guide the story arc by choosing what happens next.

This fall, Riffio is expanding its functionality to let kids bring their own custom avatar into the stories they create, offer a multiplayer function and incorporate animation into the currently audio-only format.

The app has a few popular kids YouTube channels on board so far, including Lively Lewis Show (5.6 million subscribers) and FGTeeV (24.7 million). Riffio also offers 12 original audio series, many of them podcasts that started through Storybutton—such as *Pixel Quest* and *Spyology Squad*.

Eager to add more brands to the app, Storybutton has brought in Thom Chapman, Spin Master's former VP of sales and distribution, to help make this happen. Chapman and his franchise-building company Victura Media will be at MIPCOM this month to introduce Riffio to the global marketplace and get more IP owners onto the platform.

Chapman sees Riffio as an opportunity for brands and producers to explore the gamification of storytelling while tapping into the demand for personalized, interactive stories. He adds that this trend is poised to become even more popular as kids look to reimagine, co-create and interact with content—rather than just watch it.

"The end of passive video starts with Riffio," says Chapman. "We're looking at this like it's the Roblox of content, where kids can interact with brands. And brands looking for immediate engagement from kids can make Riffio a new part of their franchise and marketing plans." k

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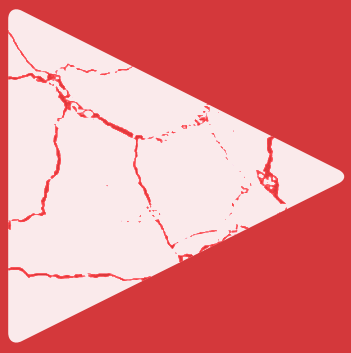
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CRACKING YouTube's code

The platform has evolved, but the opportunity is still massive—for those who know how to build smart and turn views into value.

YouTube isn't just a platform—it's the launchpad for the next generation of kids entertainment. With low barriers to entry and global reach, the video sharing platform continues to spawn breakout voices and bold new formats that traditional media can't always see coming. But as the landscape shifts, so do the rules of engagement.

From breakout creators and evolving monetization models, to the tactics that drive visibility and growth, the path to success on YouTube looks very different than it did even a few years ago. Whether you're building a channel from scratch or scaling an established IP, one thing is clear—thriving on YouTube today takes strategy, agility and a sharp sense of what kids want now.

Next in line?

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN, RYAN TUCHOW & COLE WATSON

Mark Rober



@MarkRober

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS
71.2 million

TOTAL VIEWS
14.2 billion

LAUNCHED
2011

GENRES
STEM, DIY, pranks

TARGET AGE
kids/teens

A former NASA engineer armed with a background in tech and product design, Mark Rober is feeding his young fans' appetite for problem-solving content with DIY projects and fun experiment videos that put his skills on full display.

Rober's content is especially engaging because he has the ability to simplify complex subjects so his all-ages audience can easily follow along. His catalogue of more than 225 videos varies greatly, ranging from developing glitter bombs and scaring porch pirates, to turning his backyard into an obstacle course for squirrels and building a roller coaster in his lab. Rober also frequently collaborates with other creators and celebrities, including MrBeast, Dude Perfect, Jimmy Kimmel and Bill Gates.

Outside of his presence on YouTube, Rober has expanded into buildable toy kits with the launch last year of his CrunchLabs subscription box service. This STEM toy venture has become a key business focus, and Rober inked a deal with Moose Toys in May to co-develop a new CrunchLabs-branded consumer products range to launch at retail next year. But content is still a core component of this banner—in August, Netflix ordered a new kid-friendly competition series that Rober will host and executive produce. —CW

Jo Redfern: "Mark Rober is a superstar creator who's making engineering cool, while counting MrBeast among his friends. Mixing big-budget spectacle with genuine science, his content represents YouTube edutainment excellence. With 14.2 billion views, he has the most-followed tech channel, featuring high-profile brand partnerships, subscription box toys and a Roblox experience. This is science content creation for the YouTube generation: commercial and platform-native, yet also educational."



"World's Largest Jello Pool – Can you swim in Jello?"

In this 10-minute video, Rober aims to accomplish a childhood dream by swimming in a pool of gelatin. The challenge presents a bigger engineering hurdle than anticipated, requiring him to heat up six 55-gallon drums full of the goop several times over the course of a week and use the power of gravity to fill the pool.

From toddlers to teens, the next generation of kids is finding their favorite creators on YouTube—long before the mainstream catches on. In this special report, *Kidscreen* highlights a fresh wave of emerging content creators who are catching fire—and might just be the next Ms. Rachel or MrBeast.

We explore what makes them stand out, their unique approaches to connecting with their audience, and the business opportunities waiting in the wings. Media strategist Jo Redfern then offers her expert insight on each creator's potential trajectory—and why brands should be paying attention.

The Anazala Family



@AnazalaFamily

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS
10.7 million

TOTAL VIEWS
2.2 billion

LAUNCHED
2021

GENRES
vlogs, challenges

TARGET AGE
tweens/teens

The LA-based family of four at the heart of this popular channel regularly creates chaotic situations for themselves to navigate, from being stranded on the side of a mountain, to transforming their house into a water park, to giving US$1,000 to each of the kids to see how they spend it.

However, parents Asala Maleh and Anas Marwah also enjoy capturing the simpler moments in life on video, such as taking their daughter to her first dentist appointment, planning a surprise birthday party, and seeing their son off on his first day of school.

While their core YouTube channel only has around 10.7 million subscribers, that number quickly expands to more than 40 million fans worldwide when all of their social media accounts are factored in. And the creators leverage these platforms by repurposing their 200-plus videos into shorts and compilations that rack up millions of views online.

The Anazala Family channel currently holds a Guinness World Record for generating the most views ever with a gender-reveal party video in 24 hours on YouTube. (This record-breaking title for the gender reveal of their youngest child, Noah, racked up more than 9.8 million views.) In addition, Maleh wrote a children's picture book called *Noah's Brave Night*, in which her son learns that nighttime isn't so scary after all. —CW

Jo Redfern: "The Anazala Family channel is not unlike that of the Lewis family (see page 57) in that its content is family-focused; presents an idealized, wholesome image; and has high—often lavish—production values. This has earned them billions of views and a place among the most popular family creator groups on YouTube. One concern I have is that the de facto commercialization of kids on these family channels has drawn criticism in some quarters. To be honest, I'm not sure how I feel about it, either."



"Overnight in the World's Smallest RV!"

In this video, Marwah proposes that the family take a seven-day road trip to visit his hometown in Ottawa, Canada. Mom thinks this is a terrible idea and creates a challenge where they must stay the night in five progressively smaller mobile homes, or else the trip is off.

Salish



@salishmatter

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS
3 million

TOTAL VIEWS
106.8 million

LAUNCHED
2023

GENRES
vlogging challenges, beauty

TARGET AGE
tweens/teens

This 15-year-old influencer started out on her photograher/YouTuber father Jordan Matter's channel (32 million subscribers) before launching her own nearly two years ago. Despite uploading just 13 videos so far, she's averaging upwards of eight million views per post, and recently took home a Nickelodeon Kids' Choice award in the Favorite Female Creator category.

While Jordan's channel follows a regular release schedule—bringing a MrBeast-like energy to pranks, skits and viral challenges—Salish has taken a slower, more curated approach. She's exploring similar formats, but also leaning into GRWM (get ready with me) and beauty-related content. And she has robust Instagram and TikTok accounts, where she currently posts more content and has more than seven million followers combined.

According to KidSay, Salish's videos perform best with the eight- to 15-year-old crowd—a broad demo with strong potential for franchise extensions. She currently ranks second in popularity among girls ages eight to 11, the youth research firm reports. —SB

Jo Redfern: "Salish Matter is building her own name and channel separate from her father, featuring gymnastics, dance, family and challenge content. At only 15, she is cementing her fandom by replicating the formula that brought other members of the Matter family to prominence, but adding her own personality. On her personal channel, she often collabs with other teen creators like Nidal Wonder and Sydney Morgan. You can expect to see a lot more of Salish Matter."



"Surviving Celebrity Beauty Routines ft/ Sydney Morgan"

Salish offers a mix of beauty-based content with the competitive challenges she's known for in this collaboration with Gen-Z influencer Sydney Morgan. The two face off in timed rounds to pull off their best makeup looks with celebrity products (making time to play with glitter and slime in between), and then a mystery judge reviews their efforts.



FGTeeV

@FGTeeV

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS: 24.9 million | **TOTAL VIEWS:** 25.8 billion | **LAUNCHED:** 2013

This content creator family plays together on Roblox, Minecraft and Marvel Rivals, as well as writing and performing gaming-themed sketches. The family consists of dad Duddy, his wife Moomy and their kids Shawn, Chase, Mike and Lexi. While this is their core channel, they also feed videos into other hubs dedicated to toys and family vlogs. Beyond YouTube, FGTeeV has a Roblox game and a series of graphic novels published by Harper Alley.

