



LICENCES ON THE BIG SCREEN

One big blockbuster is currently dominating the global licensing business: Even before the official release of "The Force Awakens", products based on the "Star Wars" film have been raking in the cash. This will be followed in 2016 by an array of other promising themes which will be transformed into products that have the potential to generate high sales.

The force is definitely with Disney. There is barely a sector in the toy industry that has not embraced the long-awaited space saga: "We expect 'Star Wars' to become one of the biggest selling licences of the year," says Marissa DiBartolo from the

American trade magazine "The Toy Book". Market researcher Euro-

toys/Npd Group have found that "Star Wars" and "Frozen" are currently leading the ranking of the top European licences. "At the moment the most popular licences are from Mattel – 'Frozen' is the no. 1 in Polish stores," states Jolanta Tokarczyk, editor-in-chief of Polish toys magazine "Świat Zabawek".

Beyond these two major themes, the market researcher identified significant differences between the countries inside Europe. For example, "Peppa Pig" is hugely popular in Spain

and the UK, but hovers in the lower half of the popularity stakes elsewhere. Axel Dammler, Managing Director of Iconkids & Youth, which specialises in the consumption of licensed products among children and youths,

highlights another popular theme: "The 'Minions' have shown yet again that you don't have to be Disney to create a strong licence." Even so, the Mickey Mouse inventor still has several cards up its sleeve for the coming months: "The Jungle Book" is returning to cinema screens, as is "Alice in Wonderland 2 – Through the Looking Glass" and "Finding Dory", the sequel to "Finding Nemo".

THE SUPERHEROES ARE BACK

The nine new Marvel features, announced for release before 2019, will have an enormous

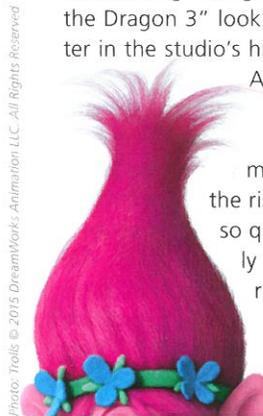


Axel Dammler, MD of Iconkids & Youth, knows the licensing world like the back of his hand.

impact on the extended toy ranges of "The Avengers" and friends. A similar picture can be painted at Warner Bros. which is poised for the first meeting between two of its most popular DC comic giants: "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice". Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill have become the embodiment of these famous characters, and will also star in "Justice League Part One" (2017), in which the superheroes join forces in the fight against evil. Warner Bros. has stated that ten blockbusters are scheduled to appear before 2020. The corresponding merchandising is already well under way. Mattel has secured the global master toy licensing rights for the entire DC Comics universe. Bandai, Lego, Panini, Rubie's and Schleich are also on board.

By contrast, Hasbro will focus much of its attention on "Trolls" – which, as the name already suggests, is a film about trolls. The marketing rights here have been secured by Dreamworks Animation. By 2018, the themes surrounding "Kung Fu Panda 3" and "Taming the Dragon 3" look set to write a new chapter in the studio's history of major successes.

Axel Dammler explains why sequels have their place: "When it comes to cinema films, there is always the risk that they come and go so quickly that they can hardly be used by the property rights business. This is why you need at least one sequel before a cinema licence can really get off the ground."



Expectations are high for the Dreamworks film "Trolls" and its licensed products.

LOCAL PHENOMENA

As far as television series are concerned, Dammler does not believe that there is a secret recipe for success. "There are just too many themes around fighting for a piece of the pie." The only themes that assert themselves in the long run are of exceptional quality, have a striking look and a prime-time slot on TV. Generally speaking, the so-called "local heroes" are rarely successful in one country alone. The production costs are far too high to focus solely on the home market. "It's nigh on impossible unless you set out to move beyond national borders right from the start," states Dammler.

Products based on Disney's "Finding Dory" are poised to take the market by storm.



Irrespective of the theme, the question is always whether it appeals to the right target groups and, of course, whether children can identify with the characters. "Mia and me", for example, had so much appeal that it made it without the support of the big players. Besides this, there are a few other emerging starlets: "'Babblarna' is a new big Swedish phenomenon," explains Lena Hedö, editor-in-chief of Swedish toy magazine "Lek & Baby Revyn". It appears, therefore, that every so often each country can produce its own little licensing stars – far away from the global hype surrounding the blockbusters.