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Yo Gabba Gabba! goes global

by Emily Claire Afan

Upstart preschool series *Yo Gabba Gabba!* has been turning heads on the international scene, especially since scoring a pick-up from Nick Jr. that will see it hit US airwaves this fall. The urban-inspired variety show created by The Magic Store (helmed by a group of Gen-X dads) puts a fresh spin on retro style and sounds, and co-pro partners W!LDBRAIN and RDF have set the property's licensing wheels in motion to keep up with its momentum on the TV side.

Managing international distribution and L&M activity, RDF Rights in London, England is working closely with San Francisco-based W!LDBRAIN towards rolling out first-phase products in fall 2008. Deals for two of the program's three anchor categories are inked, with Toronto, Canada's Spin Master winning the master toy license and Nickelodeon Home Entertainment/Paramount Home Entertainment taking on video/DVD rights in the US. W!LDBRAIN president and CEO Charles Rivkin says a publishing deal is close to being finalized. Looking ahead, the long-term plan is to expand the brand's CP reach with stationery, apparel, accessories, gift products and packaged foods partners in 2009.



As for international plans, broadcast deals covering the UK, Italy and Ireland are in advanced stages of negotiation, and RDF is actively pursuing presales in additional territories. Versioning for international audiences should be relatively easy since the costume characters' mouths don't move. But interestingly, RDF director of family entertainment Nigel Pickard is wide open to formatting scenarios. "International broadcasters can have a real investment with their own talent, which we can produce, or we can work with their local producers from territory to territory," he says.

Although the immediate focus is on selling the show globally, the company is already working on international licensing programs that will start launching in late summer '08.

In true grassroots style, The Magic Store posted clips from *Yo Gabba Gabba!*'s trailer on its website last spring and they caught on with adult viewers, eventually racking up 1.9 million views. That's when Brown Johnson, EVP and executive creative director of Nickelodeon Preschool and GM of Noggin, caught wind of the concept and set The Magic Store up with W!LDBRAIN to get a 20-episode mixed-media series off the ground.

With a heavy hip-hop influence, the magazine-style show targets kids up to age five, with host DJ Lance Rock (Lance Robertson) bringing a cast of kooky costume characters to life with the words, "Yo Gabba Gabba!" in each episode. W!LDBRAIN's toyco/retailer offshoot Kidrobot is actively helping to steer the look and feel of the series, putting a distinct design stamp on character models being used in filming.