ONES TO WATCH

Lively Lewis Show



@LivelyLewisShow

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS
5.9 million

TOTAL VIEWS
4.6 billion

LAUNCHED
2020

GENRES
roleplay, comedy

TARGET AGE
preschool

Playing an extreme game of hide-and-seek or looking after 100 pets is just a typical day on Lively Lewis Show—a popular channel featuring a family of four that creates humorous and imaginative roleplay videos.

The Lewises upload a wide variety of content, from costume try-ons to mermaid transformations, and their playful family antics have attracted a massive following. In fact, one standout video from 2021 called "Ivy Turns Into a Mermaid!!!" has racked up more than 50 million views.

Lively Lewis Show videos are now also available on Kidoodle.TV and Prime Video, and the family has even discussed a potential animated series that would give their adventures a new dimension. Plus there's a companion podcast called *Lively Lewis Stories* available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

In May, the Lewises dipped their toe into animation with "Ivy Made a REAL Cupcake Unicorn!," created in collaboration with Cartoon Conrad. And the family also runs an e-commerce shop that sells apparel, stationery and plush. —RT

Jo Redfern: "Lively Lewis Show is a YouTube family channel featuring siblings Levi and Ivy, and their parents Eric and Alexa. Using a mixture of live action and animation, they create bright, family-friendly content aimed at four- to eight-year-olds and focusing on imaginative storytelling, positive life lessons and roleplay. Their vast content footprint—including multiple channels and a podcast—is designed to emphasize kindness, inclusivity and gratitude. There appears to be a strong commercial strategy underpinning the IP, too."



"Ivy Turns Into a Mermaid and the House Floods!"

In this funny live-action/animated video, Ivy and her mom turn into mermaids and explore their underwater house, all while trying to hide their secret from dad/Eric. This vid has racked up more than 700,000 views since it debuted in early June.



The Mik Maks

@TheMikMaks

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS: 8.8 million | **TOTAL VIEWS:** 7.7 billion | **LAUNCHED:** 2013

This Australian YouTube band produces music videos encouraging preschool kids to get up and move. Created by teachers and brothers Joel and Al McInnes, the channel features a wide mix of games, nursery rhymes and songs, with Joel's daughter Ava and Drums the Panda joining in. The Mik Maks have performed more than 1,000 live shows across Australia since they launched, but have yet to score an international deal and bring their content to Europe or North America.

Danny Go!



@DannyGo

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS
3.6 million

TOTAL VIEWS
3.7 billion

LAUNCHED
2019

GENRES
dance games, musical entertainment

TARGET AGE
3 to 7

With an arsenal of earworms and silliness, creator Daniel Coleman is on a mission to get preschoolers moving and learning.

His hit YouTube channel Danny Go! features catchy, easy-to-follow songs and choreography that rival the latest Billboard Hot 100 tracks. Coleman and his pals encourage kids to get off the couch with high-energy routines that range from interactive games to groove-infused math lessons.

Platforms like Kidoodle.TV and HappyKids have already picked up the show, and the music alone attracts more than half a million monthly listeners on Spotify. That demand has helped the brand expand into live shows, including a US tour this past summer.

Beyond a killer music catalogue, the channel also has strong potential for consumer products expansion that leans into its lively cast of characters—including an adorable scientist-in-training named Bearhead—and its vibrant and toyetic settings, such as the high-tech flamingo island featured in one of its most popular videos. —SB

Jo Redfern: "Packed with great-quality content blending animation and music, these well-crafted videos punch above their weight for views. With only 124 videos amassing more than three billion views, content quality is no doubt a key reason for their success. High-energy, gamified videos are fun without being annoying, and educational without being didactic. Positive viewership growth and touring suggests they're scaling for commercial success. Should The Wiggles worry? Maybe."



"The Animal Dance Game!"

In a "this-or-that" video style, viewers choose between two animals by copying their signature dance moves—such as flailing one arm like an elephant or waddling like a penguin. But when the beat drops, Danny Go! adds a fun twist by randomly fusing the two animals together, meaning double the dance moves for the viewer to pull off.



Brandon A

@BrandonA7

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS: 7.4 million | **TOTAL VIEWS:** 1.7 billion | **LAUNCHED:** 2011

Brandon is a Canadian parkour athlete who shows off stunts and tricks in his challenge videos and skits. This channel is somewhat reminiscent of Dude Perfect in its editing style and reactions. Brandon has yet to land a brand deal, but his content has the potential to translate into athletic apparel and touring shows. He is currently more focused on YouTube Shorts than regular videos.

ONES TO WATCH

Kid Crew



@KidCrew

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS
1.2 million

TOTAL VIEWS
774.5 million

LAUNCHED
2022

GENRES
pretend play, construction, nature

TARGET AGE
preschool

Outdoor play is at the heart of Kid Crew, which focuses on the wholesome adventures of an anonymous young family. This channel has been gaining strong traction among parents, largely through word-of-mouth, thanks to its gentle pace and quirky narration. While it's still relatively new compared to other picks on our list, Kid Crew's steady viewership growth and whimsical tone have put it firmly on *Kidscreen*'s radar.

A typical episode presents a pretend challenge for the family to solve through farm work, toy tractor driving, gardening, animal care or home improvement projects. These challenges are always heartwarming—ranging from moving a fallen tree to clear a bunny's path through the forest, to searching for the family's hens because mom has run out of eggs.

Kid Crew already operates an online storefront offering a small collection of apparel and stationery. But the channel's built-in play patterns and subtle STEM themes make it ripe for broader educational partnerships—and for licensing opportunities in categories like DIY, construction and vehicle-based toys. —SB

Jo Redfern: "Kid Crew clearly knows its audience, creating intentionally appealing content. Thumbnails and video openers showcase roleplay formats featuring vehicles and construction, mirroring play patterns kids recognize and want to emulate. The channel uses algorithm-favorable, long-duration posts with regular but not excessive frequency. Limited brand extension potential currently exists, but it's well-run. One to watch for growth."



"Fixing power outage with power wheels bucket truck and lightning bug lantern"

When the power "goes out" during a thunderstorm, the Kid Crew sets about fixing things through hands-on activities—collecting (fake) fireflies for a lantern, driving trucks around the site, and using a toy chainsaw on a branch. It's an example of the channel's formula to engage young viewers through pretend play, while delivering lessons in the process (in this case, an understanding of how electrical grids work).



Super Simple Play

@SuperSimplePlay

TOTAL SUBSCRIBERS: 4.8 million | **TOTAL VIEWS:** 4.2 billion | **LAUNCHED:** 2011

Centered around star singer-musician Ms. Catie, this Canadian YouTube channel has Ms. Rachel vibes, but with a wider variety of video segments that include field trips, question time, nursery rhymes, games and musical stories to inspire kids' imaginations. In the offline world, there's a SuperSimple app and website with printable educational resources, DIY crafts, activity guides and healthy snack recipes, all offered for free.

CHANNELING SUCCESS

Tips, tricks and strategies for building strong YouTube channels for kids.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

You've defined your IP. You've created your content. Now, how do you get it noticed on YouTube? *Kidscreen* spoke with experts at Banijay Kids & Family and Little Dot Studios—who are behind top-performing kids & family channels like Totally Spies!, Dr. Seuss and Mr Bean—to deliver six strategic insights for attracting new viewers and keeping them engaged.

NAILING THUMBNAILS

The thumbnail is an invitation to watch a video, so it needs to grab attention at a glance. Thumbnails should feature bold colors, expressive faces (of easily identifiable characters) and a bare minimum of clearly readable text.

An example from Banijay Kids & Family's stable is the Totally Spies! channel (pictured below). The team makes sure that every thumbnail shows at least one of the series' spies (and all three are better). Thumbnail text should also include the logo and words like "Full Episode" so fans instantly know what they're looking at, adds Dan Lewsey, global head of digital.



BITE-SIZED TITLES

Titles should be pithy, too. Keep them short, informative and accurate—the fastest way to lose fans is by misleading or tricking them.

"For example, 'Buzzing With Fun: Bee Facts For Kids!' performs better than longer, descriptive titles," says James Loveridge, co-MD of Little Dot Studios (which manages the Dr. Seuss channel). "We treat thumbnails as mini-movie posters. They need to tell a story at a glance."

MIX IT UP

Content variety is key, and it means going beyond just having a mix of shorts and longer-form videos.

Full episodes can introduce new viewers to an IP, grow the audience and sustain loyalty, while "extras" like exclusive previews, standalone clips of fan-favorite moments and playlists focusing on particular characters are great ways to engage superfans.

Banijay uploads full episodes of *LoliRock* in a horizontal format for viewing on smart TVs and desktops, as well as vertical shorts that work better on mobile phones



FORMAT FORMULA

Mixing horizontal videos into a lineup with vertical ones is a good way to reach the growing number of viewers who are watching YouTube on their smart TVs.

