

Fast Growing Zoonicorn Brand Expands Licensing



The Zoonicorns and Pancake, the otter, love to sing!

By Gary Symons
TLL Editor in Chief

The global preschool brand Zoonicorn is coming to Licensing Expo with a bevy of fresh new licensing deals and expanded streaming territories.

Zoonicorn is a fun and educational animated preschool series, with short, kid-friendly episodes of seven minutes each.

The series, co-produced by Toonz Entertainment and Zoonicorn, LLC, and distributed by Toonz, has become a hit around the world in a very short time, and represents a new opportunity for licensing partners looking for a fresh new brand with global reach.

J'net Smith of All Art Licensing, who was appointed as the Brand Director and Master Agent for Global Licensing, says the secret to Zoonicorn's success is really

based on relatable characters and good storytelling.

"Mark Lubratt, the founder of Zoonicorn, LLC, had an idea for really cute zebra-unicorn characters for preschoolers," Smith says. "But it was the inspiration of his mentor Amar Bose, the entrepreneur, academic and founder of Bose Corporation, that brought the idea of the Zoonicorns to life.

"Mark has always believed in the power of optimism, determination and resilience, something Bose also believed," Smith adds. Mark feels strongly that children should start internalizing these positive values at a young age to help them with their social emotional growth. This was Mark's 'eureka moment': Make the characters cute and relatable, and infuse our entertaining stories with this empowering message."

Zoonicorn is a unique show in which the titular Zoonicorns inhabit the dreams of young animals, taking them on amazing adventures to help learn important social and emotional skills with a focus on determination, optimism and resilience.

The Zoonicorns cleverly guide each dreamer through a whirlwind of fun-loving escapades and when the dream is over, the young animal wakes up feeling self-confident, with the decision-making skills necessary to overcome whatever challenges they are facing. The basic concept, the producers say, is that at the heart of every solution is one important truth; the power to solve any problem is inside of them.

Multi-Emmy Award-winner Mark Zaslove (Winnie the Pooh, Lazytown, Bob The Builder) serves as show runner and lead writer/editor for the series. The music for

Continued on page 13

All Art Licensing Leading Zoonicorn Stampede at Expo

Continued from page 12

the show has been composed by Emmy Award winning composer Rich Dickerson.

But it wasn't only storytelling that led to rapid growth in a global market, Smith adds, saying the experience and connections of Toonz Entertainment has been key to the franchise's rapid growth.

"We were excited to connect with Toonz Entertainment, which is now our production and distribution partner," Smith says. "They immediately got the importance of what we were doing in the area of optimism and resilience, and they've taken the look and feel of the brand to another level.

Toonz is a media company with a lot of experience over two decades as one of the world's most active animation production studios. The studio has produced an impressive 10,000 minutes of both 2D and CGI kids and family content per year.

Toonz has also produced several animated and live action series over the years, as well as major feature films, including 'Wolverine', 'The X-Men', and 'Speed Racer: The Next Generation', among others.

As a studio trusted by streaming and linear TV networks, Toonz was able to land the show in more than 100 countries worldwide.

"Our strategy has always been a 360-degree approach to distribution; we want to



Promi gets a new hair do, but reminds the Zoonicorns--it's what's on the inside that counts.

be everywhere kids are watching programming," Smith says. "In the US alone we are on five platforms, including Peacock and Happy Kids TV, where we debuted in their top 10 preschool programs, Kidoodle TV, Il Reina Infantile, and, of course, YouTube. We're also coming soon to two more US AVOD channels, Kabillion and Kartoon Channel."

Wide distribution and a quality show has enabled Zoonicorn to reach millions of children throughout the world, and Smith says a robust licensing program is now the next major step for the franchise.

"With United Smile on board as our master toy licensee, our licensing program is growing as the brand builds through further visibility," Smith says. "All of this is very satisfying, but Mark's vision goes far deeper. His ultimate goal is to help kids internalize determination, persistence and resilience and to help mold the next generation through these core skillsets.

"Zoonicorn is the only preschool show where the emphasis is on these specific positive values. We've been talking about them for years, and we knew we were ahead of the curve when this very topic was announced as the keynote at the 2024 Kidscreen Summit."

