

World Animation Summit: Building Your Brand

Angela Entzminger Nov 4th, 2015



Rick Clodfelter, a content acquisitions consultant who has held key programming positions at Cartoon Network, Boomerang and Discovery Kids, moderated the panel of experts: Michael Carrington, CEO of Zodiak Kids; Frederick Faubert, Founder, President, and CEO of Hibernum; AK Madhavan, Founder and CEO of Assemblage Entertainment and Rich Magallanes, SVP of Development and Production for Saban Brands LLC.

The big question of the night was: What is a brand, and what is necessary for an idea to become a brand?

For Carrington, who spent many years as an executive for the BBC, the answer was simple. “For me a brand is really just a great story and a great set of characters that come to life and mean something to you,” he said.

Faubert, whose company focuses on mobile and platform games, echoed that sentiment. “It needs to have an emotional connection.” For his company, there is also the added difficulty of needing to achieve engaging game play along with creating compelling characters. “We create a universe that’s really good and really great, but if the play pattern doesn’t work it won’t stick,” he said.

However, it is difficult for even the most seasoned prognosticator to truly predict what will become a brand and what property will become the next breakout hit.

Magallanes knows this first hand. A veteran of Nickelodeon for 18 years, he oversaw the development of such classics as SpongeBob SquarePants and The Fairly OddParents, as well as the recent reboot of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

“When we were creating SpongeBob, we weren’t thinking of building a brand. It became that because of how much fun we had with the character and the crew of the show itself,” he said. “You don’t know what will become a hit. If everybody could do it, we would do it every time.”

And Carrington credits the cyclical nature of television for creating hits that span countless years and multiple generations of audiences. “I think in the old days when we just had terrestrial television, regulating that was a lot easier. We would have five years of comedy, five years of action adventure, five years of comedy, five years of action adventure. There was almost a recipe.”

That changed with the advent of video on demand and countless new ways to watch TV content, and the life cycle of popular shows has extended past a few seasons. “These days with multiple devices children are watching all this stuff whenever they want, on demand, and you’re getting an extension of all of these life cycles,” Carrington added. “You’re seeing shows like Adventure Time in the marketplace for ten years instead of five years.”

The biggest question, and the one that is the most elusive, was how to find that special idea that will become a powerhouse brand. And all the panelists agreed that there is no easy answer.

“There is no magic formula,” said Carrington. “It starts with that character and that story. It becomes that concept that becomes that story that becomes that game that becomes that toy.”

Madhavan, whose entertainment company Assemblage is based out of India, noted that the US market is vitally important for a brand’s international longevity. “To have success in the US means we have a truly international brand. To have a true brand the US has to be onboard. That’s because of the distribution strength the United States brings in,” he said.

Magallanes added though that with today’s crowded marketplace, some shows that may have become breakout hits never get that opportunity, and they need nurturing to succeed. “You can’t overlook marketing, programming, promotion, online — all those things fuel the machine,” he said. “Without those things, if you don’t place your show at the right time for the right amount of time to let it simmer and cook it may not get there. A lot of networks don’t let their program cook.”



World Animation and VFX Summit: Building Your Brand