For example, if Banijay is releasing five videos in a week, three will be horizontal—including full episodes and long-form videos—to reach tablet, computer and connected TV viewers. The other two will be vertical to appeal to phone watchers and to function as promotional pieces on social media.

TREND-SPOTTING

Building an engaging channel means keeping an eye on YouTube's priorities. For example, the platform announced an increased educational focus just ahead of the summer, says Banijay's Lewsey. And this opened up an opportunity to repackage episodes of *Numberjacks*, *Mister Maker* and *Maddie's Do You Know?* with a math or literacy focus to fit the educational content algorithm.

THE NEW TUBE

YouTube is becoming the next-gen TV-watching platform, providing an ever-growing space for longer-form live-action and animated content. As a result, families are now expecting the same level of high-quality content that used to go to broadcasters first, notes Loveridge. "For creators and brands, the ability to blend short-form discovery, long-form loyalty and live experiences—all in one ecosystem—is unprecedented." k



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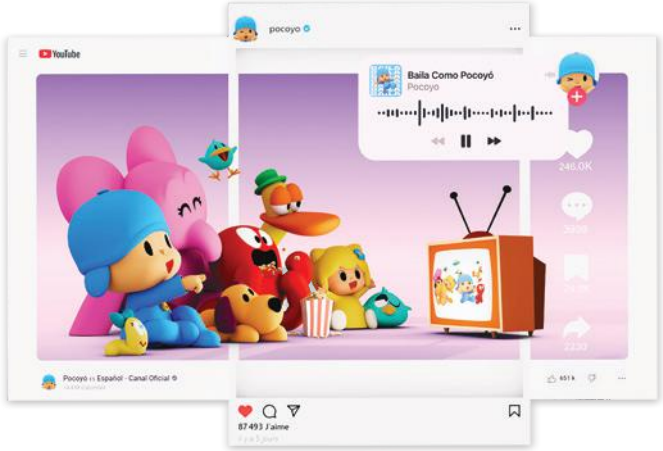
Five years after the platform's monetization model for kids content collapsed, creators are building new paths to revenue and reach.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN

IT was a revenue crash that few saw coming. In January 2020, YouTube dramatically changed the game for kids & family creators by disabling targeted advertising—a key monetization stream—on children's videos to comply with COPPA regulations enforced by the FTC.

"Overnight, kids content creators lost 50% of their earnings on YouTube on average," recalls Animaj co-founder Grégory Dray, who was working as the managing director of international for YouTube Kids at the time. To soften the blow, YouTube quickly launched a three-year, US$100-million fund to support the creation of original kids content on the Google-owned platform. But this measure had limited reach, and the fund ultimately benefited only a small number of creators, adds Dray.

Nevertheless, YouTube still dominates the kids entertainment scene, even in today's challenging post-COPPA landscape. The average Gen Alpha child now spends up to 106 minutes a day on the platform, according to the 2024 edition of *Precise Advertiser Report: Kids*. But even with such a captive audience, getting the best returns these days takes more than just posting videos and hoping for the best.



All featuring Pocoyo content, the Animaj, Pocoyo English and Pocoyo Español channels collectively have more than 20 million subscribers and drive strong ad revenue

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW NUMBERS

"In terms of viewership, you're looking at multi-million views to be able to build any kind of revenue," says TeamFalco co-founder and WildBrain Spark alum Nico Lockhart.

A strong kids channel can have an RPM (revenue per mille—or 1,000 views—after Google has taken its cut) of US $1 or lower, notes Lockhart. More generally, creators typically earn anywhere from US$0.20 to US$8 per 1,000 views, depending on factors like video length and audience location—and children's channels usually come in on the lower end of this scale.

Audience geography is also a factor. "If you're a heavily North American or European channel, you'll get much higher ad rates," Lockhart explains. "But in LatAm and Southeast Asia, the RPMs tend to be much smaller."

Another big factor is seasonality, adds Charles Courcier, founder of Soupir—a Paris-based digital distributor that manages YouTube channels for kids shows including *Grizzy & the Lemmings* and *Mystery Lane*. He emphasizes the importance of developing a year-long YouTube strategy that prioritizes "peak monetization periods"—including October 15 to December 15, when RPMs are higher due to brands ramping up marketing efforts. Even certain days or weeks, like the third week of a month, can monetize better than usual.

Setting realistic ROI expectations is key, notes Courcier. While YouTube is well-suited to monetizing an existing catalogue (as a second or third window) or launching low-cost, digital-first content, "if you're aiming to fully finance a standard 52 x 11-minute series, it is not the right platform."

AD CHALLENGES

At the top of the YouTube heap are a handful of kids companies (including Animaj, pocket.watch, Disney, WildBrain and Moonbug) with "partner sales rights" that allow them to monetize their own ad inventory and boost revenue. However, this requires an internal sales

REGIONAL RPMs

Here's how average RPMs can vary from country to country (estimated for a 15-minute average view duration), according to Parisian distributor Soupir.



US
US$5.00



FRANCE
US$2.50



POLAND
US$1.00



BRAZIL
US$0.40



INDONESIA
US$0.15



INDIA
US$0.10

team that can establish a direct relationship with advertisers, as well as a large, steady audience. Animaj, for instance, generates 22 billion views on YouTube annually. Dray says one possible solution is greater collaboration or consolidation among the big prodcos that have partner sales rights—something YouTube could help pave the way for with more support. "At least the companies that are successful at selling reservation media—securing ad placements at a preset rate—could aggregate more kids & family inventory at scale," he suggests.

One of the broader challenges is that YouTube still struggles to effectively monetize its vast volume of kids content, Dray adds, estimating that kids & family content makes up 15% to 20% of all YouTube viewership. Meanwhile, the kids advertising market is valued at roughly US$4 billion, with half of that stemming from the US.

"YouTube on its own cannot fill out the entire inventory," he explains, adding that YouTube Shorts (which launched in 2020) have created even more inventory. Though these snackable clips have racked up huge viewership numbers, YouTube hasn't yet found the right ad formats to monetize them effectively, says Dray. "The emergence of shorts has basically created even more inventory that is unmonetized."

HOLISTIC VALUE

While YouTube may not be a reliable standalone income source, companies with very recognizable IPs—such as Miraculous Corp—are optimistic about the platform's role as a brand ally that's helping to expand franchises and even lift other revenue streams.

"Over the past year, we've launched 15 new Miraculous channels and entered several [underserved] territories," says head of content partnerships and distribution Maria Doolan. She outlines a three-pronged strategy that encompasses publishing full episodes, building localized channels, and producing compilation videos to increase both watch time and ad inventory. "In parallel, original content continues to be a high-value driver of ROI, and we're investing heavily in this area as part of our long-term strategy."

As one example, the upcoming slapstick toon *Miraculous Chibi* (52 x three minutes) will launch on YouTube in Q4 before heading to other platforms, with Disney Branded TV and France's TF1 having already bought the series for a 2026 rollout.

Looking ahead, Miraculous is aiming to enhance monetization by leaning into new formats, including an original YouTube podcast launching later this year. It's a timely move since YouTube has become the top platform for weekly podcast listening in the US (31%)—overtaking Spotify (27%) and Apple Podcasts (15%), according to 2024 Edison Podcast Metrics. Miraculous is also making YouTube Shopping a key pillar of its consumer products strategy, Doolan teases. "We're beta-testing this feature [that] will enable us to offer more curated product selections, including limited-edition and exclusive drops."

CRACKING THE ALGORITHM

To position a brand for the best possible returns on YouTube, consistency and volume are key—uploading content regularly keeps channels active in the algorithm. Longform content, such as one-hour compilations, can also become powerful revenue-drivers. "The longer the video, the more opportunities to insert ads—provided that the video can sustain enough watch time," Dray notes.

Ultimately, a strong YouTube strategy includes a diverse mix of formats—shorts, themed compilations, livestreams and regular episodes—that collectively signal value to the algorithm.

Lockhart points to some evergreen trends (like learning- and song-driven content) that perform reliably well on the kids side of YouTube. But his top advice for building a successful channel is to target underserved niches with content that feels familiar yet fresh. A perfect example of this is *Gracie's Corner* (5.8 million subscribers), a channel that triggered massive growth by filling a gap for Black representation among musical and educational kids channels.

The best approach is to "find something where there's a high volume of content, but do it better," advises Lockhart.

In the post-COPPA era, YouTube may no longer be the revenue engine it once was—but for creators and studios that treat it as a strategic tool rather than a sole income source, it still offers unmatched reach, discoverability and brand-building potential. k



TO LIVESTREAM OR NOT TO LIVESTREAM?

While content livestreams can be monetized, opinions are mixed as to their benefits. Soupir founder Charles Courcier says his data doesn't show that livestreams significantly boost views/revenue on their own.

However, Miraculous Corp has embraced an "always-on" approach since launching its first livestreams in April (example pictured above). These have expanded into five languages so far, and the company plans to hit 20 by the end of the year.

