

## C21 Kids Weekly: Producer Profile

### Spain's Icon unveils Fairytale Detective, Hop & Calamity

Barcelona-based toon house Icon Animation is only two years young, yet the company's first few productions have already secured extensive global interest. Jonathan Webdale talks to Icon's head of marketing and distribution, Christophe Goldberger, on the toon house's latest projects.

Icon has quickly established a name for itself, set up in January 2003 by Myriam Ballesteros, animation producer and founder of MB Producciones, and Sergi Reitg, a former dg of Cromosoma.

Straddling the worlds of production and distribution, the company has been able to capitalise in the latter sector on relationships forged over the years by its founders.

X	<p>Working with the likes of Millimages, Entertainment Rights, Scholastic, Rag Doll and Cake Entertainment, Icon has been able to balance distribution with its creative ambitions, producing a handful of its own titles that are now doing the rounds with broadcasters.</p> <p>Catching the wave of public and government opinion that's turning against childhood obesity, Icon's first project out of the door was a cartoon called Vitaminix (104x2'), which has recently expanded by 73 new episodes.</p>
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Designed to engender the concept of healthy eating in children, the series uses a combination of bright, colourful imagery to appeal to preschool viewers, mixed with vocabulary that strikes a chord with older children.

Vitaminix has already sold to Nickelodeon in countries including Spain, France, Italy and Latin America, as well as Disney in the US and Asia and a broadcaster in Hungary too, as Eastern Europe becomes an increasing focus for Icon's activities.

The company is expected to announce further deals in the territory over the coming weeks for Lola & Virginia (52x11'), a cartoon targeting girls aged 6-12. A coproduction between Icon, Millimages, France 3, TV Catalunya and ETB, the series has already presold to Nickelodeon in Latin America, Animanima in the US, Tele Madrid and RCTV in Venezuela and Disney Channel Spain.

Currently in production, Icon expects to deliver the series in two tranches next year. Again, Lola & Virginia's emphasis is on tackling challenging issues within the context of funny, savvy characters confronted by experiences such as kissing boys for the first time.

According to recently-appointed Icon head of marketing and distribution, Christophe Goldberger, who's previously worked for Paris-based Moonscoop and Montreal's Klick Animation, this strong editorial line is part of the reason for the company's quick success.

"Lola & Virginia is a sitcom, but it's not good girl against bad girl. Sometimes the good girl is bad and the bad girl is good," says Goldberger, illustrating the point that characterisation and script are more complex than more typical stereotyping gives ground for.

It's also down to the audience demographic - again atypical in that Lola & Virginia is aimed at girls. "There aren't that many shows with strong girl characters," says Goldberger. "A lot of companies have followed the trend of producing strong boy action characters with strong merchandising potential. We're doing exactly the same but in a different niche."

To this end, a merchandising deal has been struck with Comercial Nim in Spain to ensure that toys and all manner of Lola & Virginia goodies are lining the shop shelves when the series debuts in the country in 2006.

Like any kids animation house with its head screwed on these days, merchandising will form a central plank of Icon's business plan moving forwards. 10 books and DVDs based on the Vitaminix series will be available from the autumn and Goldberger says the approach will be no different when it comes to Icon's next project.

Sandra the Fairytale Detective (52x11' or 26x22') is a 75.5m project, for which Icon is currently in the process of finalising financing. The company aims to deliver the series in autumn next year or spring 2007.

This time targeting girls aged 5-8 years old, the toon again contains Icon's characteristic injection of contemporary wit, putting a thoroughly modern twist on classic fairytales such as Cinderella.

In one episode dealing with this story, Prince Charming calls on the help of Sandra to solve the mystery of why the glass slipper he's due to place on Cinderella's foot has disappeared from this possession.

It turns out that Cinderella has got wind of the fact that the Prince isn't so charming after all, a bit of a womaniser in fact, and so arranges for the glass slipper to be snatched from under his nose so she can have it back with no strings attached.

A copro with Spanish pubcaster RTVE, Sandra has already presold to TF1 in France, Cartoon Network in Latin America and Disney in Spain, Italy and Germany. Goldberger says the company hopes to be in production by year end and is confident of receiving the necessary outstanding funds to make this happen.

In September at the 2005 Cartoon Forum being held in Kolding, Denmark, Icon will unveil its plans for an entirely new property. Hop & Calamity (52x11' or 26x22') is a 'soft' 3D animated series (pictured above).

It tells the story of a Dalmation puppy who lives on a planet which is so small that when's he's happy and he jumps up and down, the whole place shakes. This drives neighbouring canine witch Siniestra crazy and she makes it her aim in life to ensure Hop remains miserable. Enter Calamity, a novice fairy, who's mission is to help Hop overcome Siniestra's evil plot.

For Goldberger, the series completes the circle, giving Icon properties across the entire spectrum of the children's demographic. "It's more traditional as well," he says. "You'll see the difference from our other properties." But what remains constant is the likelihood that Hop & Calamity will quickly win favour with major broadcasters and become another strong property in the Icon stable.