Smith says increased viewership and distribution has thrust licensing into the forefront, not just because it makes sense as a next step, but literally due to consumer demand.

For example, when the series airs in a new territory, local licensees want to respond to the demand from consumers. A good example is in the Philippines where Zoonicorn episodes recently made their premiere on Cartoon Network Philippines. Shortly afterward the leading Philippines toy distributor Playkit launched Zoonicorn toys and other products at retail with special promotions and displays at stores and malls nationwide. Similarly, in Germany and Austria, Edel Kids launched Zoonicorn with a theatrical release of eight episodes in more than 400 theaters across both countries during a dedicated family programming block, with product and plush giveaways supplied by Zoonicorn master toy licensee United Smile.

Smith says the characters seem to lend themselves very readily to licensing programs.

"We know the marketplace has a powerful affinity to unicorns," Smith says. "We offer that strong affinity with a few unique



J'net Smith

Continued on page 14

Zoonicorn's Positive Messaging Resonates With Families

Continued from page 13

twists. One of the unique brand attributes of the Zoonicorn characters is that, unlike so many brands in the market, Zoonicorns are not superheroes. They are like your own children, learning along the way, making mistakes and living in a diverse and expansive world where anything can happen.

This is what makes them so relatable to young children. It's OK to make mistakes, learn from them and move on. I can say with confidence that no one else has the same look and feel as Zoonicorn and our Zooniverse. Our brand is ideal for licensees looking to freshen up their lines with a new and one-of-a-kind look. We also have a great advantage in the market because of our broad appeal at retail. Zoonicorn works at boutique, high end and mass market."

That said, Smith argues that licensing for a values-based children's show can't be only about products and revenue; it also has to be about extending the message behind the story. With that in mind, she says the team is looking for very specific types of partnerships.

"We're looking to build quality products with partners who have the ability to translate our characters and stories in a unique way," Smith explains. "Our partners need to share our deep understanding of – and passion for – our core message of optimism, determination and resilience.

"It also means weaving our values into their designs, play patterns and game play. We want experienced partners who have the relationships with key vendors and who can move with us in the class and mass markets, since we fit well into both. They need to be able to translate the relatability of the characters onto their products through excellent design, while still producing quality products at key price points, and can grow with us. Being responsive is really important, since it's important to the kids and retail accounts."

The licensing effort is being led by Smith and also by Bruno Zarka, the president of



Pancake becomes Zooniclaus to deliver gifts.

TV co-production, distribution and syndication at Toonz Media Group. For both of them, there are twin goals of creating new and mutually beneficial collaborations, but there is also the added pressure of handling international growth.

The team behind Zoonicorn wants to literally get their message out to every child in the world, which in itself is a tall order, but one that Smith is convinced can be achieved.

"We are fortunate that Zoonicorn so easily cuts across borders and cultures," Smith says. "Kids everywhere love our stories, get our characters and can feel inspired by what they see. So our goal is to have our feet on the ground in every territory in the world.

"As a self-sustaining, profitable brand, we will have the latitude to build on our positive message, not just to kids, but to parents, grandparents, caregivers and educators," Smith adds. "We truly want optimism, determination and resilience to be the zeitgeist of this era, and 'Zooniyay!' to be the cheer heard around the world!

"This is the goal and we are certain it is highly achievable."

Zoonicorn will be exhibiting at the upcoming Licensing Expo, and given the incredibly rapid growth of the franchise, Smith is expecting it will be a very busy few days on the trade show floor.

You won't find many other independent brands with a success story like Zoonicorn," Smith says. It really is quite incredible that, in just a few short years, we've gone from a powerful vision that was nurtured by Mark Lubratt, to where we are today.

"Our shows enjoy global distribution and we are entering season two with season three already in development," she adds. "I really think that Zoonicorn has that potential to be an evergreen brand that will be in the market for a very long time, so it's just a great time for licensees to come on board and grow with us."

Companies interested in licensing opportunities with Zoonicorn can connect with J'net Smith by email at jnet@zoonicorn.com, or set up appointments through Licensing Expo's Meeting Platform.

The Zoonicorn booth is located at #D204.

