

KIDSCREEN

FEATURES

Kidcasters hunt for four to seven fare to bridge between preschool and core kids

U.K. grocers grab a greater share of toy sales with private labels and lowball pricing

About reaching children through entertainment

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NICKTOONS





production,
programming & distribution

- Former TV2 buyer Lisbeth Mathiesen sets up shop to dispense Jolly Good advice to Nordic animators
- Pact opens its doors to live-action specialists and forms a stronger kids production lobby group to tackle key issues



What's developing in kids production

BY LIANNE STEWART

Can't make it to Cartoon Forum in Denmark this year? Well sit back, grab a coffee and danish (any flavor will do), and take a look at some of the most promising pitches from the showcase lineup.

Bali's big-city backdrop speaks to urban preschoolers worldwide

With both parents holding down full-time jobs, a high-rise apartment to call home and the city as his own personal playground, three-year-old Bali is enjoying a decidedly urban upbringing that's becoming the norm for preschoolers around the globe. And his namesake 2-D animated series from Paris-based Planet Nemo Animation explores this bustling, colorful world through the eyes of its young protagonist.

In one big-city tale, Bali and his dad hit the grocery store, where he watches his father fix the shopping cart's wonky wheel with a screwdriver. Intrigued, Bali escapes into his fertile imagination, where he saves the day for candy-loving kids everywhere by repairing a broken machine in a lollypop factory. Then Dad jolts Bali back to reality, rewarding him with a lolly of his own for being such a good and quiet boy.

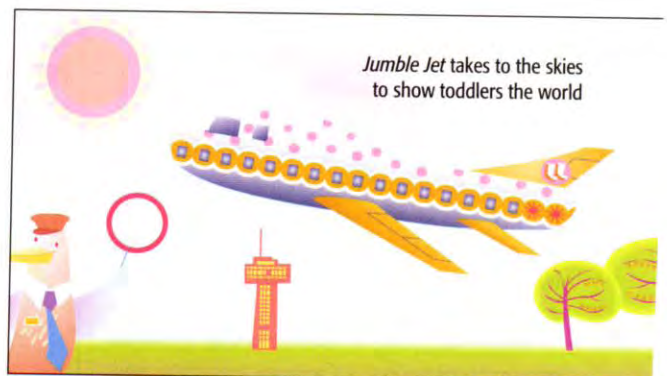
The 52 x 13-minute show is based on a 15-title book series by French author Magdalena, and it has a bold color palette and distinctive graphic style. Moving away from the soft, innocuous music that's often piped into preschool programming, *Bali* will feature funkier tunes by Hong Kong pop composer Dick Lee, which should encourage its two to six target demo to dance along with the show.

Status: In production, with delivery set for Q4 2005. Planet Nemo and co-pro

partners Subsequence Entertainment in Montreal, Canada and Hong Kong's Agogo International have already secured presales with France 5, Disney Channel France and three Canadian nets—Knowledge Network, Radio-Canada and TVOntario. Through its Canadian and French connections, *Bali* has also tapped into financing from the CNC, the Shaw Rocket Fund, Telefilm Canada and the CTF. Julie Fox's Awol Animation is currently working towards locking in one or two more broadcasters to top up the show's US\$5.2-million budget.



Planet Nemo animates the urban preschooler experience in *Bali*



Jumble Jet delivers in-flight entertainment for the next generation of world travellers

What airline do animals use to travel the world? That would be *Jumble Jet's* fleet of pastel-colored planes, around which London's Lupus Films has created a

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as RTL2 and Kabel 1's kids block, both of which net between 8% and 10% market share. "For advertisers, Nick will be an optimizing channel to generate additional reach, but Super RTL will remain the primary way to reach children," he says.

Christof Baron, CEO of media planning agency MindShare Germany, says Nick's entry won't really affect his ad-buying strategies for kid clients that include Mattel, PlayStation and Kraft until the net's market share hits at least 10%. However, it would



Super RTL is still getting the most out of its access to Disney fare like *Dave the Barbarian* (above), while Nick Germany's marketing plays up the presence of *SpongeBob* and his posse of in-house friends

give him more leverage during negotiations. And in the longer term, Baron says advertisers would stand to gain if an upstart channel were to shake things up and loosen Super RTL's firm grip on 85% of kids TV advertising revenues in Germany. But he adds that Nick will have to make sure its programming has a more German-centric feel in order to be successful this time around.

Heavy marketing is another prong in Nick's strategy to carve out a German audience, and the plan calls for on-line contests, a major outdoor advertising campaign, cross-promo spots directing traffic from Viacom's other channels (VIVA and MTV) and activities and booths at German theme parks such as Legoland and Warner Bros. Movie World. The goal is to play on kids' pre-existing familiarity with Nick's hit properties, so messaging will run along the lines of "SpongeBob is coming, and he's bringing along his friends."

