

MIPJUNIOR: CO-PRODUCTION

The Deep (Technicolor)



# It's all about teamwork

*As a new crop of kids' shows hits MIPCOM, producers in the children's space tell Rachel Murrell about their strategies for international co-production*

IT STARTS with the broadcaster, says Alison Warner, vice-president of IP sales, acquisitions and co-productions at Technicolor. "We know which broadcast-

er we want to work with for each show, and we ensure the show we're developing is going to suit them," she adds.

With *The Deep* (26 x 22 mins), a CGI-animated series about the adventures of a family of underwater explorers, the broadcaster that Warner had in her sights was Australian pub-caster ABC Kids. So she asked

ABC's then controller of kids content, Tim Brook-Hunt, which Aussie production houses he rated, discussed the project with his recommendations, and selected A Stark

Productions.

*Atomic Puppet*, an animated comedy action-adventure series about a 12-year-old boy and a superhero in reduced circumstances, brought Technicolor together with Mercury Filmworks in Canada and a soon-to-be-announced French production partner. Developed with Teletoon in

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# FEATURE

mind, the show is being structured as an official French/Canada co-pro and there is an offer for a pre-buy on the table from a major network.

“Every show is different,” Warner adds. “Do your homework to get the right fit. And be clear with producers, and the broadcasters, about what you want and can deliver, because they also have their own criteria.”

Nigel Pickard, CEO of Zodiak MEEA (Middle East, Asia and Australasia) and UK Kids & Family, took a more conservative approach to preschool show *Zack And Quack* (52 x 11 mins). His Korean co-pro partners, High1 Entertainment, had worked with him on a previous show, *Tickety Tok*.

*Zack And Quack* (formerly *Quick Quack Duck*) came to him by accident. “I did a speed-date at MIPJunior four years ago and was pitched a show by the Israeli animation producer Gili Dolev based on his short film *The Happy Duckling*,” Pickard says. “He was working in Scotland at the time and the film had won several awards.”

Dolev moved back to Israel and, after a minor bidding war, Zodiak took on the property and put together a UK/Israeli/Korean co-production. “Our production company The Foundation managed the scriptwriting process, while High1 provided animation and some investment,” Pickard says. “QDD, our Israeli partner, was involved as a non-cash partner.”

He adds: “The show was licensed by Nick Jr channels worldwide, so it’s driven by the US, which is great for a British producer. Not only is it one of the best-designed shows we have ever done, but the storytelling has a US pace, thanks to our American head writer Robert Vargas and a mixture of US and UK writers.”

Robin Lyons, managing director at Welsh production company Calon, has found co-production getting harder in the second series of *Igam Ogam*, a pre-school series about a Stone-age girl, her pet dinosaur *Doggy* and her monkey friend *Roly*. The show is a Calon/Telegael co-production for three broadcasters S4C (Wales), Five (UK) and TG4 (Ireland), and distributor ZDF Enterprises (Germany).

“ZDF Enterprises invested originally because they were confident they could sell it to their broadcaster,” Lyons says. “But even with a licence fee from two broadcasters — S4C and Five — as well, that wasn’t enough to



Filly Funtasia, based on the toy brand Filly

greenlight it. Then we got an investment from Telegael and they tapped into their tax credit under Section 481 and did a sale to TV4. And we got some regional funding from Ireland and Wales.”

Lyons is used to the funding process becoming more complex every time he does it, but never before has he had to ship his workforce overseas. “We set up a stop-motion studio in the west of Ireland,” he says. “Having made this investment, we will probably do more projects that can be made there.”

Lyons is looking East as well as West. “We noticed that Al Jazeera Kids buys all our shows, so we started to develop stuff with an Arab theme that would work for them,” he says. The first fruit of that initiative is *Mustafa* (52 x 10 mins), a 2D animation series about a young Arab boy who helps his granddad in the souk.

Jim Ballantine, managing director of Sydney’s Flying Bark Productions, is also co-producing with Telegael. *Tashi* is an “unofficial” co-production with Telegael and an Indian partner. Aimed at eight- to 11-year-olds, the adventure series is based on the million-selling Australian children’s books by Barbara and Anna Feinberg. Ballantine has structured the work split to maximise Australian government support. “We have two participating Australian networks, some investment from Screen Australia and some state funding,” he says. “It sounds good, but Sydney is the third most expensive city in the world, salaries are high and the exchange rate is against us.”



*Igam Ogam*, a Calon/Telegael co-production



Invizimals, co-produced by Screen 21 and Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

Super Mega Hyper Pets was produced by Studio 100 in Paris and Flying Bark in Sydney. “There’s no Australian/French co-production treaty, but there is a memorandum of understanding,” Ballantine says. “You tell the CNC how much you intend to produce in each country, and they say whether it qualifies for support or not. It’s important that the creative remains in the country of origin.”