"We're seeing strong signals that our livestreams are positively influencing the algorithm and boosting performance across our channels," says Maria Doolan, the company's head of content partnerships and distribution.

While YouTube doesn't charge a fee to host livestreams, in some cases, channels might need to invest in a third-party software solution to help with the technically complex process, notes TeamFalco's Nico Lockhart. —SB

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ANIME'S BIG MOMENT

Once confined to specialty channels and convention halls, anime has evolved from niche fandom into one of the most powerful forces in kids & family entertainment. This Japanese style of animation now drives strategy for global streamers, broadcasters and producers alike.

With its emotional storytelling, complex arcs and cross-generational appeal, anime resonates with younger audiences in ways few other genres can match—and Western companies are taking notice.

In this special report, *Kidscreen* looks at both sides of that shift. First, we explore why young viewers are flocking to anime, how producers outside Japan are adopting its unique characteristics, and where new creative opportunities can be found.

Next up, our Anime Buyers Guide highlights 24 key platforms, networks and investors that are actively acquiring this content. From recent pick-ups and target demos, to editorial priorities and contacts, this directory shows where demand is strongest—and how producers and distributors can best position themselves to meet it.

DRAWING POWER

With young audiences driving a global boom, Western producers are racing to tap into anime's emotional storytelling and genre-bending style.

BY: SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN



From an industry POV, it's hard to think of anything that has dominated the zeitgeist lately as much as anime has. A May 2025 Crunchyroll-NRG report found that while all generations are contributing to this cultural momentum, anime is especially popular among 13- to 28-year-olds (54%)—outpacing the NFL (48%) and K-pop superstar group BTS (39%) for attention.

Why are these young audiences so enamored? Jerome Mazandarani, head of anime and young adult at UK-based distribution and production company 8 Lions, has an answer. "Western audiences have grown tired of the self-aware and sarcastic tone of much of the [content] we deliver to them; it's too cynical."

Apart from a few notable exceptions (*Bluey*, *KPop Demon Hunters*, the Spider-Verse franchise), he sees "a lack of emotional stories that are direct, intense and deeply felt"—and that's a gap that anime has been able to fill. "Asian writers generally preoccupy themselves with emotional truth, [and] this resonates," says Mazandarani.

Anime mania was especially evident at Annecy this year, with a palpable buzz across many panels, meetings and kids content announcements by some pretty heavy-hitters. BBC Studios Kids & Family teased an anime-inspired *Children Vs Battle SuperStars* animated series it's working on with Blink Industries; the powerhouse Miraculous brand previewed its *Miraculous Stellar Force* anime spinoff; and Disney EMEA spotlighted Paris-based Chouette Studios' *Dragon Striker* on its slate, touting the broader importance of the show's anime influences.

"One of the things we identified a while ago was that we have an audience that loves anime, whether it's Japanese or French anime-inspired productions, or serialized adventure series from all over the world," Disney Branded TV's VP of international animation Orion Ross told a packed room at the annual animation fest.

"There is this love for epic world-building, big emotional stories, long arcs, complexity, adolescent struggles—all the kinds of things that you find in classic anime."

GAUGING MARKETS

Wall Street research firm Bernstein recently forecast that the international streaming market for anime could triple by 2030 to hit US$12.5 billion in annual revenue. Reports have also pinpointed the US, France, India and Brazil as regions that are fueling this overseas growth.

Miles Atherton, CEO of anime consultancy White Box Entertainment, says his research shows a number of Japanese titles performing well with tweens/teens in North America, specifically *Solo Leveling*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, *The Apothecary Diaries*, *One Piece*, *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*, *Haikyu!!*, *To Be Hero X* and *Wind Breaker*.

While privacy laws make this kind of analysis challenging, he sees clear hooks for younger viewers. "More broadly, anime featuring self-discovery and characters that don't fall into the gender binary tend



BBC Studios Kids & Family/Blink Industries' anime-inspired *Children Vs Battle SuperStars* generated lots of buzz when it was announced at Annecy in June

to overperform with under-18s," Atherton notes. Another trend: Younger audiences today are less interested than previous generations were in isekai (stories about being transported into another world).

"For audiences younger than teens, it's more anecdotal. But Studio Ghibli and Pokémon truly reign supreme there," he adds. "There are very few children's anime dubbed into English and airing on network television or cable that have been able to catch on in the last decade or so."

The UK is also emerging as a growth market, with regional producers beyond BBC Studios keen to explore the form. For example, London's Lime Pictures (*Wolf King*) is betting on a slate of anime projects for the seven-plus demo, including an action-comedy and a rom-com—all featuring "a uniquely British spin while honoring its Japanese origins," says creative producer Barry Quinn.

WESTERN CONTRAST

Although anime is no monolith, one of its common elements is Kishōtenketsu—the four-act structure of Japanese storytelling (unlike the three-act Western model)—which fans see as giving anime a slower pace and greater complexity, says Falcon's Beyond creative development EVP Eric Calderon.

And Japanese anime is more focused on genre than strict age demo appeal, unlike its Western counterparts, he adds. "Take *Dragon Ball Z*—it's in the genre of shōnen (young boys action), but we can see fans as young as six and as old as 50."

It's within these genres where creatives can learn more of the unique tropes and "guidelines" that underpin them. Shōnen, for instance, commonly features protagonists who declare their goal out loud and carry that theme through their journey.

"In *One Piece*, Luffy exclaims that he wants to be 'King of the Pirates!' And Naruto claims he's going to be 'The 9th Hokage' (leader of the Ninja village)."

Eight years ago, Calderon coined the term "Cowboy Anime" to describe toons inspired by Japanese anime but produced outside of Japan (and as a nod to Texas-based Powerhouse Animation Studios, producer of *Castlevania*).

Comparing the form to hip-hop, Calderon says authenticity and cultural immersion (watching anime, attending conventions and noticing cosplay) are crucial, since audiences can easily sniff out knock-offs.

"My heart breaks when I see well-meaning, talented, experienced creatives try to make their *Dragon Ball* or their *Naruto*. [Viewers] will probably wonder, 'Why watch the [knock-off] version of the thing I like when I can just watch the real thing?'"

For some of the biggest anime-inspired kids hits beyond Japan (*Totally Spies!, Avatar: The Last Airbender*), success came from weaving in something specific and non-Japanese that felt organic, he adds.

CULTURAL CROSSOVER

In April, *My Life is a Manga* from France's Blue Spirit and Brain Comet secured the backing of 11 EBU public broadcasters, which collectively committed US$64,900 (€60,000) in development funding to the project. France Télévisions led the charge, but it was notably joined by the BBC (UK), RTÉ (Ireland), NRK (Norway), SVT (Sweden) and RTVE (Spain), among others.

This is yet another sign of anime evolving from a niche into a potential pillar of European kids programming, says Brain Comet creator and producer Nicolas Monteiro. "Broadcasters want to meet the needs of audiences who are already consuming this style massively, while adapting it to their editorial requirements."

The 52 x 11-minute tween series is budgeted at US$9.8 million (€8.5 million), which Monteiro says is higher than the Japanese average, but consistent with a fully French production's higher labor and structural costs.

HUNTING FOR GOLD

What's behind the rampant success of *KPop Demon Hunters*

IF there was a big entertainment winner this summer, it was probably Netflix's anime-inspired musical *KPop Demon Hunters* (pictured below), which skyrocketed to become the streamer's most-watched movie of all time. Jerome Mazandarani, head of anime and young adult for 8 Lions, credits producer Sony Pictures Animation's deep-rooted love of the anime genre—first demonstrated in the studio's Spider-Verse films—for its willingness to take a chance on *KPop* at a time when greenlights were (and still are) scarce.

The premise—a K-pop girl group slaying demons between stadium shows—was an undisputed global hit. The film blended the shōnen action narrative with the beats of a "magical girl" story, adapting two major anime genres, notes Mazandarani. Other typical hallmarks included a close-knit group of friends with a deep bond, a training montage ("even if it's more about dance than fighting") and a climactic battle against an overwhelming evil, he adds.

While the Spider-Verse saga had a hybrid 2D/CG animation style and dropped frame rates (known as "animating on twos"), *KPop Demon Hunters* leaned into more of a 3D design aesthetic. "However, it takes the anime influences even further with the incorporation of gag manga in the film's first hilarious act," says Mazandarani. With its "exaggerated, illogical and often silly visual gags," the movie uses this style of comedy in moments such as Zoey sprouting corn eyes that turn into popcorn when she's checking out an attractive boy band member.

Chibi transformations are common motifs in gag comedy, where characters will morph into simple, squishy, child-like versions of themselves to amplify their emotions. "For instance, someone might literally turn to stone in a moment of profound shock, or their head might 'explode' to signify extreme anger. This subverts the expected reality of the show, allowing the entire world to distort for the sake of a joke."

