



Home > Current Issue > Licensing Reports > Yo Gabba Gabba—Wildbrain Entertainment: Tasteful Merchandising, Satisfied Fans

## Yo Gabba Gabba—Wildbrain Entertainment: Tasteful Merchandising, Satisfied Fans

LICENSING REPORTS

This entertainment company knows what fans want from their favorite TV shows after they've turned off the tube.



Michael Polis, president



Erin Dippold, director of licensing

Producing programming that resonates with audiences can create intense brand awareness among loyal fans. But the marketing and tie-in efforts associated with that successful program must be handled carefully to grow the brand and not alienate fans.

"Clearly, you have to make a great show first, with engaging characters and storylines," said Michael Polis, president of Wildbrain Entertainment. Polis is also EVP of branded entertainment and consumer products at DHS MediaPolis and oversees global operations for Wildbrain Entertainment, including development for the studio.

Polis is also executive producer of "Yo Gabba Gabba," the critically acclaimed television series that was recently picked up for a fourth season by Nickelodeon. He built a thriving consumer products business for the studio from scratch when he joined Wildbrain Entertainment in June 2007, only a few weeks after the launch of the series on Nick Jr. He took "Yo Gabba Gabba" and the studio beyond the basics of brand licensing with the launch of an unprecedented consumer products program and a live touring show, which kicked-off with a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and a performance at the White House. The 60-city North American tour sold out all major markets, including Los Angeles and New York.

"Yo Gabba Gabba" is created by Christian Jacobs and Scott Schultz of The Magic Store. The television series, produced by The Magic Store and Wildbrain Entertainment, airs in all major international territories, including Australia, Canada, Israel, Latin America, New Zealand, South Africa, and the UK. Many indie and mainstream bands have performed on the television show and as part of the live touring show, which has nearly 400,000 friends on Facebook. The fan base grew steadily between 8,000 and 10,000 new fans each week during the 2010 North American live tour.

"If no one engages, no one will want to be associated with your brand," said Polis. "Yo Gabba Gabba" is gearing up for a live tour in Australia in May and will go back on the road in North America in the fall.

### Fit with fans

Wildbrain Entertainment, an award-winning studio recognized as one of the world's foremost leaders in animation with popular programming in both the children's and primetime categories, handles the marketing and merchandising related to "Yo Gabba Gabba," which airs on Nick Jr. in the US and has grown a loyal following among preschoolers, parents, and young adults worldwide, said Erin Dippold, director of licensing at Wildbrain Entertainment.



Dippold joined the company three years ago and is primarily responsible for overseeing the "Yo Gabba Gabba" consumer products lineup, which includes 45 US licensees and a range of products from apparel to accessories. "We have everything from toddler Ts and plush backpacks to Vans sneakers—we are that cool," Dippold said, explaining that there was an outcry for adult Vans after the company released a kids/toddler line of the shoes.

Wildbrain Entertainment also has a robust program with Simon & Schuster with 40 titles in release by the end of this year, including story books, board books, novelty books, and coloring and activity books. The company also has a DVD distribution deal with Nickelodeon Home Entertainment. Seven DVDs each containing four episodes of "Yo Gabba Gabba" have been released, with an additional three releases planned for 2011, Dippold said.

The company continues to evaluate potential partnership offers that make sense for fans. In addition to continuing its online relationship with Celebrate Express for "Yo Gabba Gabba" party goods, Wildbrain Entertainment has signed a deal with Amscan to bring party goods to Party City stores and other major retailers around the country. Another new deal will bring Beanie Babies of the show's five main characters to Ty's traditional retail outlets by Christmas.

The "Yo Gabba Gabba Live! There's a Party in My City!" tour recently wrapped up shows in more than 60 markets, with more shows on the books, including a tour of Australia that will bring DJ Lance and the gang to the famous Sydney Opera House. Dippold said that merchandise sales from the shows are higher

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than other live events aimed at kids—a testament to the strong appeal of the show.

"Entire families come see this show together," Dippold said. "It's not uncommon to see mom, dad, and the kids all wearing the same branded shirt," she said, noting that up to 20% of T-shirts sold at the live shows were in adult sizes.

### Make it go

Wildbrain Entertainment was acquired by DHX Media in late 2010, giving the company global distribution capabilities and greater access to financing. With the purchase, Polis took on the additional title as executive vice president of branded entertainment and consumer products for DHX Media.

Wildbrain Entertainment has a core employee count of about 50, which can expand rapidly, depending on the number of jobs that are in production at any one time.

The Los Angeles-based company recently expanded to a second location because of the growing number of projects. The studio's slate of programming includes "The Ricky Gervais Show" (HBO), "Higglytown Heroes" (Disney), "Bubble Guppies" (Nick Jr.), "The Hard Times of RJ Berger" (MTV), "Team Smithereen" (Disney XD), "Oki's Oasis" (Disney), the first animated Western for preschoolers (starring Mandy Moore), and "Monster High," of which the Halloween special received record ratings on Nickelodeon. It also recently wrapped production on a new Peanuts special, "Happiness is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown."

The studio is also leading the brand licensing and consumer products program for "Rastamouse," the animated music series based on the critically acclaimed books by Genevieve Webster and Michael De Souza, which launched on CBeebies in January. Proper merchandising depends on the shows themselves and the style of the characters.

"There's a lot of thought and discussion early on with a particular property to make sure it fires on all cylinders," said Polis. "We talk a lot about storytelling across multimedia platforms, including web, iPhone, TV, and DVD. You never know precisely where the next hit will come from."

Wildbrain Entertainment is in development on a number of projects, including "Spark City," based on the mega-successful brand All Girl Arcade; Sideway, based on a Sony Playstation 3 videogame slated for release in June; and Umigo (for U Make It Go), a trans-media property aimed at teaching preschool and elementary age children science and math, which was awarded a \$32 million grant by the US Department of Education to develop and produce.

Umigo is expected to launch next year on-line and as a mobile app in recognition of the growing use of 21st century technology in teaching tools. An on-air program remains a possibility, and the company will have "first-blush" conversations with retailers about potential merchandising partnerships starting next month. "We will go where the kids are," Polis said of the launch of Umigo, but the philosophy also applies to Wildbrain Entertainment's other properties. "It's critical to what we do."

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"TV executives really don't understand what a cookware manufacturer is doing, but it's our job to help them understand. We synergize everything that's going on so it pushes the brand to the next level."

—John Cusimano, CEO of Watch Entertainment



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