SPECIAL REPORT



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FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY

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by PATRICIA DELUCA

ANIMATION CAN BE a misunderstood genre. On one hand, you have an artform that some may reserve for the preschool set. On the other hand, cutting-edge techniques and commentary from animation properties can deliver an impact that standard TV and film properties cannot.

Older audiences recognize the magic in animation shows like "The Simpsons" (now in its 30th year) and newer shows like Netflix's "Disenchantment." And its fandom can revive shows. "Family Guy" was cancelled by Fox twice only for the network to bring the series back in 2003 based on audience demand and its cult status.

Currently, there are several animated series on TV with strong fan followings, and whose consumer product ranges reflect its audience's buying preferences–those who prefer to wear their fandom rather than display it on a shelf.

Cartoon Network Enterprises has several apparel collaborations currently in stores globally for "Rick and Morty." Partnerships include an exclusive apparel collection at global retailer Primark with sock brand Stance for a line of "Rick and Morty"-inspired styles, and Primitive Skate for apparel, skateboards and accessories. CNE marked the series' third season on Adult Swim with a special DVD box set and a line of wooden nesting dolls.





For CNE, "Rick and Morty," with its eccentric characters and grown-up humor, has universal appeal, which reflects the consumer product line.

"'Rick and Morty' incorporates themes such as family, relationships and overcoming challenges that resonate across all demographics," says Pete Yoder, vice president, Cartoon Network Enterprises, North America. "The show tackles these themes head-on, with humor incorporated."

CNE has worked with international streetwear companies on capsule collections featuring "Rick and Morty." Recently, Australian lifestyle brand BlackMilk Clothing and French urban design label Elevenparis both dropped apparel collections inspired by the animated series.

"We definitely look for partners who understand the brand and are able to develop product that delivers the unique comedy of 'Rick and Morty,'" says Yoder. "In many instances, our partners are huge fans of the show, so they are able to take that fandom and translate it into product that resonates with our core audience."

Fox Animation's "The Simpsons," "Family Guy" and "Bob's Burgers" have long-running licensing programs across several categories, including some that will pique the interest of the most die-hard collector.

"The Simpsons" first premiered on network television in 1989 and quickly set the standard for high brow (yet low format) political and pop culture commentary, creating a series that was accessible to the whole family. Its fan following has been consistent for its 30-year run, spurring merchandise programs along the way.

Consumer products for "The Simpsons" include a men's and boys' collection at Zara worldwide, a men's 10-piece collection from Pull&Bear and an apparel line at Lefties. Character World will unveil a collection showcasing Duff, the beverage brand within the show. Asos has created a summer collection around "The Simpsons," while H&A will launch a beauty line around the show. Her-Chain will expand its brick-and-mortar "The Simpsons" stores in China, and American Eagle Outfitters will unveil a men's apparel collection around "The Simpsons" this fall.

"Bob's Burgers," Fox's animated series that centers on the Belcher family (and whose first episode was titled "Human Flesh..." not exactly kid-centric), has a licensing program in place that includes a branded cooler with Igloo; a book, *"Bob's Burgers" Recipe Box,* from Rizzoli later this year and apparel from Sprayground and Ripple Junction.

Retailer BoxLunch will work with "Bob's Burgers" again to support Hunger Action Month in September. Purchases of BoxLunch "Bob's Burgers" products will provide 10 meals to Feeding America.

"Family Guy" is another family-centered animation, but which includes a semi-matricidal baby, a gluttonous father, a drunk dog and a whole host of decidedly unchildlike characters that continually find themselves in questionable circumstances.

Licensing for "Family Guy" includes a streetwear line with Diamond Supply; *Inside "Family Guy:" An Illustrated History* with HarperCollins and a jewelry collection with King Ice to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

The "Family Guy" licensing program also includes a collection of mobile games. The most recent game, "Family Guy: Another Freakin' Mobile Game," was released by Jam City in 2017.

Viacom Nickelodeon Consumer Products built an extensive licensing program around the 20th anniversary of Nickelodeon's "SpongeBob SquarePants."

Although "SpongeBob" is an animation that has true kid appeal, its fan base spans multiple demographics, finding popularity in with people from ages 5 to 100.

The anniversary kicks off with a "The Best Year Ever" celebration on July 12 with the premiere of "SpongeBob's Big Birthday Blowout," an original mixed live-action and animated special.