This likely explains the film's appeal with Gen Alpha, adds Mazandarani. "In today's world of social video and dank memes, it should come as no surprise that gag manga tropes have become part of the contemporary tween/teen lexicon." —SB



It's what he calls "anime made in France," prioritizing Japanese design/creative tropes with a European flair. The premise revolves around Liya, a Parisian girl inspired by manga to overcome everyday problems.

Each episode is structured like a short shōnen (13 minutes with build-up and climax), while the characters will range in cultural and ethnic backgrounds for more global appeal. The producers also plan to leverage tropes like characters breaking into chibi versions during battles and "eyecatch" transitions (a popular type of ad bumper used in Japanese anime).

Monteiro is bullish about the show's global prospects, with early plans for expanding into gaming, trading cards and a movie. Building a multi-format presence in Asia is part of his strategy—and deals are under- way with a Japanese manga company (to launch a young mangaka contest) and a South Korean publisher (to create webtoons for the IP).

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

"Japanese animation is not a service-based economy. Co-productions are rare," says Mazandarani, though things are opening up. "European producers like Miyu are carving a path in how it can be done, along with producers like Elypse and ZAG, which are slowly building relationships with local creators."

He adds that 8 Lions is working both ways—supporting Japanese creators entering Europe and the Middle East, and helping foreign producers gain traction in Japan.

While Japan excels at producing anime for tweens, Mazandarani sees "a lot of room for growth of these kids anime brands" outside Japan—and that's something he's keen for 8 Lions to buy. He's also keeping an eye on youth-heavy gaming spaces like Roblox.

"Almost 23% of all monthly users spend time on unlicensed games inspired by some of the most popular anime IPs," he says, predicting that future anime-inspired brands will evolve on the Roblox platform.

In terms of specific genres, Calderon has long contended that romance is a major whitespace in anime. "We're already seeing how strongly that genre occupies the webtoons space," he says. "Among the hundreds of things we can learn from *KPop Demon Hunters* is that a well-told romance is always welcome and celebrated."

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ANIME BUYERS GUIDE

From Tokyo to Toronto, this global directory highlights platforms that are acquiring anime for kids, outlining what they're looking for and how producers can supply this hot international content market.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW

Global demand for anime is surging on all fronts. European buyers made 2,755 anime titles available in 2023—a 42% increase over 2019—according to Ampere Analysis. And between 2020 and 2024, audiences in France, India, South Africa and the UK enjoyed significantly more anime, making the genre a regular part of their mainstream entertainment diets.

But to succeed in this fast-growing market, producers need to know where to do business—it's about identifying who's buying, what they want, and how to reach them. And with that in mind, *Kidscreen* has assembled its first-ever Anime Buyers Guide.

This global directory includes buyer contacts, recent acquisitions, target demos and platform insights from industry leaders, but also regional players and rising FAST channels. It's a comprehensive roadmap designed to help producers and distributors navigate the anime boom and close their next deal.



BUYER CONTACT:
Maria-Nicole Miriklis, aquisitions manager (miriklis.maria-nicole@abc.net.au)

TARGET DEMO: 7 to 12 & family co-viewing

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Dragon Ball Super, Pokémon: Diamond and Pearl*

Responding to growing demand among local audiences, anime features prominently in this free-to-air public broadcaster's curated content offering for school-aged kids and their families. "We know that there is a huge audience for anime in Australia, and we understand that our role is to introduce our young audience to the genre, among a variety of content that serves their interests and curiosity," says Miriklis. The ABC is looking for classic anime titles that offer broad, multigenerational appeal and that can serve as entry points to anime storytelling for younger viewers, particularly titles with emotional resonance, cultural relevance and wide demographic reach.

BUYER CONTACTS: Kim-Ngan Damasse, marketing and content director (kimngan.damasse@animedigitalnetwork.fr)

Julien Lemoine, general manager (julien.lemoine@animedigitalnetwork.fr)

TARGET DEMO: 12 to 25

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Dan Da Dan, Naruto, Dragon Ball Z*

Animation Digital Network (ADN) is a French VOD service and one of Europe's leading platforms for animated content. It launched in 2013 and now offers more than 15,000 episodes from 450 series, including Japanese anime, but also a wide range of animated films, short-form titles and kid-friendly series. ADN offers near-simulcast viewing, with many series episodes available one hour after (H+1) their Japanese broadcast, in both original and dubbed formats. Available in French with English subtitles, the service supports co-productions to help create new original series. ADN aims to serve a wide range of viewers, from seasoned anime fans to younger audiences discovering the genre for the first time. The platform offers both a free, limited-access version and a full subscription service.

BUYER CONTACT: Josh Mandel, senior executive, development and production (jomandel@amazon.com)

TARGET DEMO: Preschool & 3 to 12

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Super Spy Ryan*

Amazon Kids+ is a subscription-based streaming platform offering thousands of ad-free books, games, videos and apps. While its anime catalogue is limited, the service has dabbled in anime-inspired originals and remains open to new titles that align with its safe and child-friendly content focus.



BUYER CONTACT: Timothy Teo, manager of programming and acquisitions (timothy.teo@kcglobalmedia.com)

TARGET DEMO: Teens & adults

RECENT ACQUISITIONS:
Gintama, Naruto, Fruits Basket, Haikyu!!, Mushoku Tensei: Jobless Reincarnation

Animax is Asia's leading destination for Japanese anime, broadcasting in more than 84.8 million homes across 14 territories. It offers a wide variety of anime genres—action, romance, horror, supernatural, sci-fi, comedy and slice-of-life—with many titles simulcast with Japan. Aimed at core anime fans, the channel is home to some of the most recognized titles in the anime canon and continues to seek premium content—including action, sci-fi and fantasy—that resonates with older viewers and genre enthusiasts across the region.

BUYER CONTACT: Chiho Mori, director of global acquisitions (chiho.mori@crunchyroll.com or businessinquiries@crunchyroll.com)

TARGET DEMO: Primarily adults, with some content for older tweens/tweens (14-plus) & families

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Nyaight of the Living Cat, Dr. Stone: Science Future*, *Kaiju No. 8* (season two)

Crunchyroll is the market's leading global anime streamer, with more than 17 million subscribers and a mission to make anime a bigger part of pop culture worldwide. It offers the largest dedicated anime library—with more than 25,000 hours and 50,000 episodes, spanning series, films, music videos and live events. Each anime season, Crunchyroll debuts 50 to 60 new series, many of them simulcast with Japan. The platform also extends its reach through theatrical releases, events, games, news and merchandise. Anime is accessible across all major platforms—from mobile and gaming consoles, to smart TVs and desktops—making Crunchyroll a key destination for fans around the world.

BUYER CONTACT: Rick Clodfelter, executive director, content acquisition & networks (rick.k.clodfelter@disney.com)

TARGET DEMO: 6 to 11

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Beyblade X* season 2 (for Disney XD, DisneyNOW, US linear, YouTube US and global SVOD via Hulu/Disney+), *Yu-Gi-Oh! GO RUSH!!* (for Disney XD, Hulu and YouTube US)

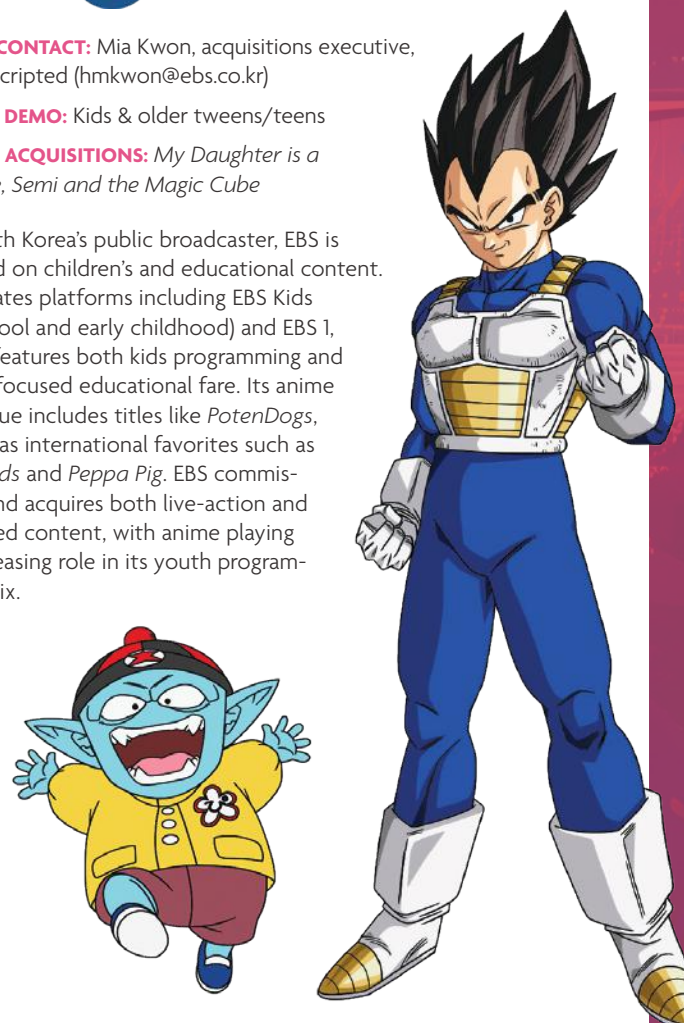
Disney Branded Television develops and acquires content for Disney+, Disney Channel, Disney XD and Disney Jr.—serving kids, tweens, teens and families. The team sees anime as "a deeply cherished art form" and selects titles that foster joyful, lasting connections between audiences and characters, says Clodfelter. Anime acquisitions *Beyblade X* and *Yu-Gi-Oh! GO RUSH!!* are natural additions to DBTV's mission of telling imaginative, aspirational stories that reflect kids' real-world experiences, he adds. Anime titles are evaluated on a case-by-case basis—for fit and opportunity, rather than simply meeting volume quotas.

