

Two year old Metrostar is an independent licensing agent that has found a niche in exploiting 'grown-up' TV brands.
Katy Elliott reports

License to print money



"Potential licensees and retailers are only just beginning to realise that brands based upon 'grown up' TV shows can perform well for them."

Claire Potter, Metrostar

A range of *Kumars At No 42* snacks and self help books - who would have thought it? But former marketing director of BBC Worldwide Claire Potter says indies are missing a trick: the time is ripe for independents to start raking in the cash from consumer products - money they can make while they sleep.

Potter is co-owner and managing director of Metrostar, a licensing agent that marries TV brands with consumer products and books. "We help TV companies turn their programmes into consumer products by licensing their brands to people who work on DVDs, magazines, food, exhibitions, clothing, giftware, books, board games, calendars - it can be literally anything."

The company launched two years ago with the aim of mopping up the left over shows that the rights-owning broadcaster/distributors didn't have the time, budget or inclination to exploit. But with the terms of trade transferring rights to indies the company is now focussing more keenly on the independent community.

"We envisaged the company initially taking the over-spill from broadcasters and I still think BBC Worldwide does not make the most of its grown up programming, which is a real shame because it has fantastic brands," she says. "But the ground is shifting because indies are producing more and more."

Potter says licensing is not always at the forefront of producers' thinking - their interests lie elsewhere and they are busy. But there's good money to be made from extending a TV brand into consumer products if it's done in the right way. "Done well, it creates a fitter, happier and healthier brand. Done poorly it creates a rather tired, fat and unappealing one, so we resist talk of 'cashing in' and 'milking'," she says. "We help to create new products, which enliven and enhance television brands - and through that, we generate new revenues."

In fact, the company recently became a Pact member with a view to meeting more indies through Pact events and haranguing the makers of "brilliant shows" for weeks to get a meeting.

"Membership helps us to see the industry from the producers' perspective and educates us about aspects of the industry we're less familiar with. Crucially, we hope it's an opportunity for us to influence independent producers as to how

they can make the most from licensing.

"I recently sent a top 20 list of common mistakes producers make in relation to licensing their intellectual property to someone who runs courses. We realise this is a whole new world to many indies and are keen to help where we can," comments Potter.

All too often, Potter warns, indies are quick to appoint distributors whose chief area of expertise is international sales, not licensing. "Sometimes indies give rights away even though the distributor may not have come up with a licensing strategy. For me it's a specialist function. It is always worth indies thinking long and hard before they give rights away," she says.

In order to work as a calendar, snack or book, for example, a few criteria must be met: it must be a show that engenders warmth and must obviously attract a sizeable audience that makes a point of not missing it. Not all television shows have strong enough relationships with their audience to become brands. It must also be returning because the licensing community is a risk averse, Potter warns.

While children's brands - particularly preschool - are easily extendable, Potter has always been more interested in the grown up properties, particularly the overlooked genre of drama.

Earlier this summer, Kudos Film and Television appointed Metrostar as its licensing agent for its hit BBC drama, *Life On Mars*.

Potter says: "Audiences have been captivated by the great stories and great acting and by the contrasts the series highlights between agrarian Britain and today. The Ford Cortina, the music, platforms and flares, even the test card girl and old Lucozade bottle, transport us grown ups back to our childhoods - and therein lies the distinctiveness and consumer appeal of this very unique TV brand."

This October, Simon and Schuster is publishing a fiction/non fiction *Life On Mars* book for the Christmas market. Metrostar is also looking to broker fiction for Kudos' drama *Habit* and has signed a non-fiction handbook for *Spooks* with Orion Books.

