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90 Years of Mickey Mouse

CASE STUDY

90
Years
of

MICKEY MOUSE

From his beginnings in “Steamboat Willie” to high fashion collaborations with the hottest designers, Mickey Mouse has come a long way in 90 years and has grown to become an indelible piece of popular culture for every person around the world.

by AMANDA CIOLETTI

Perhaps no figure in the world is more symbolic of happiness, joy and childhood magic than Mickey Mouse. A cross-culturally recognized, multi-generation-spanning icon and symbol, The Walt Disney Company has built its kingdom upon some pretty iconic black ears.

“Without a doubt, Mickey has very broad appeal on screen, in person and in merchandise alike—he transcends age, geography and demographics to appeal to the good nature in all of us,” says Ken Potrock, president, consumer products commercialization, Disney Parks, Experiences and Consumer Products. “Mickey Mouse has brought generations together more than any other animated character in the world. With his universal appeal and ability to emotionally connect with people from all over the world, he has remained a pop culture icon decade



after decade. In 1934, Walt Disney was asked to explain Mickey's global popularity, and he said, 'The Mickey audience is not made up of people; it has no racial, national, political, religious or social differences or affiliations; the Mickey audience is made up of parts of people, of that deathless, precious, ageless, absolutely primitive remnant of something in every world-wracked human being which makes us play with children's toys and laugh without self-consciousness at silly things, and sing in bathtubs, and dream and believe that our babies are uniquely beautiful. You know, the Mickey in us.' This is still very much true today. As our most iconic character and the face of Disney, Mickey sparks childhood nostalgia in adults and represents positive values to children while entertaining and delighting audiences wherever he goes."

To date, Mickey Mouse has starred in more than 120 animations, 30,000 publications, multiple touring productions and has appeared on countless (literally, countless!) pieces of apparel, toys, homewares and other products.

In 2018, Mickey Mouse commemorates its 90th anniversary—he first debuted in "Steamboat Willie" on Nov. 18, 1928—and with that comes a celebration that only the Mouse House could pull off in true style.

Disney has brought the entire organization together to create an expansive licensing program that commemorates Mickey Mouse with a global offering of goods and experiences that honor the world's most famous character.

"Mickey Mouse is the No. 1 licensed character franchise in the world, and we continually collaborate with the top brands and licensees in emerging spaces to create products and experiences that help extend Mickey's brand and reach audiences of all ages," says Josh Silverman, executive vice president, global



product commercialization, Disney Parks, Experiences and Consumer Products. "Our recent efforts have been focused on working with other brands who are considered 'true originals' in their own right—other iconic brands that have rich histories—to share in the 90th anniversary celebration of the 'true original' Mickey Mouse."

Mickey, the 'True Original'

As the legend goes, when it comes to licensing, Mickey is the "true original."

In 1929, Walt Disney was walking through a hotel lobby in New York City when he was approached by a man asking if he could pay \$300 to place Mickey on a writing tablet that he was manufacturing. Needing the money, Disney agreed, and thus, Mickey became the first-ever character to appear on a licensed product.

Soon after, Disney expanded on this concept, creating the first plush toy from the Steiff Company of Germany in 1930, and in 1933, the Ingersoll-Waterbury Company unveiled its now-iconic Mickey wristwatch at the Chicago World's Fair.

Today, Mickey is the No. 1 licensed character franchise in the world, contributing to The Walt Disney Company's status as the world's most successful licensor, bar none. This year alone, the company reported \$53 billion in annual retail sales of licensed products, making it No. 1 on *License Global's* annual Top 150 Global Licensors report year-on-year (and for many years prior to that).

"Merchandise inspired by Mickey Mouse has played a significant role in the legacy from the past 90 years," says Silverman. "That's what makes this project so fun; we get to take these great, iconic moments from the past several decades and bring them back to life with partners—some existing and some original—in new and unexpected ways."



Products and More Products, 'Oh Boy!'

To mark the milestone anniversary of Mickey Mouse, Disney has crafted a global licensing program that reflects the overwhelming popularity the character enjoys, and many of those partnerships are limited-edition or short-term opportunities.

"There are a number of licensed collaborations that have rolled out around the globe in support of Mickey the 'True Original' and his milestone anniversary," says Silverman. "From the one-of-a-kind fashion show in Disneyland with fashion brand Opening Ceremony to the near full-store takeover with Target this past summer, collections with Primark and Dose of Colors' Mickey Mouse makeup collection (pieces of which

sold out in China on the first day) and in-store events at Sugarfina, Levi's, Rag & Bone and more, Mickey is in the spotlight with brands paying tribute to his legacy.”