New "SpongeBob" consumer products from master toy partner Alpha Group are bringing the cartoon figure to life with collectible figures that incorporate SpongeBob's fan-favorite viral memes like Mocking SpongeBob, Imagination SpongeBob, Surprised Patrick, SpongeGar and Handsome Squidward in stores and on Amazon.com. Apparel partners include Cynthia Rowley for a "SpongeBob" wetsuit that debuted at New York Fashion Week in February, and artist Romero Britto created mixed-media art that will be exhibited at pop-up "SpongeBob" experiences across the U.S. throughout the year.

VNCP will also launch a mobile game, the first line of "SpongeBob"-themed cosmetics and more in the coming months. The anniversary celebration will lead up to the theatrical release of Paramount Pictures' and Nickelodeon Movies' feature film *The SpongeBob Movie: It's a Wonderful Sponge,* which hits theaters in summer 2020.

VNCP has also launched a consumer products line for MTV's



classic animation, "Beavis and Butt-head." Created by Mike Judge, "Beavis and Butt-head" originally debuted on the networks' "Liquid Television" series, a platform for edgy animations and shorts. The animation, which centers on two inept teenage delinquents, quickly took root with fans and developed into a full series.



Licensed product programs for the property continue to find relevancy, as well. It has partnered with Adidas for an apparel and footwear inspired by the '90s animated series.

Unlike "SpongeBob Squarepants," "Beavis and Butt-head" exists only online. The last original episode aired in 2011 with no news of a revival. So why would VNCP work on a "Beavis and Butt-head" licensing program? Once again, credit goes to the loyal fans of the animated series.

"The core demo for the series when it aired was teens and young adults that connected with the off-color and iconic humor that was ground-breaking for its time," says Charlotte Castillo, senior vice president, franchise planning, Viacom Nickelodeon Consumer Products. "Today, the characters still resonate with the GenXers that grew up with 'Beavis and Butt-Head,' but also with Millennials who have discovered the series online. Our consumer products program has remained steady throughout the last decade with a focus on nostalgia trends."



The "Beavis and Butt-head" Adidas line was a strategic partnership for VNCP to bridge the cartoon with contemporary brands that resonate across multiple demographics.

"Brand and demo alignment are important," says Castillo. "We work with partners that are authentic to 'Beavis and Butt-Head's' brand, and a love for the show is always important. Our recent collaboration with Adidas was a perfect fit, and their two limited-edition capsule collections evoked '90s nostalgia, counter-culture and the golden era of skateboarding that epitomize 'Beavis and Butt-Head.'"

Original animated series are now popping up on streaming channels, making it easier than ever for grown-ups to find them, and therefore create new fans with buying power.

Netflix's "Disenchantment" (by "The Simpsons" creator Matt Groening) is available worldwide in 27 languages and going into a second full season. And with a global fanbase, Netflix announced a full licensing program this year.

The series' new partners include Bioworld, which launched the first "Disenchantment" curated t-shirt assortment for the U.S. via Coalition Supply at Amazon.com. Bioworld, the master apparel and accessory partner for Bapper Entertainment, creators of "Disenchantment," will develop adult t-shirts, fashion apparel, sleepwear, loungewear, headwear, bags, jewelry, drinkware and small accessories. Funko will create stylized figures, keychains and novelty cereal and Kidrobot will create stylized figures, keychains and plush.

Segal Licensing was named the agent for "Disenchantment" by Bapper Entertainment in Canada, while Rocket Licensing will serve as the animated series' licensing agent in the U.K. and Ireland.

Rocket Licensing will help develop a licensing program that will include apparel, accessories and collectibles for adults. Rocket's initial partner focus will be on entertainment retail, with product categories include apparel, gifting and homewares, social stationery, food and beverage, collectibles, accessories, and electronic accessories) and toys and games.

Merchantwise Licensing will represent Bapper Entertainment in Australia and New Zealand for "Disenchantment." Other agency appointments for "Disenchantment" licensing include J&M Brands in Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg; Team! Licensing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland; and ETS Studios in Italy.

Whether a show has just launched or has run for several years, the licensing programs for adult-oriented animation proves that its licensing campaigns can no longer be dismissed as "kids' stuff." ©