Sergi Reigt, CEO of Imira Entertainment, is exploring new financing partners for his latest co-production. The animated adventure comedy *Bat Pat* is an official co-production made with Rai and Atlantyca Entertainment — both based in Italy — and Malaysia’s *Inspidea*. But Reigt hopes to secure venture capital as well.

“This means our projects need to work not only in the TV space, but also in consumer products and — in the case of venture capital — they need to be a business in their own right,” he says. “This is harder to achieve [than TV/TV co-productions], but ultimately it’s healthy, as only the strongest properties make it through.”

Locating venture capitalists for individual properties — and perhaps later for company investment — takes a good deal of research. “Venture capital involves a very specific type of partner, with its own parameters and

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**“Venture capital can be a great tool for those who can make it work”**

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Sergi Reigt

expectations from the deal,” Reigt adds. “This might not be something that works for all independent producers, but it certainly can be a great tool for those who can make it work.” Carlos Biern, CEO of BRB Internacional, is launching two new co-productions, both based on established toy properties. *Invizimals*, co-produced by Screen 21 (Spain)

and Sony Computer Entertainment Europe (UK), is the first-ever TV series to feature augmented reality (AR) bonus action. A Spanish broadcaster is about to sign on.



Lanfeust (Gaumont Animation)

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"Invizimals started as a video game in the days when kids had no smartphones," Biern says. "It's being developed as a transmedia concept based on the premise that mythical creatures exist and children can help protect them. They do this by holding their phone in front of the animation to download mini games, clues about the show's story and special messages from their favourite characters."

The second property, Filly Funtasia, based on the toy brand Filly, is co-produced with toy partners Dracco (Hong Kong and the Netherlands) and Simba Dickie Group (Germany) for delivery in 2014.

"Filly is a very big property in Germany and Eastern Europe for girls, with 500,000 downloads and 30 million collectable stickers this year alone in Spain and Portugal," Biern says. "In adapting it, we are trying to broaden its appeal to boys by changing the line-up of characters, creating an academy context and giving it a sitcom edge. That involves using mostly US writers."

According to Biern, co-production is changing: "It's much more of a party than it used to be. It's no longer just about making a great show — though that obviously comes first. It's now about looking for many more companies to create content with." Potential partners include games, toy, publishing and music companies, as well as app developers.

Biern also expects territories to become less important. "We will be releasing a show in several languages at the same time," he says. "That means streamlining the legal side so we can respond fast enough. We think countries like China and Indonesia will find they have to open up. Kids want to know what's going on, and they'll find it."

Pierre Belaisch, managing director of Gaumont Animation (formerly Alphanim), is launching two copros next month, both with the advantage of established brand recognition.

Lanfeust is a CGI-animated epic-comedy based on the 10 million-selling French comic book; and Calimero is about a little black chicken first seen in an Italian TV advertising campaign on Rai.tv in 1963.

For Lanfeust (26 x 26 mins), Gaumont's Indian partner was DQ Entertainment. "We

worked with DQ on Galactik Football, so we know Tapaas [Chakravarti] is reliable and has people with high levels of skill, and we know he listens, respects the budget and that his ways of working fit with ours," Belaisch says.

When it came to Calimero, which is 50 years old this year, Belaisch looked to Japan for co-production support. "I felt this



Super Mega Hyper Pet, produced by Studio 100

**"Animation is a universal language and great for international co-production"**

Aton Soumache

property would be very appropriate for Asia," he says. "So we created a co-pro structure with TV Tokyo and Kodansha, Japan's largest publishing house. They invested a huge amount in this, which they don't normally do for a French production." The new CGI version of Calimero will premiere on France's TF1, Italy's Rai, Disney Junior in selected EU markets and Tele-Quebec. Aton Soumache, CEO of Method Animation, also looked to Japan for co-producers on Lady Bug. Created by Jeremy Zag, CEO of Zagtoon, and set in Paris, the Manga-inspired LadyBug is about two teenage friends who become superheroes in order to save their city, but without knowing each other's true identities. The show is co-produced by Zagtoon and Method with Toei Animation (Japan), SAMG (Korea), AB Group (France) and Curlstone (Jordan) for TF1 (France), SK Broadband (Korea) and Disney. Distribution is by PGS and AB International Distribution.

Soumache and Zag jointly chose their co-production partners for their track record in specific areas. "We wanted Toei Animation for its knowledge of action-adventure and SAMG for its high-quality production pipe in Korea," Soumache says.

The Method Animation chief also senses that co-production is changing. "Shows need to work on an international scale and meet new demands," he says. "Animation is a universal language and great for international co-production. But kids' audiences are evolving and we need to adapt too. Our challenge is to find synergies and new ways to create value for our shows. And our goal as producers will always be to tell the best story possible."



... And Quack



Zodiack's Zack...