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Fast and Furious

CASE STUDY



MARC LOW

senior vice president and general manager, international consumer products, Universal Brand Development

FAST AND FURIOUS

Universal Brand Development is shifting gears and becoming more active in its approach to licensing.

by **AMANDA CIOLETTI**

NBCUniversal is continuing to overhaul its consumer product division, changing the course it has been charting as DreamWorks completes its integration into the studio's core business and widens an already rich portfolio.

In August, Universal Brand Development, the consumer product, games and digital and live entertainment arm of the studio's ecosystem, announced two key appointments: Joe Lawandus, who joined last month as senior vice president and general manager, North America consumer products, and Marc Low, who was elevated to senior vice president and general manager, international consumer products.

"Our global consumer products business unit has grown exponentially over the last two years, both in the U.S. and international territories. As we continue to expand our business both creatively and categorically, both Joe and Marc have the proven ability to amplify both our businesses and partner relationships as we set new benchmarks for the future," says Vince Klaseus, president, Universal Brand Development.

Low's escalated position will enable him to continue to help Universal Brand Development transition its business model, which has relied on overseas agents, to a direct business, giving the company enhanced advantages to leverage its ever-growing portfolio of diverse IP.

"Agents can be very good for the business—and we do have many in a lot of countries in the world that we will continue to use—but for us in the key markets, going direct allows us to have boots on the ground so that we can engage with partners locally," says Low.

Universal Brand Development has identified four international regions that the company will focus on and manage in-house: Latin America, which includes Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, etc.; EMEA; Greater China, which includes Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan; and Asia-Pacific, which incorporates India, Australia, Korea and Japan.

“Within each of these regions, we’ve identified key markets that we think will be growth drivers for the future, and that’s where we’ve put our emphasis and focus for the years to come,” says Low.

The international territories are then headed up by country managers, who will work to ensure that each market has offerings that are locally relevant and can be tailored and customized on an individual basis.

“Going direct allows us to broaden our offer because we can talk to retailers and licensees in real-time without the filter of a third party,” says Low. “It allows us to deepen our categories and our relationships, and it also allows us to start to tailor our offer to local trends and customize how we appear in each market. It’s less of a one-size-fits-all model, and more of a focus on regional or local needs and tastes.”

Local country directory appointments, which have been sliding into place over the past two years, are:

- Allen Wang, vice president, consumer products, Greater China
- Jeffrey Daggett, vice president, consumer products, Asia Pacific
- Maria Ancieta-Risher, vice president, consumer products, Latin America
- Jonathan Baker, vice president, consumer products, EMEA

“Building a robust leadership team is a crucial element for our international group as we look to forge new opportunities for business expansion across Universal’s ever-growing portfolio,” says Low. “We’re thrilled to welcome a strong team of seasoned experts as we form a more integrated approach for our EMEA territories and continue to establish the Universal brand as a global leader.

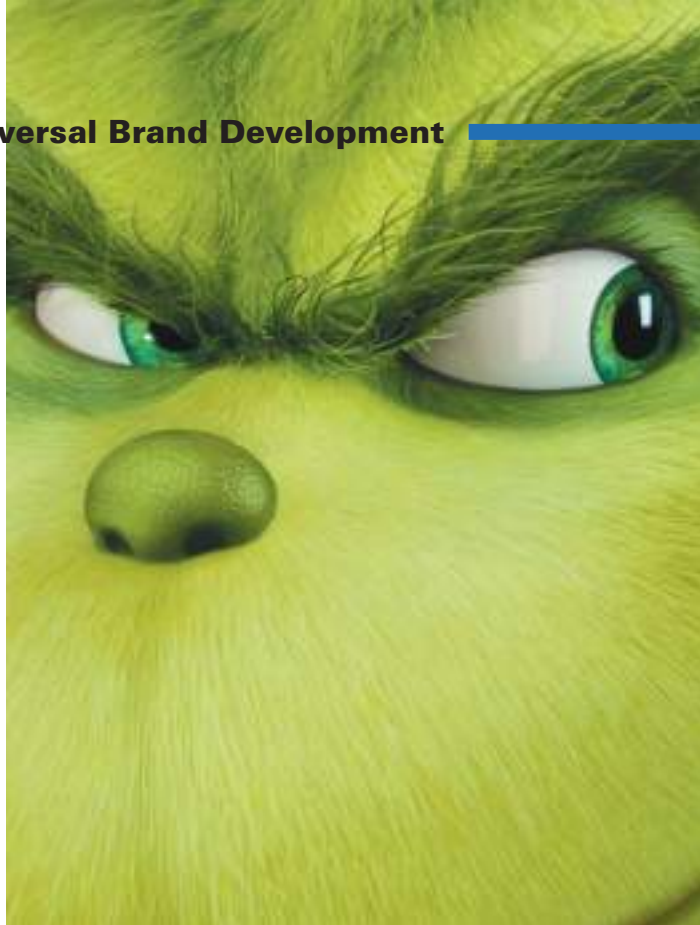
“Each country will have a local structure that will have category experts who are focusing on hard lines, soft lines and creative in-market so we can get closer to local tastes, and we will have retail in-market who can build the relationships with the retailers,” he continues.

The direct model is one that

was kicked off domestically in North America, and is now rolling out around the world, with advantages that reach deep into Universal’s catalog of IP, allowing for a more nimble local approach and stronger relationships with licensees and retailers. With “boots on the ground” now, as Low says, Universal is able to present its total portfolio, which includes DreamWorks, as well as its live-action and Illumination animation offerings, and can appeal to a wider demographic, from preschool to adult.

“By removing the agent layer, we’re now able to interact





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with retailers and licensees directly, allowing us to have deeper relationships and offer our broader portfolio," he says. "Previously, we had agents that managed the Universal portfolio and separate agents that managed the DreamWorks portfolio. Now we're able to put everything together and go out to market with one combined statement that covers various ages and consumer segments."

Low also sees the advantage of increased synergies between the consumer products teams and NBCU's wider organization, including theatrics, home entertainment, TV distribution and theme parks.

As the company heads into 2018, major initiatives are taking shape, says Low.

"What's really wonderful about what we have going forward are these three big content engines that drive very different and complementary offers. As we head into 2018 and beyond, we have a wealth of IP we can start to grow and develop in these markets," he says.

On the live-action side, NBCUniversal is putting a lot of muscle behind the *Jurassic World* franchise. 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the original *Jurassic Park* film, and the company is planning to celebrate the milestone with plenty of activations that build the brand



DREAMWORKS
Trolls

into one of the largest dinosaur properties in the world.

On the heels of the eighth installment of the *Fast and the Furious* franchise this spring, Universal will launch a "Fast & Furious Live" arena tour that will be making stops throughout Europe, beginning in London, and hitting the major markets, and building momentum for the next *Fast and the Furious* film coming in 2019.

Shifting gears to Illumination, the company will continue to build on the success of *Despicable Me* and the *Minions*, which "continues to remain popular around the world," says Low. Illumination is also ramping up for another new theatrical release this holiday season with *The Grinch*.

DreamWorks is now fully integrated into NBCU, and so plans for that portfolio are rolling ahead full steam. According to Low, Universal will continue to build a 365-day program around the *Trolls* property, and will create activations stemming from the film.

DreamWorks' television offerings are also a push for the Universal group, and will focus on series "Voltron: Legendary Defender," "Spirit: Riding Free," "Noddy, Toy Town Detective" and "How to Train Your Dragon," which has a third film coming out in 2019. ©