BUYER CONTACT: Mia Kwon, acquisitions executive, kids & scripted (hmkwon@ebs.co.kr)

TARGET DEMO: Kids & older tweens/teens

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *My Daughter is a Zombie, Semi and the Magic Cube*

As South Korea's public broadcaster, EBS is focused on children's and educational content. It operates platforms including EBS Kids (preschool and early childhood) and EBS 1, which features both kids programming and family-focused educational fare. Its anime catalogue includes titles like *PotenDogs*, as well as international favorites such as *Oddbods* and *Peppa Pig*. EBS commissions and acquires both live-action and animated content, with anime playing an increasing role in its youth programming mix.



BUYER CONTACT: David Di Lorenzo, SVP of acquisitions (david@futuretodayinc.com)

TARGET DEMO: 8 to 12

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Pokémon the Series: XY, Bakugan, Yu-Gi-Oh!*

This free ad-supported streaming service operated by Future Today has been steadily expanding its anime offering to serve its tween audience. In a major move, HappyKids recently acquired more than 140 hours of Pokémon content. The platform looks for programming "that is both fun and engaging for this demo"—especially titles that deliver themes of adventure, friendship and self-discovery, says Di Lorenzo. The service is trusted by more than six million parents and widely accessible across connected TVs and mobile devices.

BUYER CONTACT: Toru Iwakami, acquisitions coordinator (sentai.tokyo@amcnetworks.com)

TARGET DEMO: Primarily 14-plus

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Bureaucrat to Villainess: Dad's Been Reincarnated!, Flower and Asura, Loner Life in Another World, Insomniacs After School*

Acquisition volume on this American anime streamer varies from season to season, depending on production output from Japanese studios. But it has been known to debut as many as 16 first-run titles each year. The broadcast release window for acquired titles typically ranges from one to 24 months. HIDIVE also offers a Family and Kids category made up of mostly older catalogue titles.



BUYER CONTACT: Andrew Thomas, VP of content partnerships (andrew.e.thomas@disney.com)

TARGET DEMO: 7-plus, with a focus on tween/teen viewers for most anime

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Yu-Gi-Oh!, Digimon, Pokémon the Series: Sun & Moon, Bananya*

Part of Disney Entertainment, Hulu is a US-based SVOD platform offering a mix of acquired and original content. Available both as a standalone service and bundled with Disney+, Hulu had close to 55 million American subscribers as of June 2025. Its anime library spans kid-friendly franchises and tween/teen hits alike, with titles such as *One Piece, Naruto Shippuden* and *Dan Da Dan* rounding out a catalogue that continues to grow in alignment with the rising demand for anime across age groups.

BUYER CONTACT: Brenda Bisner, chief content officer (content@kidoodle.tv)

TARGET DEMO: Up to 12

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Chaotic, Yu-Gi-Oh!, Bakugan*

Kidoodle.TV is expanding its anime library with content designed specifically for kids, aligning with its brand mission to provide safe, curated entertainment that parents can trust. Anime's kawaii aesthetic—playful, colorful and emotionally engaging—makes it a natural fit for the platform, notes Bisner. Kidoodle.TV is responding to global anime momentum and broader trends in Japanese and Asian pop culture, including the viral rise of collectible characters like Labubu. By curating titles that embody high-engagement storytelling, character affinity, cultural relevance and merchandising potential, Kidoodle.TV is building a cross-media ecosystem for young audiences that blends storytelling with strong emotional and brand attachment. The company is actively seeking AVOD and FAST rights for titles that meet its age-appropriate standards.

BUYER CONTACT: Louis Berbain, animation/fiction acquisitions officer (lberbain@mediawan.com)

TARGET DEMO: Tweens/teens & anime fans; some younger content

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Demon Slayer, Dragon Ball Z, The Mysterious Cities of Gold*

This Mediawan-owned French pay-TV channel broadcasts anime exclusively. Known as the "100% Japanime" channel, Mangas offers simulcasts of new series in French with English subtitles, as well as uncensored and remastered versions of cult classics. Available in France via major carriers including Canal+ and Prime Video Channels, Mangas is a go-to destination for dedicated anime fans across the region.

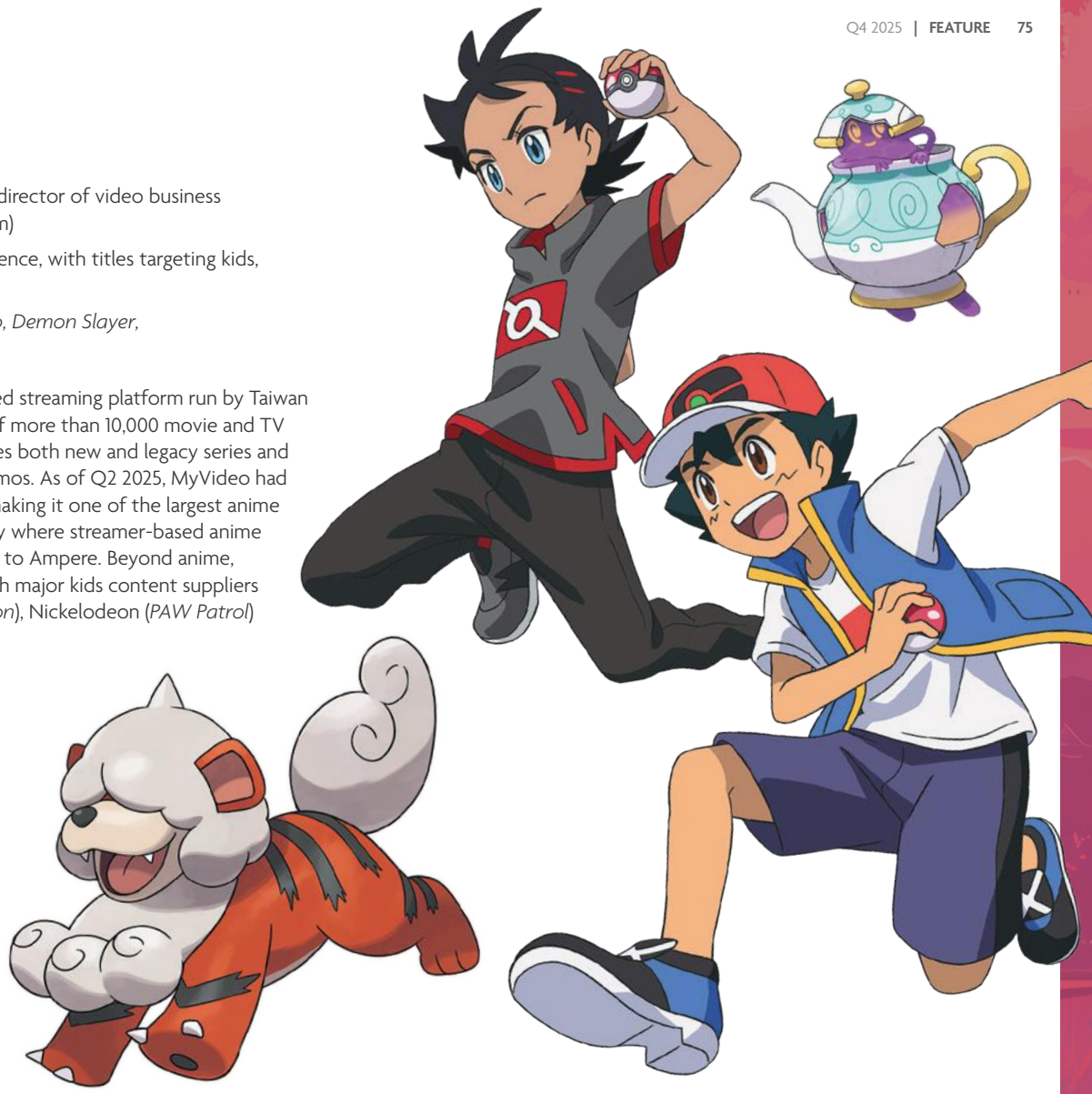
MyVideo

BUYER CONTACT: Peggy Shaw, director of video business (peggyshaw@taiwanmobile.com)

TARGET DEMO: Mixed-age audience, with titles targeting kids, teens & adults

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Naruto, Demon Slayer, Detective Conan, One Piece*

MyVideo is a subscription-based streaming platform run by Taiwan Mobile, boasting a catalogue of more than 10,000 movie and TV titles. Its anime offering includes both new and legacy series and films for all a variety of age demos. As of Q2 2025, MyVideo had more than 1,000 anime titles, making it one of the largest anime platforms in Taiwan—a country where streamer-based anime consumption is high, according to Ampere. Beyond anime, MyVideo has deals in place with major kids content suppliers including Moonbug (*CoComelon*), Nickelodeon (*PAW Patrol*) and BBC Studios (*Bluey*).



