

# One-Stop Shop *for the* Best in Class

Retail Monster works closely with its partners including, A+E Networks and Entertainment Retail Enterprises to meet licensing, retail, sales and marketing needs for brands and franchises across a variety of categories. **BY STEPHANIE CRETS**



**E**ndless opportunities abound in the world of licensing, retail, marketing and sales – more than most brands can even imagine, in fact. But that’s where Retail Monster comes in to assist brands, retailers and licensors looking for solutions for brand extensions, licensing opportunities and preferred suppliers. Launched this past March, Retail Monster operates out of strategic locations near big retailers in Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Orlando and Bentonville, Ark., with plans to expand to Minneapolis and internationally next year.

Retail Monster does more than licensing a brand before bringing it to retailers. In fact, it does the reverse approach and brings brands to retailers as a pitch to generate excitement on the front-end, which makes licensing easier overall. It has also found that suppliers who sell intellectual property-based products are skilled at selling those products but struggle when pitching the brand behind them. Retail Monster, however, is more than comfortable helping a supplier pitch their products to retailers and linking brands with suppliers, licensors and retailers.

“We have a unique ability to sell brands to retailers and suppliers through brand ambassadorship,” CEO and founder Michael Connolly says. “What we offer in addition to that really rounds out our vortex. Our key differentiator comes in the sales and marketing services. The most important thing is we’ve decentralized our structure; we haven’t built one big infrastructure anywhere. We can be in front of retailers to pitch within the day and that’s the game-changer. Selling true products and licensing big brands give us a distinct advantage.”

Having worked with some of the biggest brands such as DreamWorks, Nickelodeon, Disney and VIACOM, coupled with retail relationships in the United States and around the world with Walmart, Toys “R” Us, ASDA and Carrefour, the Retail Monster team has vast experience spearheading licensing and retail programs for consumers ranging from infants to grandparents and everyone in between. It operates as a one-stop shop, wanting to make every brand it takes on the best in class in the industry.

“We’re a start-up and build-as-we-grow model,” Connolly explains. “When we meet with new partners, we dedicate resources to those particular brands and programs. In some cases, it’s selling and licensing a brand, and then we come up with a game plan together. It requires us to devise a consumer-led strategy for the business to make it

happen. Some brands might not be biggest, but as long as they have the drive and skill to be successful, we can fuel their fire and help them reach their sales and licensing goals. We pride ourselves on the unique model we’ve developed and it ensures we are working with the right companies.”

**Beyond the Screen**

One of Retail Monster’s key partnerships is with A+E Networks, the global entertainment media content company with nine networks including, original brands: A&E®, HISTORY®, H2®, Lifetime®, LMN®, FYT™ and VICELANDSM, and Crime + Investigation™. These networks reach more than 335 million households worldwide, along with 500 million digital subscribers, through popular programs such as “Ancient Aliens,” “Pawn Stars,” “Duck Dynasty,” “UnReal,” “Bates Motel,” “Wahlburgers” and many more. As part of A+E Networks Brand Licensing growth strategy, they are working with specialized partners, such as Retail Monster to give its fans more creative and unique ways to engage with their favorite shows and talent beyond the screen.

“The holistic, 360 approach Mike is taking with Retail Monster, encompassing traditional licensee/licensor relationship, plus strategic sales, marketing and franchise development, is an appealing one-stop-shop solution for A+E Networks as we look to identify new licensing and retail opportunities for our expanding portfolio,” says Jill Tully, vice president of A+E Networks Brand Licensing. “By leveraging our in-house expertise with the successful track record of the Retail Monster team, we are able to efficiently scale our brand licensing business and be front and center with the key retail decision makers.”

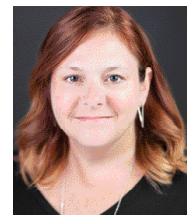
Building on the growth and momentum of the A+E Networks’ content pipeline, A+E Networks’ Brand Licensing team is focusing on three key areas to maximize its portfolio of merchandising and retail opportunities. It’s taking a look at how it can keep its core franchises fresh, such as “Duck Dynasty” and



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“American Pickers,” through creative fan engagement; expanding its current brands in the coming years through new categories such as recreation, publishing and immersive experiences; and delving into newer franchises – “SIX,” “Knightfall,” “The Curse of Oak Island,” “UnReal” and “Bring It!” – as they represent major growth potential. “A+E Networks has proven brands that span an array of demos that translate well to a multitude of licensing deals such as outdoor enthusiasts for ‘Alone’ and ‘Duck Dynasty,’ and games and illustrated books for ‘Ancient Aliens’ sci-fi buffs,” Tully notes.