Special partnerships include, in part:

- A collection of vintage-inspired Mickey Mouse assortment from Funko that include a “Steamboat Willie” Pop! vinyl figure, “The Brave Little Tailor” mini vinyl figures, a firefighter Mickey Pop! and more.
- Longtime food and beverage partner Dole has brought Mickey to bananas, pineapples, salads and veggies in the U.S. and Canada, and through January, has crafted a Pinterest campaign that offers how-to recipes, healthy menu ideas and party planning tips.
- Shinola has launched a range of cool special- and limited-edition items including timepieces, leather goods like backpacks and a tech portfolio, audio equipment and wall clocks.
- Vans gathered together four artists to create a line of footwear in honor of Mickey's 90th. The partnership also includes t-shirts.
- Polaroid has released an anniversary edition camera and film that incorporates Mickey into its borders.
- Mickey is featured on a makeup collaboration with Dose of Color, bringing the iconic character to the packaging and stamped within eyeshadow palettes.
- Lacoste, which is also celebrating its 85th year, has paired with Disney for a range of 90th anniversary sneakers, leather goods, polos, t-shirts, sweatshirts and accessories for kids and adults.
- Levi's has brought Mickey Mouse to its own collection of iconic denim, fashioning skinny jeans, sequined quilted coats and jackets, each emblazoned with the famed mouse.
- Apparel brand Rag & Bone launched a range of Mouse-inspired t-shirts, knits, jackets and sneakers in November.
- British retailer Cath Kidston has debuted a line of bags, accessories, homewares and more, each adorned with Mickey branding.

Other best-in-class partners such as Forever 21, Gigi



Burris, Marc Jacobs, Opening Ceremony, Nixon, Just Play, LEGO, Goldfish, Ample Hills and Oreo are also on board for various collaborations and products.

Disney Parks Say 'Hiya, Pal!' to Anniversary Celebrations

Mickey Mouse is the heart and soul of Disney parks around the world. Since the opening of the first Disneyland park in Anaheim, Calif., in 1955, to the most recent Disneyland Shanghai in China in 2016, Mickey Mouse and his friends have featured prominently in parades, attractions and entertainment experiences. The anniversary, then, is big news.

“Disney parks and resorts celebrated Mickey's 90th birthday with a series of events at all sites around the world on Nov. 18—Mickey's actual birthday—that continues with the World's Biggest Mouse Party, a limited-time, global celebration of Mickey and Minnie around the world,” says Potrock.

In October, Disneyland Paris debuted “Mickey and his PhilharMagic Orchestra,” a 4D experience; and the Tokyo Disney Resort (which is also celebrating its 35th anniversary this year) premiered the new “Dreaming Up!” parade and “Happiest Celebration on the Sea,” both of which feature Mickey.

Hong Kong Disneyland is hosting “We Love Mickey!” surprise parties and has transformed its Mainstreet U.S.A. into a tribute to the famous Mouse; while Shanghai Disney Resort has debuted its spectacular, “Ignite the Dream—A Nighttime Spectacular of Magic and Light.”

There are also plans for special shows, appearances and more on Disney Cruise Line ships and at Aulani, Disney's resort and spa in Hawaii.

Additionally, Disney recently announced a new mouse-themed attraction, Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway, set to open at Disney's Hollywood Studios in October 2019.

M-I-C—'See You Real Soon'—K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E

Last month, Disney opened the doors to the “Mickey: The True Original” exhibition in New York, New York. The 16,000-square-foot exhibit features historic and contemporary works featuring Mickey Mouse from renowned artists such as Darren Romanelli, Amanda Ross-Ho, Kenny Scharf, Shinique Smith, Keith Haring, Daniel Arsham and others, as well as Disney's famed animators.

The immersive attraction, centered in New York's trendy Meatpacking District and just below the High Line, takes visitors through 10 curated rooms that showcase Mickey Mouse through the years and in various interpretations.

The exhibition also includes a Mickey's Maker Shop,



a retail store that offers exhibition-branded merchandise, timed product drops and select pieces from the 90th anniversary "True Original" capsule collections. Visitors can also create custom personalized products on-site.

"Mickey: The True Original" runs through Feb. 10, 2019.

Other major events, experiences and entertainment specials celebrating Mickey include a TV special on ABC;

a Disney on Ice tour that will bring the 90th anniversary festivities to the U.S., Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America; and a special school program in France that asks students to create their own Mickey artwork.

Additional products, such as 30 titles from Disney Publishing Worldwide and various items from Disney Store, have launched, as well.

Potrock and Silverman say birthday celebrations will continue through 2019 as well.

"From a new star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame to a one-of-a-kind fashion show inside Disneyland Park, a new television special, celebrations at Disney parks and resorts, unique product collaborations with other 'true original' brands, and the 'Mickey: The True Original Exhibition' opening in New York City, this has most definitely been the year of the mouse," says Potrock. "We've been hyper-focused on celebrating the persona and characteristics so inherent to Mickey in everything we've done this year, and have worked closely to make sure our fans and guests are reminded of why the world has come to love this character so much over the years." ©

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YEARS
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