But Super RTL isn't about to let Nick lay claim to some of its highest-profile shows that easily. "We are going to do what we can to make it clear that *Jimmy Neutron* and *SpongeBob* are still with Super RTL," says Schmit with determination. Along with an outdoor ad campaign promoting these returning hits as part of its fall lineup, Super RTL is currently hosting an on-line vote-off (coinciding with Germany's general election this month) to decide which TV hero should be the nation's kids councillor. Candidates hail from four of the net's most popular shows—music-themed magazine *Banaroo*, comedy toon *What's With Andy?*, action-adventure series *Dragon Hunters* and science format *Wow Die Entbeckerzone*. The contest launched in August and generated 1.2 million hits in its first week and a half.

Although commercial-free KIKA doesn't have to worry about competing with Nick for ad dollars, staying top of mind is still an issue. And so head of acquisitions and co-productions Sebastian Debertin says the net will also be ramping up its marketing efforts this year with an increased focus on the web, merchandising and outdoor events such as the KIKA Summer Tour, a free travelling show featuring the channel's live hosts.

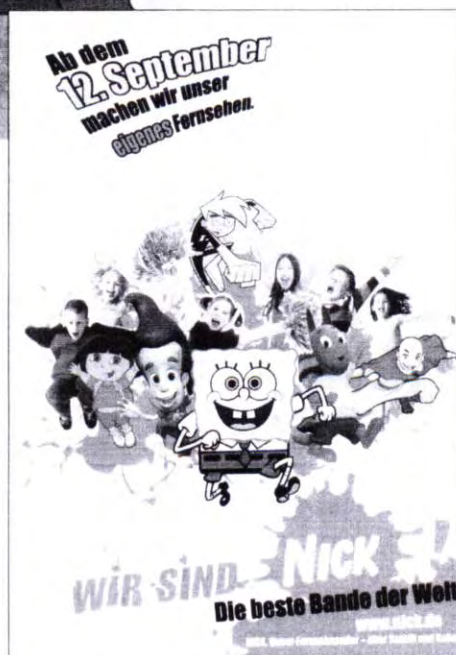
In terms of maintaining its edge on the programming front, Super RTL is refreshing its fall lineup this year with several new shows, including preschool fitness phenomenon *LazyTown*. And leaning more heavily on its access to the library of channel shareholder Disney, Super RTL plans to roll out ratings winners such as

Dave the Barbarian, *WITCH* and *Kim Possible*. Schmit says there will also be a renewed focus on proprietary live action to draw in tweens who have grown out of animation. Upcoming highlights from this genre include sports show *Toggo United: The Football School*, a German version of *America's Funniest Home Videos* and a *German Idol* magazine show that will run in conjunction with the talent-finding format on RTL.

For his part, Debertin is hoping to boost KIKA's 14.3% marketshare this year by promoting strong local content such as 45-year-old classic bedtime show *Sandman*, increasing the net's co-production activity by 150%, and shaking up the net's dayparts.

KIKA's sked will break down into three new blocks this month to narrow in on preschoolers, the six to nine set and tweens. Each one sports

a very unique look, but still incorporates elements of the larger umbrella brand. "This allows us to address each age group in its own language without fragmenting our channel into sub-brands as Nick and Cartoon Network are doing in the U.S.," explains Debertin. ☐



Lisbeth's leap is Jolly Good news for Scandi toons

When industry execs turn to the global market for fresh animation product, Scandinavia is almost never considered as a go-to territory. But ex-TV2 kids programmer Lisbeth Mathiesen plans to build up exposure for Nordic projects and creatives with her new one-woman outfit, Jolly Good Company.

She says there are actually a lot of strong ideas coming out of countries such as Denmark and Norway. But lack of public funding and international business acumen, coupled with the fact that Scandinavian kidcasters offer low presale dollars, often discourages animators in the region from pushing their concepts through to the greenlight stage. Mathiesen says TV2's average presale price for a half hour of animation is US\$2,000, which is a mere drop in the bucket for a producer aiming to secure the 30% needed to send a new show into development. Countries in the region have small populations (for example, Denmark's is only five million), so ad revenue that could help bump up presale dollars simply doesn't exist.



Ex-TV2 buyer Lisbeth Mathiesen hangs a new shingle to help Nordic animators make waves on the global market, and *Ugly Duckling and Me* will be her lead-off project

Given this glitch, Mathiesen plans to lean heavily on her 10 years of experience in the kids TV biz and introduce Nordic studios to co-production opportunities, distribution partners and non-domestic broadcasters looking to pre-buy content. She'll also guide creative and design efforts on projects that need it, as well as using her reputation for singling out high-potential pitches to help move her clients' properties onto the international playing field.