Some franchises lend themselves easily to fan engagement. “Ancient Aliens” has a niche, engaged audience that Tully describes as some of her “favorite fans.” Because of the fierce fan loyalty with this program, A+E Networks Brand Licensing has launched a fan convention – Alien Con – occurring Oct. 28–30 at the Santa Clara Convention Center in California, with leading event developer, Cosmic Con. The alien enthusiast community will get to attend panels, engage with on-air talent from “Ancient Aliens” and meet stars from shows like “Battlestar Galactica,” “Farscape” and “Lost in Space.”

“We’re really excited about the chance to expand ‘Ancient Aliens’ into the emerging immersive experience space,” Tully says. “We are off to a great start, with ticket sales trending high, and VIP tickets are sold out.”

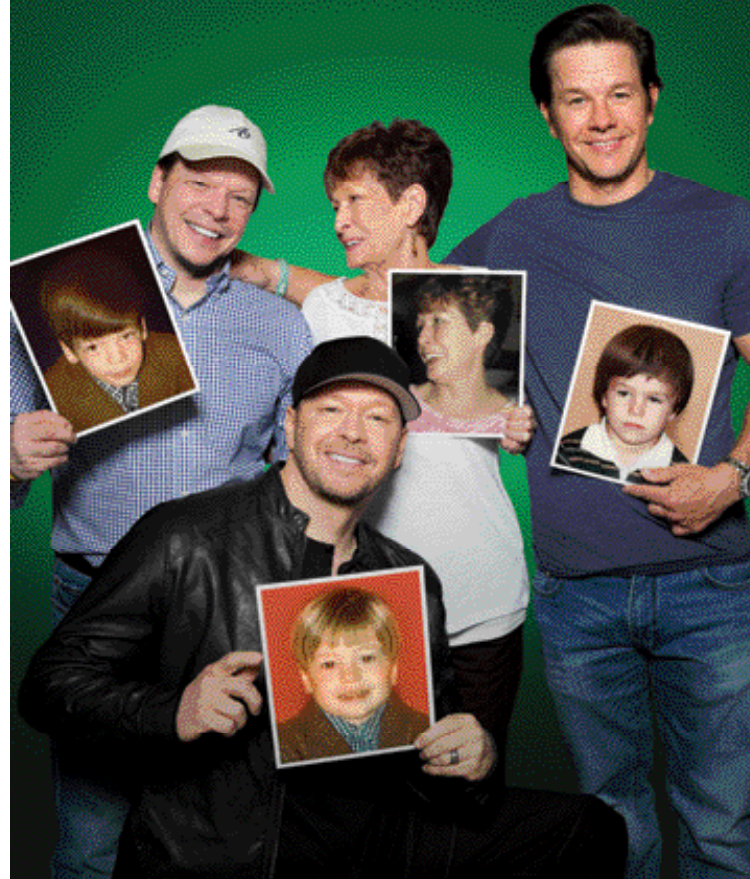
Another exciting fan event launched by the A+E Networks Brand Licensing team and Mills Entertainment is the “Bring It!” Live tour with Miss D and the Dancing Dolls, based on the popular Lifetime® series “Bring It!” that shines a light on the world of majorette dance competitions. Launched in July, the tour will travel to 30 cities with 31 performances.

“For a first run live event, ‘Bring It!’ Live is blowing our expectations out of the water,” Tully adds. “We have 14 sold-out shows and there are more than 70 percent of tickets sold so far. The fans are amazing; their energy at the show is palpable and we are thrilled to have the chance to connect them directly with the stars they clearly love.

“We’ll continue to build on this success, expanding into other live events and experiential in 2017,” she continues. “Today, fan engagement is integral, and the huge appeal of A+E Networks’ franchises on-air provides a strong base to create enhanced off-screen promotions and sponsorships.”

These brand extension opportunities come to life through exclusive representation partnerships A+E Networks has signed with companies like Mills Entertainment, Cosmic Con, ScreenLand on the publishing side and SC Group, who develop gaming and gambling programs. Retail Monster is A+E Networks’ lead partner for licensing and retail activities. “These specialized partnerships enable

A+E Networks is growing new franchises, like A&E®’s hit series “Wahlburgers.”



us to meet consumers where they are and have the right presence in the right licensing verticals,” Tully explains.

After attending Licensing Expo this past June in Las Vegas, A+E Networks Brand Licensing noticed a renewed interest in many properties, like “Wahlburgers” and “The Curse of Oak Island” and growing excitement about newer properties. Tully notes a lot of buzz for the upcoming HISTORY® series “SIX,” a drama inspired by real missions of the Navy SEAL Team, and “Knightfall,” a scripted series based on true accounts of the Knights Templar – also premiering soon on HISTORY®.

In addition, many people were aware of “UnReal,” a Peabody Award-winning Lifetime® series that gives a behind-the-scenes look at the world of Bachelor-style reality television, but it’s now gaining even more traction and interest from both an audience and licensing standpoint as it airs its second season. “We’ve had a lot of positive feedback from the licensing community,” Tully says.

Whether scripted like “UnReal” or reality-based like

A+E Networks is expanding the successful HISTORY® franchise, “Ancient Aliens,” into an immersive fan event called “Alien Con,” landing Fall 2016.



