



Above: Aardman Animations has created new characters for Leonard Cheshire Disability's campaign including a bull terrier in a wheelchair.



Above: Kelvyn Gardner MD of LIMA UK.

Why is it that celeb 'brands' can get away with touting their wares shamelessly on the chatshow circuit while the licensing industry is so often accused of being mercenary for promoting its own branded products? What about all the good the licensing industry does? questions head of LIMA UK Kelvyn Gardner.

The Good, The Bad, (The Not So) Ugly

If you believe in conspiracy theories then the licensing business is probably not the place for you. There can be few industries that seem to attract the wrath of consumers and the popular press with such regularity.

A successful new children's character or a line of toys featuring the same will inevitably be accused of being a 'rip-off', of immorally persuading children to watch/consume it, or of being a 'get rich quick' scheme hatched by foreign businessmen of dubious ethics.

Contrast this with showbiz: I find it amazing that film, TV or music 'star properties' - be they films, bands or individual personalities - can expect interviews, plugs, star features, photographs, competitions, puffs, you name it, for whatever new thing they are up to. The consumer media

wants to entertain, of course, but they have this purely arbitrary line that says what 'events' they can merrily write up as fun for readers, and which ones are horrid, commercial attempts to attract publicity that they should not mention with a barge pole, as it were.

Years ago in another life I worked in book distribution. Our trade magazine, *The Bookseller*, at the time was filled with trade ads for new books inevitably featuring the fact

that the author would be interviewed on *Wogan*. I haven't looked at *The Bookseller* for years but it would not surprise me in the least to find the same thing today, substituting the rather more sartorially-attired Jonathon Ross for the hero of Eurovision. Does the BBC know that its talk show is part of publishers' marketing? You can



Below: Fireman Sam is lending his support to the Child Accident Protection Trust.

bet that they do. Would the BBC, however, interview the md of Cadbury's about the launch of a new chocolate bar? Will we ever see the ebullient 21st century 'JR' sitting opposite the ceo of Toys 'R Us as he announces a new in-store feature for licensed toys? Sadly, I guess not. It's OK to plug a book, a record, a film, a play, but not the consumer products which actually touch far more people on a regular basis but which are deemed 'horribly commercial'.

Against this background we don't often hear the good news stories coming from the licensing world. For instance, the whole food industry came under intense pressure in 2007 from the consumer lobby for good reasons – the protection of children's health – but, as ever, throwing the baby out with the bathwater (perhaps babies and bathwater are Ofwat's problem where TV advertising is Ofcom's??). What we in the licensing industry know is that many of those involved in licensed food have been working diligently for a number of years to improve their nutritional offerings. Licensors like the BBC, Nickelodeon and Disney have led the way with codified policies on the licensing of food. Licensees have responded positively. Lightbody Cakes, for example removing all hydrogenated fats from its birthday cakes and moving to natural colours (no E numbers!). Kinnerton and Bon Bon Buddies moving to careful portion control and in some cases going guaranteed nut-free. Food companies in general reducing salt by some 30% in the last few years (and that fact comes from the Food Standards Agency, our biggest industry critic).

Charity can begin with licensing

And it's not just about promoting good feelings, either. 4Kids properties, The Dog and The Cat, have spent the year giving a proportion of all their revenues to the PDSA, the UK's leading veterinary charity. Speaking of charitable work, Aardman Animation this year has created new characters for Leonard Cheshire Disability's campaign including a bull terrier in a wheelchair, a stick insect with a walking stick and a tortoise on crutches.

Education Education Education

What about children's education? A fantastic initiative this year has been Bob the Builder's fully interactive live show at the Science Museum.

The 45 minutes shows which ran for six months from May to September taught children about structures, water flow, patterns, numbers and the all-important 3 Rs, Reducing, Re-using and Re-cycling – which are a key focus of the Key Stage 1 science curriculum.

And then there's Jakers, the pre-school property from Entara which won a prize normally associated with big-budget 'message' movies and TV shows. Yes, Jakers can now line up alongside the likes of Schindler's List, M*A*S*H, and Good Will Hunting as winner of The Humanitas Prize, which honours, stories that affirm the human person, probe the meaning of life, and enlighten the use of human freedom.



Above: Properties like The Dog give some of their royalties back to good causes like the PDSA.

The campaign highlights the disadvantage and discrimination that disabled people experience every day, largely as a result of the ignorance of the wider population. The Creature Discomforts characters appear in adverts online, in magazines, at bus stops and on the tube.

Not be left out of coming to the rescue of those less fortunate, pre-school Hit! Entertainment hero Fireman Sam has named the Child Accident Prevention Trust as his official charity partner. Fireman Sam now acts as a spokesperson for the charity's marketing and promotional activity including Halloween, Bonfire Night and the charity's annual Child Safety Week in June 2008. Mean while Postman Pat has lent his weight to the National Literacy Campaign to encourage kids to read and write.

These individual efforts all score points for their creators and owners in 'putting something back'. Of course, we should not forget that all of us in the licensing industry also contribute to good causes through The Light Fund, which has raised £50,000 in 2007 a variety of children's and adult charitable causes.

So if you get any horrified responses at Christmas parties this year from parents outraged by licensing 'rip-offs', feel free to fight back a bit. After all, world-saving super-heroes themselves love licensing, don't they?