Mathiesen also hopes to build strategic alliances with fellow freelance consultants around the world, and she expects there are ways to work together to generate wider support for new projects. "I would initially be looking to bring the Scandinavians into the world, but I also wouldn't mind bringing the world to Scandinavia," she says.

It's been just one month since Jolly Good opened for business, and Mathiesen has already ID'd several homegrown projects she'd like to add to her catalogue. Her first project will be a show she started working on at TV2—*Ugly Duckling and Me* from Denmark's A Film, Ireland's Magma Films and France's Futurikon. The show is ramping up for delivery at the end of the year, and Mathiesen is overseeing its production on behalf of the Danish pubnet. **LS**

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new 2-D animated series designed to teach preschoolers about the virtues of visiting exotic places.

Each episode centers around a different passenger, following their journey from check-in to disembarkation, and learning about their final destination through live-action cut-aways. In one segment, Mr. Koala boards the plane and settles in for a long overseas flight to Mexico to attend his best friend's birthday party. After he requests a eucalyptus meal from Fifi the flight attendant, the scene shifts to shots of Mexican children wrapping presents and playing with a piñata as they get set for the fiesta. Back in the plane, a mix-up plays out when Fifi accidentally brings Mr. Koala the nice juicy T-bone she meant to deliver to Mr. Dog, who doesn't know what to make of the pile of fragrant leaves sitting on *his* plate. After a few seconds of head-scratching, the kerfuffle is put right with a simple meal switch, and the journey continues.

Status: The 52 x 13-minute show is budgeted at US\$6.5 million, and HIT Entertainment (the project's sponsor at Cartoon Forum) is laying the groundwork to come in as a co-production partner. Lupus will be looking for presales in France and Germany, as well as targeting U.S. nets such as PBS and Discovery Kids, and the plan is to deliver the series in late 2007.

Euro comic book artists pool talents for *Safehouse Hotel*

When Sally and Simon's parents inherit a sleepy seaside hotel from a distant relative, they're totally unaware that it's listed as a safe house on the website for Spies Reunited. But

it doesn't take long for the siblings to cotton on to the strange and secret lives of some of the residents. For example, it's hard to miss the daily attempts made by two elderly guests (and sworn enemies) to liquidate each other using homemade weapons like combustible slippers and false teeth imbedded with explosives.

Although they try to remain as neutral as Sweden, Simon and Sally routinely get sucked into any number of the many espionage missions being carried out right under the noses of their oblivious parents.

In development at Calon (the new studio recently set up in Cardiff by ex-Siriol Productions managing director Robin Lyons), *Safehouse Hotel* is the brainchild of two comic book artists—Calon's own in-house writer/illustrator Mike Collins and Spain's Jose Luis Agreda. The 26 x half-hour series will



be rendered in Flash for US\$4 million, and it's aimed squarely at eight- to 10-year-olds.

Status: Calon is looking for co-pro partners in France and Canada to get the show onto small screens by 2007.

The EBU helps spread roots for tree-dwelling *Klumpies*

On the heels of revamping its investment infrastructure and expanding its content-hunting parameters beyond kids six to 12, the European Broadcasting Union is hitting Forum '05 with a new preschool concept in tow. Originally developed by Belgium's Creative Conspiracy, *The Klumpies* is about a community of tiny creatures who live in an enormous



The EBU's newest co-pro attracts a *Bob the Builder* writing triumvirate

board as scriptwriters, and Guionne Leroy (*Toy Story*) is handling animation design.

Status: Development wrapped in May, and a pilot for the 52 x seven-minute CGI series is in the can. *The Klumpies* will be produced in HD for delivery in 2008, and the EBU is helping the producers generate presales for the US\$6-million project in Europe.

BRB fuses Hindu setting with manga action and style

In *Khudayana*, a new action-adventure co-pro between Spain's BRB Productions and L.A.-based Al Ovdia and Associates, all hope to save the mystical land of Magesh rests on the motorcycle racing skills of three teenagers. An evil despot has usurped the rightful ruler of the kingdom and now controls a set of magical runes that are the keys to power in Magesh. But he foolishly scatters the runes in hiding places all across the land and challenges all those aspiring to a higher political or social status to root them out in an epic motorcycle race he's sure no one but himself can win. Enter Khuda, Sita and Chek, the latest progeny in a long line of skilled bikers, who have trained all their lives to compete in such a quest.

Status: This toon-shaded CGI series should speak to boys six to 11 when it wraps in Q1 2007. Two full seasons of 26 x half hours are planned for US\$195,000 an ep, and the partners are looking for presales to top up at this point. ☐

Given that Al Ovdia is a partner on the project, it's not surprising that a consumer products push for *Khudayana* is already underway

