



Left: Anemone Barbie was designed by Christian Louboutin to coincide with the Cannes Film Festival.

Barbie™

The PR Darling

In her 50th anniversary year Barbie has quite literally re-invented herself and as a result the brand's doll sales have soared, achieving an incredible 60% growth.

LSB spoke to the Mattel media machine to find out why Barbie has been attracting almost as many press column inches as Cheryl Cole and what this has meant for the brand.

The power of the press is undeniable; it has the ability to shape opinions, launch careers and to dash them, sending former A-list stars signing up for a stint in the jungle to reverse the negative opinions.

Barbie won't be needing a media shot in the arm any time soon though as her press profile has been up there with the best of them. From a piece on careers in Grazia magazine (where eight readers attended a mentoring brunch where, like Barbie, they were encouraged to explore other career options), to fashion spreads in the Daily Mail and Vogue, she has set tongues wagging over the last year. And, in a real media coup Barbie even appeared in Toy Story 3 and was reunited with her long-time beau Ken after a rather public break-up back in 2004, giving the press ample fodder for more stories.

"The 50th anniversary has been a fantastic opportunity to re-connect with the brand and what its core principles

were; she was after all always very much a fashion doll," explained Mattel's UK public relations manager Sarah Allen.

To this end Barbie sponsored New York fashion week and has also taken part in a number of high profile fashion collaborations, including customised dolls sold on Asos.com kitted out in a series of little black dresses, and a collaboration with celebrated shoe designer

Christian Louboutin.

But it's not just Barbie that's had a share of the limelight; thanks to the exposure in arguably one of the biggest movies of the year, Ken is back. "The whole re-ignitement of the Barbie/Ken relationship and the 'will they, won't they' get back together question has given us an opportunity to have some fun with Ken too," said Sarah. "As a



Above & right: Barbie is a career woman and this was exploited in a recent article in Grazia magazine.



fashion icon as well he's been in Esquire magazine and has even offered his dating tips in GQ magazine."

She continued: "The PR we've achieved has worked on so many different levels. We've been courting opinion leaders in different communities to try and keep people with the brand, but most importantly talking about us in cultural conversations. We've targeted mums, fashion followers, and girls and the overall mix of coverage has been phenomenal."

Sarah believes the staggering upturn in doll sales can be attributed in part to the media coverage, but she concedes the competitive landscape for Barbie has changed dramatically. Mattel is conscious that the Barbie doll

itself needs to move with the times and the new toy line is "better and has more sparkle", according to Sarah. The company is also introducing a high-tech Barbie doll with a video camera in her necklace.

From a licensing perspective Mattel still has the core target of girls very much in its sights, but it has identified women as a secondary and important category. "For example through one of our licensees we have collaborated with Jane Norman and Miss Selfridge with some fashion lines," explained Sarah. "We want to entrench ourselves in the adult segment over the next four years and we will be using some of the Ken activity next year to push this through."

Asides from fashion, other areas that Mattel will concentrate its licensing efforts on include role-play. "By this we mean anything from dress-up to role play toys," said Sarah. Active life too is another core area with products such



Above: Ken and Barbie were re-introduced in Toy Story 3 but will they or won't they get back together?



Below: A Barbie football table was set up at Selfridges - blondes vs brunettes.



Above: Ken laps up the attention in a fashion spread in Esquire.

as sporting goods and health and beauty with a big launch scheduled for Q2 2011.

As far as Ken is concerned he is destined to be the celebrity partner, but never the star! "On the licensing side we are bringing Ken into Barbie's world in a fun way to enhance the Barbie brand," said Sarah. That said Mattel will be working with high end fashion designers

for the menswear shows as London Fashion Week and some Ken products will hit the high street, including a Sweet Talking Ken toy and a Shaving Fun Ken, but he won't have his own

standalone licensing programme.

The PR machine is set to ramp up yet again in time for Valentine's Day as the very public question of will Ken

and Barbie get back together is set to dominate headlines!

Fashionista Facts

- Ruth Handler, co-founder of Mattel, brought her vision of a three-dimensional doll to life with the introduction of Barbie in 1959.
- Barbie has four sisters Skipper (1964), Stacie (1992), Kelly (1995) and Krissy (1995).
- Barbie's first pet was a horse named Dancer; since then, she has had more than 50 other pets!
- Barbie's first boyfriend, Ken, debuted two years after Barbie in 1961.
- Ken and Barbie broke up on Valentine's Day in 2004 after being together more than 43 years.
- Barbie has been outfitted by more than 70 famous couturiers and has served as creative inspiration to 146 designers.
- Barbie has had more than 120 inspirational careers.
- With over a half-million fans, Barbie has the largest Facebook fan page of any doll.
- Barbie's blog is translated into 11 languages and has been viewed in 194 countries.
- Barbie has never been married (she just likes to model wedding gowns for her designer friends)
- Barbie and Ken are currently "friends" (but we hear he wants her back).
- Barbie has never been pregnant (that was her best friend Midge).
- Barbie's "real" measurements are 5 inches (bust), 3 ¼ inches (waist), 5 3/16 inches (hips). Her weight is 7 ¼ ounces.
- Because she's plastic, Barbie technically has had "plastic surgery" on her face and body.