NETFLIX

BUYER CONTACT: Yuji Yamano, director of content, Netflix Japan (yyamano@netflix.com)

TARGET DEMO: All ages, including kids

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *My Melody & Kuromi, Pokémon Horizons: The Series, Yu-Gi-Oh!, Naruto, Delicious in Dungeon, The Summer Hikaru Died, One Piece*

With upwards of 300 million paid subscribers in 190-plus countries, Netflix continues to deepen its investment in anime. The platform reports that more than 50% of its global members watch anime, and in 2024, anime titles were streamed more than a billion times. The genre's momentum is strong, especially among global audiences, 80% to 90% of which prefer dubbed versions to subtitled ones. In the first half of 2025, eight anime titles made it onto Netflix's Global Top 10 (Non-English) list, including *The Apothecary Diaries* and *My Happy Marriage*. Netflix is also building out its anime movie slate. In 2022, it forged a multi-film partnership with Studio Colorido (producer of *A Whisker Away*) that resulted in kid-friendly features such as *Drifting Home* and *My Oni Girl*. "The next generation of anime fandom is already here. More and more of the titles you love are available on Netflix," the company said in July 2025. "And with the support of visionary local creators and passionate fans, we're just getting started."

NHK nep

NHK ENTERPRISES

BUYER CONTACT: Kazuhiro Iwami, producer & animation acquisitions (iwami-ka@nhk-ep.co.jp)

TARGET DEMO: Preschoolers & their parents

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Little Charo, Oni: Thunder God's Tale*

NHK, Japan's national public broadcaster, produces and airs a wide slate of children's, educational and general entertainment content, including animation. It operates six TV channels, among them Educational TV, which is primarily targeted at children. And distribution arm NHK Enterprises manages the broadcaster's anime catalogue for international sales and licensing. NHK's current library includes *Dog Signal, Welcome to Demon School! Iruma-kun, Pikaia!!* and *Nanami-chan*, and it typically commissions or acquires four series and four animated specials or one-off films annually. The focus is on meaningful, age-appropriate storytelling with strong educational and cultural value for young viewers and their families.

BUYER CONTACT: Avni Amin, VP of content partnerships (avni.amin@pluto.tv)

TARGET DEMO: Kids, teens & adults

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *One Piece* (France), *Dragon Ball Z* (Spain), *Naruto* (LatAm), *Sailor Moon* (Canada)

This leading FAST service offers thousands of hit movies and TV shows on demand, along with hundreds of live-streamed channels covering all kinds of genres—from anime and kids, to news, sports and reality. The platform has expanded its anime programming internationally, with regional offerings across Europe and the Americas. "We know there are a lot of anime aficionados out there!," says the company. Pluto TV typically looks to license 100 to 200 hours of anime per channel, though smaller volumes may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

BUYER CONTACT: Goyo Garcia, content acquisitions & sales manager (goyogarcia@sbt.com.br)

TARGET DEMO: Preschoolers to tweens/teens

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Beyblade X, Saint Seiya: The Lost Canvas, Kamisama Kiss, My Deer Friend Nokotan, Brave 10*

Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (SBT) is one of Brazil's largest and most popular commercial TV networks, with a legacy of airing kids content for more than 40 years. (In fact, it's currently the only free-to-air commercial channel in Brazil running children's programming on a regular schedule, with weekday morning blocks and a five-hour window on Saturday mornings.) For free-to-air, SBT wants non-violent animated content for preschoolers to tweens, including action, adventure and family-safe stories. For its +sbt streaming platform (AVOD/FAST), the age range extends up to include teens, but all content must still be suitable for family viewing, and it must also be fully dubbed in Brazilian Portuguese.

BUYER CONTACT: Kamel Weiss, director of strategy, business development and content (content-team@spacetoongroup.com)

TARGET DEMO: 7 to 15

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Naruto, Beyblade X, Doraemon, Ramen Akaneko*

Founded in 2000, Spacetoon is a leading pan-Arab broadcaster, distributor and producer of children's content. Its programming reaches audiences across the MENA region, and in 2025, the company expanded by launching a new channel in Turkey. Spacetoon operates Spacetoon Go, a dedicated streaming platform, and its YouTube channel has more than 12 million subscribers. The company also produces theatrical films, live events and manages a robust licensing & merchandising business. In addition to content acquisition, Spacetoon positions itself as a regional partner for brands seeking to connect with young audiences across the Middle East and beyond.



BUYER CONTACT: Ronojoy Chakraborty, head of programming (ronojoy.chakraborty@setindia.com)

TARGET DEMO: 12 to 18 for anime

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Naruto Shippuden, Jujutsu Kaisen, Dr. Stone*

Sony YAY! is an Indian pay-TV channel primarily targeting kids ages two to 14, but it's actively expanding into tween/teen-skewing anime to evolve into a multi-generational entertainment brand. The network broadcasts a mix of Hindi-language cartoons, international animated series and anime titles, with dubs available in Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam. *Naruto Shippuden*—the channel's flagship anime pickup—has been watched by more than five million viewers since its March 2024 debut. Sony YAY! became the first master licensee for *Naruto* in India and has since added *Jujutsu Kaisen* (produced by MAPPA) as part of its continued push to meet the rising demand for anime among Indian youth audiences. It typically acquires five to six series a year, averaging 52 episodes per title.

Stan.

BUYER CONTACT: Les Sampson, head of acquisitions (les.sampson@stan.com.au)

TARGET DEMO: Family-friendly anime for kids

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Pokémon: Sun & Moon—Ultra Adventures, Pokémon The Movie: I Choose You!*

Stan is a leading Australian SVOD platform, owned by media company Nine, and available on all major connected devices. Its content library includes thousands of hours of kids programming and family entertainment. Best-known for streaming series like *Thomas & Friends*, *PAW Patrol* and *Paddington*, Stan is steadily expanding its anime library, from three titles in Q4 2020 to 11 in Q2 2025, according to Ampere.

Tencent 腾讯

BUYER CONTACT: Qing Fan, content investment & co-productions (animation@tencent.com)

TARGET DEMO: 7-plus, tweens/teens & young adults

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Blades of the Guardians, Ling Long Mountain, The Chosen One*

Tencent Video is China's leading streaming platform, with 117 million subscribers as of Q1 2025. It has become the country's top destination for animation targeting viewers ages 10 and up, adding 56 original animated titles in 2023 alone. Tencent originally launched as a domestic SVOD service in 2011, but it has since grown into China's largest digital content provider. The company has made a long-term commitment to anime and animation, and is actively seeking global co-production partners to expand the international reach of these IPs. The platform also has strong traction with original series adapted from popular video games and hit web novels.



TF1

BUYER CONTACT: Jerome Alby, SVP of kids & family co-productions and distribution (jalby@studiotf1.com)

TARGET DEMO: 4 to 10 (TFOU programming block), 3 to 12 (TFOU Max streaming service)

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Naruto, One Piece, Miraculous Chibi, Hunter x Hunter*

One of France's largest broadcasters, TF1 has integrated anime into several of its kids platforms, including streamer TF1+ and the linear programming block TFOU. It also operates TFOU Max, a standalone kid-focused streamer. TF1 was an early backer of *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir*, and it will premiere the spinoff short-form series *Miraculous Chibi* (52 x three minutes) in 2026. It was also the first broadcaster to support *Artefacts: Thieves of Thieves*, an anime-inspired 2D-animated series from Somewhere Animation. Anime and anime-style titles are an increasingly important part of TF1's youth content strategy.

tubi

BUYER CONTACT: Sam Harowitz, SVP of content acquisitions and partnerships (sharowitz@tubi.tv)

TARGET DEMO: Kids, tweens/teens & older anime fans

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *Yu-Gi-Oh!, Naruto, Sonic X*

Tubi is a free ad-supported streaming service with more than 100 million monthly active users and a catalogue of nearly 300,000 movies and TV episodes. Its anime offering includes kids content (*Yu-Gi-Oh!, Naruto* and *Sonic X*), as well as YA and adult titles like *Death Note* and *Ghost Stories*. Tubi significantly expanded this catalogue in 2021 through a content partnership with Shout! Factory. Anime remains a high-performing category for the service, which has "a significant audience of anime lovers," says chief content officer Adam Lewinson.

