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SERVING THE GLOBAL MARKET

## LICENSING SHOW 2009 Brands Embrace Culture



by Jennifer Sinclair

The licensees, licensors, and agents in the world of brand licensing touch people's daily lives, move people, and get people moving. The resulting products range from outdoor recreation to video games, but the initial selling point is the same: find out what appeals to the consumers' sense of wonder, history, and community. Discover the elements at the heart of what makes up shoppers' daily lives and attitudes, and you can't help but create a product that resonates.

The simple idea of people admiring the unusual talents of other people has led to years of success for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and for its licensing programs. It is the need of "ordinary" people to live vicariously through the extraordinary few that makes us want to immerse ourselves in the lives of acrobats, jugglers, and so many others.

Ringling Bros. has scores of licensed merchandise, from plush to toy circus trains to Halloween costumes. In June of last year, Feld Entertainment, owner of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, appointed CopCorp Licensing to manage the licensing program for the brand, earning raves from CopCorp Licensing President Carole Postal. "The brand's rich tradition combined with its constant reinvention and unbeatable visual appeal makes Ringling Bros. a truly unique property for licensing and retailing partners of all stripes as well as children of all ages," says Postal.

One of Ringling's most recent deals received a circus-sized tribute. During a recent Ringling Bros. performance at Madison Square Garden, a Ringling Bros. high-wire artist took to the air and made a 25-foot walk across a tightrope while maintaining his

balance with only a Wii Remote and Wii Nunchuk in his hands, to the delight of upward-gazing onlookers. The stunt was in honor of a licensing partnership that was announced in April; 2K Play, a publishing label of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. and Feld Entertainment, Inc. have partnered with Ringling Bros. to develop circus-themed video games for the Nintendo Wii and Nintendo DS.

MARS, just like Ringling Bros., capitalizes on our indulgences, mainly our sweet tooth. MARS Retail Group (MRG) offers some of the country's most recognizable brands, including M&M's, Dove, Snickers, 3 Musketeers, Twix, Combos, Starburst, and Skittles. With products that appeal to all demographics, including apparel, novelties, collectibles, and electronics, MRG has grown from 12 licensees to 50 in the past two years.

Retailers and consumers are looking for exclusivity and uniqueness, says John Capizzi, general manager of wholesale and licensing for MRG. That's why, Capizzi says, when creating M&M's-branded tins designed exclusively for Cracker Barrel in a partnership with CandyRific, MRG "worked with Cracker Barrel to create a unique item that represented both of our companies' values."

Over the years, corporate brands have gone from being familiar names to being a part of our lifestyle. Why can't the people who make our favorite candy make our earbuds, too? Why can't we wear, use, eat, drink, camp, rest, work, and play with the brands we've come to trust? ■