

# MGM harnesses bandwidth to rep third-party IPs

**W**hen a consortium led by Sony America acquired MGM in 2005, industry speculation turned to calculating how long it would take for the studio and its consumer products operations to be absorbed by its new owners. It turns out that scenario wasn't in the cards for the venerable Hollywood institution. On the heels of the company forming a new media sales division and moving into the worldwide TV distribution market earlier this year, its merch arm, MGM Consumer Products announced its own expansion into third-party representation at Licensing Show.

MGMCP came out of the gate with two sizable deals in hand, picking up North American merch rights for Paris, France-based Marathon's follow up to *Totally Spies!*, *Team Galaxy*, and *Storm Hawks* from upstart prodco Nerd Corps in Vancouver, Canada. The series have landed fall '06 and '07 debuts for 52 eps, respectively, on Cartoon Network in the U.S. and both came into the deals toting master toy partners. (Cypress, California's Bandai picked up *Team Galaxy* and Toronto, Canada's Spin Master scooped up *Storm Hawks*' rights.)

Certainly, the decision to pick up two boys action properties wasn't a coincidence. "We were looking to fill niches in our portfolio," Travis Rutherford, executive VP of MGMCP, says. Preschool properties were under consideration but he says boys TV-driven properties currently hold more opportunity; the preschool market's simply oversaturated right now. Also, the series will skew to slightly different age groups with *Team Galaxy* hitting the four to eight crowd and *Storm Hawks* appealing to older boys, so the pair won't be competing directly for MGM resources.



Room to grow in boys action—MGM now has North American merch rights for Nerd Corp's *Storm Hawks*

As for the two pickups, Rutherford says his team is working to round out the programs launching in 2007 and 2008. For *Team Galaxy*, key categories after toys include publishing, apparel, back-to-school and novelty, while *Storm Hawks* will most likely have video games and trading cards as anchors with apparel and back-to-school filling out a planned second merch wave.

Rutherford's dance card is pretty full on the third-party front for 2007/08, but he's still entertaining pitches and is particularly interested in opportunities in the younger girl demo. He says most third-party deals will encompass the full gamut of exploitable rights for North America including all merch, interactive and new media. In some cases MGMCP will help feed content to company's other divisions, such as its international TV and video distribution arm; those rights were part of the *Storm Hawks* package, for example. Look for Rutherford and crew at MIPCOM in October, where they'll be evaluating post-2008 opps. *LC*

## News in Brief

### Google opening up new market research frontier

When your target audience is kids—a demo that's notoriously fickle and trend driven—being the first to spot the next hot thing often spells success. However, figuring out what's top of mind with kids and consumers to stay ahead of the curve always presents a big challenge for creators, marketers, and retailers working in the space.

Google might just have the answer. The Mountain View, California-based internet giant has just introduced a tool called Google Trends ([google.com/trends](http://google.com/trends)), which ranks the relative popularity of queries made via its ubiquitous search engine according to cities, countries and languages. The resulting graphs detail the number of searches and milestones that might have exerted influence on the popularity ranking over the years. For example, a Trend query about *SpongeBob SquarePants* reveals spikes in searches coinciding with the theatrical release of his movie and appearance in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. As well, the site surprisingly notes that Auckland, New Zealand, Manila, Philippines and Birmingham, England are the three cities with the highest number of *SpongeBob* searches.

While Google calls the program an experimental tool, and has no plans to release the exact number of any searches, the site has already garnered international media attention and surely the eyes and fingertips of executives around the globe.