“Wahlburgers,” Tully says they are focusing on the DNA of their shows to shape category and product development. “For example, we are partnering with Abrams Books on illustrated books spotlighting the extreme downsizing lifestyle celebrated on FYI’s ‘Tiny House Nation’ that will feature tiny homes across the country, DIY projects, decluttering advice and tips for downsizing.”

Coupled with new partners like Retail Monster, A+E Networks is looking forward to more opportunities in the industry than ever before. “Our goal is to position our franchises for sustainable, long-term growth by opening new retail distribution channels, including mass and specialty, innovative product development shaped by property DNA and, above all, deliver singular experiences and brand extensions our viewers demand and deserve,” Tully says.

### Retail Solutions

Another crucial partnership for Retail Monster is with Entertainment Retail Enterprises (ERE), an innovator in

creating custom retail solutions for brands and licensors. ERE has focused on the development and execution of turn-key retail programs for more than 20 years and offers a one-stop shop for top brands. “Our unique approach and cross-category expertise provides retailers with cohesive programs that deliver incremental sales,” says Tina Calvo, CEO of ERE. “We want retailers to see us as a 360° solution to their merchandise program needs.”

Developing destination and experiential merchandise programs is the foundation of ERE’s success. The business model evolved to meet the changing needs of retailers in a constantly shifting marketplace. “We saw how impactful our cross-category programs were for theme parks and other destination retail partners and knew there was an opportunity to create a ‘mini destination’ in traditional retail stores,” adds Calvo.

ERE’s solution of bringing together development and manufacturing of multiple categories into one unified, shoppable display was quickly embraced by retailers and

consumers. ERE's displays now encompass a full array of offerings, including promotional pallets, end caps, side-wings, in-line programs and other configurations.

Connolly sought out ERE for its innovative solutions and capabilities, knowing the company would be a great partner moving forward for Retail Monster. "ERE can successfully deliver a program on a pallet or other format with a consistent and relevant brand message," he says. "ERE can deliver that expertise. We are certain ERE has such a unique capability that we've had them in front of every retailer. ERE's amazing merchandising ability, coupled with Retail Monster's ability to identify gaps in the marketplace, makes a potent combination."

"We have built our partnership with Retail Monster based on each other's areas of expertise, relationships with brands and the retailers we serve," Calvo adds.

The beauty of the programs is that Retail Monster only needs to work with one licensee in ERE to offer a variety of different categories of merchandise. Other suppliers focus on a single or limited category, but ERE brings collections and programs to retail across all categories.

"I'd use the analogy 'what makes a great car is great parts' to describe ERE's advantage," Connolly explains. "ERE's car is the 'pallet' but each individual item featured in the pallet will stand up to any item you can find on the shelves. We love that unique differentiator."

ERE and Retail Monster plan to expand the business to additional retailers by working strategically to identify opportunities and capitalize on them in a significant way. "We have the product knowledge and execution know-how to bring something new and different to the market," Calvo says. "Together, we've built a vertical infrastructure to deliver innovation that is brand relevant, retailer focused and consumer friendly."

In addition to offering retail solutions, ERE owns and operates a U.S.-based manufacturing facility at its corporate headquarters in Apopka, Fla., and Product Development and Quality Assurance offices in China. This gives ERE an even greater advantage because they understand what goes into making a variety of products and can directly manage the entire process from design to delivery.

Although the company has entered a very crowded marketplace, Calvo sees ERE fulfilling a white space for brands and retailers. "We want to expand our turn-key platform and become known as the brand statement partner for retail and consumer solutions," she says.

## Coming Together

Connolly describes Retail Monster as "an organization of empowerment," with more than 70 years of combined licensing, retail, sales and marketing experience among its



team members. "The culture is deeply collaborative as everyone has individual levels and areas of expertise that we bring together to ink deals and shape customized strategies for our brand and retail partners," he says.

Connolly notes two strengths found in every member of the Retail Monster team: Everyone is a retail connoisseur and everyone is bringing in a specific expertise, brand management to direct sales or marketing. "We are able to bring each team member's core skill sets into play to meet client needs," he adds.

"We are fortunate to have industry expert Kelli Corbett as a partner and our chief client officer. She is an accomplished sales and retail marketing leader, and I always learn something new from her," Connolly says. "She can walk the floor of any retailer and immediately identify white space and, together with ERE, conceive and manufacture wow-factor products to fill it, fast. In addition to Kelli is Colin McLaughlin, partner and vice president of licensing, who for years has the proven ability to license brands from small-to-large.

"Our amazing partners share our goal to provide extraordinary consumer experiences," Connolly continues. "From forecasting trends and delivering best-in-class solutions to retailers and helping bring brands to life in dynamic new ways, I'm excited to have the talent and know-how in place to take their businesses to a whole new level." 📦