

Calling the toon

Top figures in the international animation industry reveal how they have adapted to cope with the difficult economic climate and how the web is affecting their business, and unveil the new projects they are developing.



Emely Christians
MD and executive producer,
Ulysses Films, Germany

How has the economic downturn affected the international animation business?

Fortunately, we haven't felt the effects too much. We were in the middle of financing a feature film as a coproduction with Iceland when the economic crisis hit Europe. But we managed anyway and are now in production with this project. I think that high-quality projects will always find their way to financing. However, I do notice that it's harder to acquire market money, so that it is not so easy to finance productions that don't have access to film funding.

What is the biggest challenge facing the animation business?

The market demands that most films be in stereoscopic 3D. The sales agents and distributors are buying animated features almost exclusively in 'real 3D' but no one is

sure if this is just a momentary trend or the future of animation.

What is your company doing to meet this challenge?

We had just started production on the feature *Legends of Valhalla: Thor*. We decided to produce it as a stereoscopic 3D feature, when we had just started production. That meant that we had to find 1m [US\$1.3m] within a couple of weeks, but we managed to do that. We now plan to produce most of our movies in 'real 3D,' if it makes sense for the target group.

What is the role of the web and mobile in the animation business?

Cross-media productions will be more and more important and each side of the industry will profit from the other. For



example, we have a *Thor* game for the iPhone out now, and when the film starts in theatres there will be new levels available. We always try to simultaneously develop internet games or other cross-merchandise for our products.

Tell us about the project you're pitching at Cartoon Forum.

We are pitching the CGI animated TV series *Fairycakes* (pictured, 26x26'), aimed at six- to nine-year-olds. It's about a girl, Maxie, who wears only jeans and hates pink but, of all people, gets a dolls house. In it lives a temperamental little fairy who loves pink and from now on brings trouble into Maxie's life. The project was developed at the Akademie für Kindermedien, the script development programme for children's media, in 2009/10 and is funded by the Filmfund Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein.



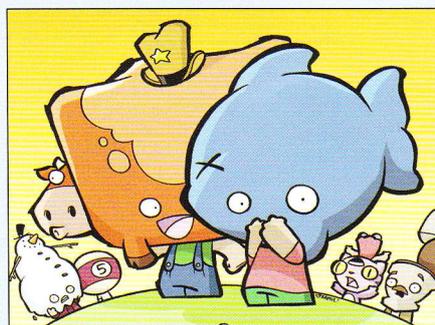
Andrew Cole-Burgin
Partner and head of film
and television, *Random
House Children's Screen
Entertainment, UK*

How has the economic downturn affected the international animation business?

Constricted budgets have raised the bar for better risk management, and the key is to provide a match between investor expectations and investment in intellectual property rights.

What is the biggest challenge facing the animation business?

Access to funding. The long lead-in times, from the exploitation of character properties to peak sales revenues, is typically three to seven years. Essentially, this means that investment in the rights alone is not such an attractive investment to pure equity investors, who may be seeking a three-year exit strategy, especially in the current financial climate.



Fish-Head Steve

What is your company doing to meet this challenge?

We have adopted a strategy that encompasses the re-examination of media finance from the ground up. Everything we do must have a global perspective, from finance to production and distribution.

What is the role of the web and mobile in the animation business?

The web and mobile devices have created distribution platforms that shorten paths to the consumer for revenue optimisation.

Tell us about the project you're pitching at Cartoon Forum.

Fish-Head Steve is a series of 52 animated 11-minute episodes based on a comic strip by Jamie Smart that appeared in David Fickling's comic *The DFC*. The series is set in the town of Spumville, where nothing appears out of the ordinary – until you meet its citizens. The entire population wakes up one morning to find their heads have been replaced by household objects and family pets. Steve is the teenage leader of a gang of friends who are determined to have fun despite their odd heads. And so they go camping in the woods, play ball games or dress up as ninjas, always with ridiculous consequences. So on one level we have a classic silly comedy and we also have a series about what it's like to be different. The series is aimed at 8-12s, predominantly boys. Oli Hyatt from Blue-Zoo will direct, Random House Children's Screen Entertainment (RHCSE) will produce and RHCSE's Catherine Robins will oversee the creative and executive production.