

# ALL ABOARD FOR **Chuggington**

**With the track record of its creators and management, Chuggington looks set to take on the world as Ludorum steps up to the plate with an international licensing program.**

By **Josephine Collins**

With BBC in the United Kingdom, Super RTL in Germany, TF1 in France and ABC in Australia already on board, it looks as if Ludorum's £4.4 million (U.S. \$7.7 million) train property, Chuggington, can look forward to a long journey through global territories.

And with its creative and management credentials, it's no wonder that this television, publishing and online launch is being backed so early in its life.

Ludorum was created by the management team behind the success of HIT Entertainment—which built the Thomas & Friends franchise. Following the sale of HIT in 2005 for £489 million (U.S. \$859.9 million) in a deal led by private equity firm Apax Partners, Rob Lawes and Charlie Caminada were part of the team that set up AIM-listed Ludorum, as chief executive and chief operating officers, respectively.

The first CGI 3D season of Chuggington debuts on BBC in the United Kingdom this autumn, and the team has given the go-ahead to start production on the second and third series.

Chuggington already has pulled in a worldwide master toy license with Learning Curve, a division of RC2. Ludorum has links to the companies via its chairman Dick

Rothkopf, who held senior posts at both Ludorum and RC2.

Ludorum has just teamed with joint venture publishing partner Parragon, owned by DC Thomson, which is the major shareholder in Ludorum. The U.K. DVD partner is Zentertain, the BBC and Woolworths joint venture.

Parragon's deal is for English-speaking markets, except the United States, plus Scandinavia and Germany.

Charlie Caminada says: "Our aim is to develop intellectual property in the kids' space and to acquire properties.

We wanted Ludorum to operate on a model that reflects today's market. During the time I was at HIT, the market changed. HIT moved from being 100% TV sales to 87% of business generated by consumer products and home entertainment and only 7% TV sales. During that time, dedicated children's television channels were launched, and the whole landscape changed. There was a big shift down in television sales revenues, but the costs of production did not diminish."

Caminada says Ludorum is focused on building global franchises that will "stand the test of time," with a new launch every two to three years.

Of Chuggington, Caminada comments: "We looked at how children source their entertainment and wanted a show

which would be commercially successful beyond television. We looked at different properties and saw opportunity to take trains and create a show. We asked ourselves what would a 21st century train property look like?"

And the answers they found provided the template for Chuggington—a property that is evenly balanced between girls and boys; one that is targeted at children aged 3 to 6 years; a property with an online presence from its inception; and one that is well written, creative and tells stories that connect positively with children. "And we had to have a property that allows parents to approve of it—which is an important dynamic in the children's area."

Ludorum has set itself up in a crowded and competitive market, a point that Caminada freely acknowledges. But he believes Chuggington has all the elements to become a successful brand. Its creative qualities have been a real focus. Sarah Bull, who won a BAFTA for her work as director and writer on "Bob the Builder," heads the creative team, while the property is designed by Don Toht, executive vice president of concept and development, who has worked on both "Thomas & Friends" and "Bob the Builder."

"The quality and movement of the program and the very big range of characters underline the opportunities of the show," Caminada says. "And the online proposition is the best in class. Children can immerse themselves in the world of Chuggington through television and then online, with the Web site in the same quality as the television program.

"We wanted the online experience to be no less than expected on television—and it has the social and educational values running through every aspect."

The broadcast rollout starts in 2009, and Ludorum is in talks for a 2010 launch in the United States. U.K. DVD and book launches are also set for 2009.

However, Ludorum is looking further into the future and does not expect toys or other categories to launch until 2010. "We're looking at the next 20 years," Caminada says.



## the chuggington story

**Chuggington has a cast of characters based on modern trains from around the world. The program follows the adventures of Wilson, Brewster and Koko, who are trainee engines, called Chuggers. Each has its own personality and different way of learning. The show is set in a contemporary world, and each episode contains entertainment, learning, sharing and enjoyment and is strong on social values.**



"We want to develop a strong line and want to take a long-term view. The fact that our deal with Parragon is a joint venture underlies the confidence that there is in Chuggington."

Ludorum, which runs from small operations in London and Los Angeles, has made a number of appointments to back the consumer product program, which it will handle in-house for the United Kingdom and will appoint partners internationally.

Julian Day is the U.K. vice president for consumer products and DVDs, while Daniela Flower is vice president of international sales. Joi Podgorny is vice president of interactive development.

Ludorum is not only about creating new properties. It already has taken on third-party deals from DC Thomson for comic characters Dennis the Menace and Gnasher and for Marvo The Wonder Chicken.

DC Thomson, which has a 20% stake in Ludorum, has awarded the business

worldwide rights representation for the new Dennis and Gnasher television series, scheduled to launch on BBC in 2009. Ludorum is distributor for the 52x12 series in all categories except publishing.

Caminada says: "The shows are being written for a global market, so the audience will not have to be Beano fans to appreciate the new series. Red Kite Animation in Edinburgh has created a new look but one that is faithful to the original. Dennis is iconic in his home market."

Marvo, who could be described as a "new Road Runner," is set for a new 52x2 series.

Caminada says: "We want to look at new properties all the time, but we are content to take the time to develop shows that can become global franchises. We don't want to dilute our efforts—there is no exclusivity to good ideas.

"It's tremendous fun to re-engage with agents and licensees," Caminada says. "And it has been a luxury to spend the time and resources on Chuggington that we have been able to. You do not know what you've got until it's on air and the first products are sold, but we are proud that we've created something with truly global potential." ©