So what exactly is the company's area of expertise? Both owners have a proven track record in brand management at a senior level. While at Unilever, Potter led the team that launched

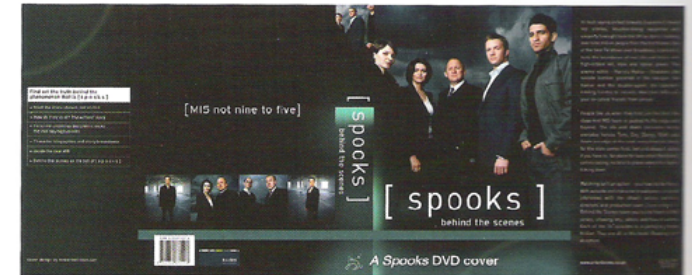


Chicken Tonight cooking sauce in the UK before holding senior marketing positions with Golden Wonder and Ladbrokes. She joined BBC Worldwide as UK marketing director for its combined publishing businesses before joining the Guardian Media Group as marketing and product development director of its recruitment website, Workthing.

Meanwhile, co-owner Steve Deakin-Davies has worked as a global manager for BT and consulted with names such as Blue Arrow, NTL, and Thales. He has worked with Universal, Polygram, EMI, and Carlton, developing IP for retail sale.

The company has also just recruited Stuart Cooper, a managing editor from BBC Books, to manage its expanding publishing business, which now creates publishing packages that include writers and designers.

Metrostar's team of eight seeks to understand who loves the programme and channel brands and why, as opposed to who watches them. With the help of viewing figures, research from companies such as DGA and sometimes from broadcaster commissioned focus groups, it identifies the 'real' profile of a show by comparing the average profile for the slot with the profile of the particular programme brand. It then uses these elements to create new product



ideas. The team creates a brand plan that encapsulates the brand's particular attributes and values, and describes its consumer. Then it generates a licensing strategy that details thoughts about product areas, territories and timescales. For many brands it also produces style guides to give potential licensees and retailers the guidance they need to develop new product ideas, promotion and for point of sale. But the ultimate secret weapon is a "maddening" persistence: "We believe passionately in our brands' potential and we just go on (and on and on) at licensees relentlessly (but nicely!) until they understand it too," says Potter.

Potter is keen to point out that the right licence is the one that builds the brand, not the one that offers the short-term commercial return. In this way Hat Trick's extraordinarily long running *Have I Got News For You* has been extended into greetings cards by Woodmansterne and calendars by Danilo. "*Have I Got News For You* is a comedic exchange rather than a quiz show so you have to concentrate on its irreverence and intelligence and the consumer goods that can capture that," says Potter. "As long as people are still positively engaging with something it will work well. We will see how the calendars and cards go and then look at new areas."

But with the industry dynamic one of consolidation, surely the powerful parent companies are increasingly likely to handle all their own rights, setting up their own specialist licensing divisions while the smaller players will not be able to afford to hire the likes of Metrostar? "Nobody can staff up a department to exploit all their opportunities," claims Potter, foreseeing that the super indies may become like the broadcasters of old and Metrostar will be able to help extend the brands those companies haven't had a chance to exploit. "We may end up concentrating on specific genres, such as drama and comedy, where we can help the bigger companies in areas they don't have the experience or resources to cover."

But for now Potter is more concerned with making sure the decision-makers at indies and channels know about Metrostar and educating the TV industry about licensing, its value, how to develop successful brands and what it can do for their businesses. What's more, she adds: "Potential licensees and retailers are only just beginning to realise that brands based upon 'grown up' TV shows can perform well for them. It's really important to keep reminding them of the power of TV brands and shout about the success stories."

Metrostar client list and licensing product:

- 12 Yard Productions: *Eggheads, In It To Win It*
- Hat Trick Productions: *Have I Got News For You, The Kumars At No 42, Father Ted*
- Flextech Television: original commissions, i.e. *Most Haunted, Celebrity Poker Club* and channel brands
- Kudos Film & Television: *Spooks, Hustle, Life On Mars*
- Derek Acorrah: *Derek Acorrah*
- Optomen Television: *The Great British Menu**
- September Films: *Haunted Homes*
- FromantleMedia: *Dangormouse**
- All3media: *Homes Under The Hammer**
- * consultancy only