YOUKU

BUYER CONTACT: Yan Wang, international content acquisitions (yixiao.wy@alibaba-inc.com)

TARGET DEMO: Older tweens & teens

RECENT ACQUISITIONS: *The Demon Hunter, Eclipse of Illusion*

Youku Kids, a division of Alibaba's streaming platform Youku, offers a range of anime content, with a focus on martial arts and action-themed titles geared to older tweens, teens and young adults. Its core kids programming library caters to viewers up to age 12, featuring songs, educational programming and animation including international hits such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Peppa Pig*. With a growing emphasis on Japanese and Chinese anime, the platform continues to position itself as a destination for high-quality children's and youth entertainment in China. k

COOL NEW SHOWS

MIPCOM EDITION

With tighter budgets and greenlights scarce, producers are arriving at MIPCOM with only their very best bets queued up in the pitch deck. Here are some of the strongest new projects we've seen vying to cut through the clutter and make their mark in Cannes.

BY: RYAN TUCHOW & SADHANA BHARANIDHARAN



8 to 11

Beyond the Leap

Producer: Turnip + Duck (Ireland)
Format: 10 x 22 minutes
Style: CG animation
Budget: US$7.5 million
Status: A pitch deck and artwork are available, and a pilot script will be ready by the end of October. The studio is looking for broadcasters, financing and co-producers.
Delivery: Q3 2027

During an American family's wild road trip across Ireland, 13-year-old Luke discovers that his grandfather is secretly a magical thief from another realm who stole powerful Mystic Stones and fled to the real world years ago. Now Luke has to find the stones to save his grandpa's life. It's a crazy adventure that sees him dodging monsters and hunting for ancient artifacts, while enduring his goofy family's vacation antics. The producers liken this concept to *The Mitchells vs. the Machines* meets *Trollhunters*, describing it as a show for kids who aren't old enough for *Stranger Things*, but want something a little bit edgy. Seasoned producers Colm Tobin and Aidan O'Donovan (*Maddie + Triggs*) drew inspiration for *Beyond the Leap* from their own 2023 road trip across Ireland in 2023 with writer/showrunner Tony Gama-Lobo (*Rise of the TMNT*).



Whatever You Do Don't Laugh

Co-producers: Sinking Ship Entertainment (Canada), King Banana (UK)
Format: 60 x seven minutes
Style: CG animation
Budget: US$8 million to US$10 million
Status: Fully developed, 70% financed, and looking for broadcasters and private investment to close the gap. A bible, animatic, designs and three scripts are ready.
Delivery: Fall 2027

Mr. B'Tom, the very serious presenter of this comedy series, sets out to teach fundamental lessons about basic concepts like shapes, numbers and colors. But his rather dry lessons get a much-needed injection of humor when something invariably goes wrong—typically at the hands of his wacky assistants and production crew. One episode sees the very short Mr. B'Tom covering the nature of tall things, but when he tries to demonstrate, there's one button he can't quite reach. After plenty of hilarious attempts, his crew steps in to help him. Then just as he's about to continue his monologue, a pack of alpacas explodes onto the scene.

British screenwriter and stand-up comedian Howard Read (*Danger Mouse, Horrible Histories*) wrote the scripts, which are designed to help kids prepare for preschool while also giving them a taste of how fun learning can be. With psychologist and educator Natascha Crandall on board as an advisor, this series uses laughter to make the learning stick.



Chickies

Co-producers: Xilam Animation (France), Cube Creative (France)
Format: 78 x seven minutes
Style: CG animation
Budget: Approximately US$8 million
Status: An animatic, bible and several scripts and outlines are ready to share with buyers. With Xilam handling global distribution, the team is now looking for broadcast partners.
Delivery: June 2027

This spinoff of the partners' *Where's Chicky* shorts series follows the avian hijinks of Chicky, Bekky and Poyo. Tired of being cooped up, the little bird buddies frequently slip away to explore life outside the henhouse, discovering new flora and fauna on their adventures. With four slapstick-driven seasons, *Where's Chicky* ranks as one of Xilam's most popular titles across linear and digital, and *Chickies* is taking some big swings under director Khalil Ben Naamane (*Zig & Sharko*) to expand the world of its predecessor and attract new fans—most notably by giving the characters voices for the first time. The seven-minute episodes are also a step up from the one-minute format of *Where's Chicky*, opening up a much broader canvas for storytelling.

Truffle

Producer: Happy Camper Media (Canada)
Format: 26 x seven minutes
Style: 2D animation
Budget: US$3.6 million
Status: Télé-Québec is on board as a broadcaster, and 80% of the financing for season one is in the bag. There's a pitch deck, graphic bible, teaser, synopses for six episodes and two fully scripted episodes. The studio is looking for co-producers and broadcasters, and PVP Distribution will handle worldwide sales.
Delivery: The first batch of episodes is expected to deliver in December 2026, with the rest on deck for Q3 2027.

Seven-year-old Truffle is an up-and-coming musician/songwriter pursuing his dream of being a rock icon. In one episode, he's a little nervous in a social situation and starts to act like a "real" rock star—a.k.a. a demanding jerk—until a friend speaks up, reminds Truffle that plenty of rock legends are actually nice, and helps him get comfortable being himself.

This series is adapted from the book *Forever Truffle* by Fanny Britt and Isabelle Arsenault (published in 2024 by La Pastèque). And notably, the David Bowie estate gave its pre-approval for *Truffle* to use Bowie's hit song "Space Oddity" in one planned episode after reviewing the book, series teaser and pitch deck. Télé-Québec, the first broadcaster to sign on, sees the show as the full package. "Comedy, poetry and the most captivating melodies come together to give it a tone and energy like no other," says VP of content Nadine Dufour.





Cats React to Facts

Co-producers: Keyframe Studios (UK), Serious Kids (UK)
Format: 52 x seven minutes
Style: Mixed media, with 2D cutouts and live action
Budget: US$3.75 million
Status: Pre-selling the project to broadcasters and streamers is the next step, relying on the strength of a full bible, a pilot script and an animation test. Serious Kids is managing distribution.
Delivery: Q3 2027

In this tween infotainment series, cats host their own podcast, reacting to facts about everything from AI and lasers, to robots and feng shui. Meanwhile, Tabby team leader Tom Purrrlman is determined to build a media empire—even if the only sponsor he can land is Doggie Biscuits. Inspired by a series of same-name books that have sold 100,000-plus copies and won a Lolly Award (by popular kid vote), this quirky, fast-paced show has the feel of online content/social media memes. And the feline focus is a plus, given that "cat" remains one of the most-searched keywords on the internet. BAFTA-winning TV and theater director Will Brenton (*The Tweenies*) is attached as the head writer.

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BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

GROWING AT THE SPEED OF SOUND

SEGA's Sonic the Hedgehog franchise is turning 35 next year and shows no signs of slowing down. The iconic blue hedgehog debuted in 1991, and his full portfolio of 100-plus games have sold more than 1.7 billion units worldwide to date.

SEGA designers Yuji Naka and Naoto Ohshima originally created their super-sonic star as part of an assignment to come up with a character that could match Nintendo's success with Mario.

During the early design process in 1988, they drafted several SEGA mascot options, ranging from a variety of animals to a hairy caveman (who would later be repurposed as Sonic's archrival Doctor Eggman).

SEGA executives quickly dismissed these initial concepts as too cute or too similar to Mario. Instead, they wanted something cool, fast and rebellious that would embody the graphics power of their upcoming SEGA Genesis console.

With this new brief in mind, Naka and Ohshima created more characters, ultimately landing on a speedy blue hedgehog with attitude after a character survey found that US consumers favored this design.

"Video game characters that players could relate to were becoming more important in the industry, and SEGA wanted to be part of that movement," says Ivo Gerscovich, head of SEGA brands and chief business officer. "When *Sonic the Hedgehog* was bundled with the Genesis, the company was taken to a whole new level—the blue blur was the catalyst for our success."

Fast-forward to today, and what started as a video game franchise has skyrocketed into a multimedia juggernaut spanning TV series, films, theme parks and a 360-degree consumer products program. *Sonic the Hedgehog 3* earned US$491 million at the global box office last year, and Paramount has now greenlit a fourth live-action film for 2027. Meanwhile, the brand's zealous fandom is eagerly awaiting SEGA's next mainline entry in the long-running game series. —Cole Watson

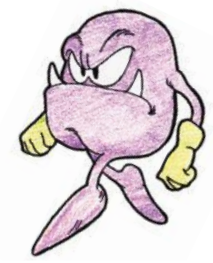


Even since his 1991 debut, Sonic's appearance has continued to evolve as the character explores new worlds and formats, including live action and CG animation

In one initial design, Sonic was a cute rabbit, but SEGA execs wanted something edgier



Early enemy concepts (above and bottom right) never saw the light of day in the games or series, but one pajama-clad option for Sonic himself (right) was developed into Doctor Eggman, the blue blur's primary antagonist




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