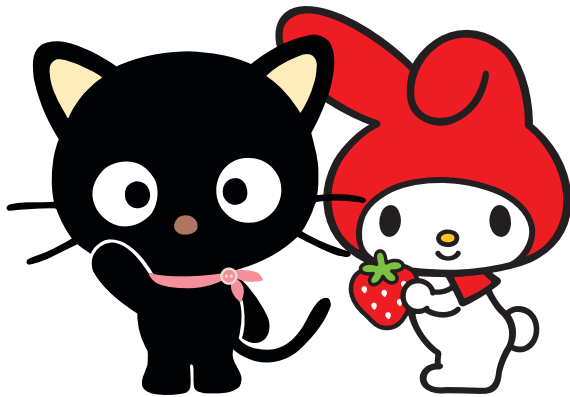


Feline Young



Hello Kitty is a feline in demand. She was the property on the retail buyers' lips when LSB quizzed them about their favourites at The Licensing Awards judging day and is nominated for no less than seven Licensing Awards.

As Sanrio celebrates its 50th anniversary, LSB found out more about the licensing action for Hello Kitty and her 'sister' brands.

Fluid World, Sanrio's official UK licensing agent, will be kicking off the 50th anniversary festivities with aplomb.

Founded back in 1960, Sanrio's philosophy has always been 'small gift, big smile' and the company will be raising many big smiles with a whole chain of events and initiatives, notably the official trade launch of licensing programmes for six more characters from the Sanrio stable that will follow on from the licensing phenomenon of Hello Kitty.

Licensing programmes for My Melody, Keroppi, Charmmy Kitty, Chococat, Badtz Maru and Kuromi have never officially launched in the UK although recent product trials in H&M and Claire's Accessories across Europe have delivered encouraging results. The company now intends to launch these characters (just six from a stable of over 400 Sanrio characters), at BLE



Above: Keroppi and Badtz Maru in Ty Beanie form.

Libby Grant, brand director of Fluid World explained: "Hello Kitty is a licensing phenomenon which, despite being in her 35th year, continues to gain momentum. Consumer appetite for Hello Kitty across all ages and demographics is insatiable. The time is now right to take what we have learnt from Hello Kitty, respond to consumer

and industry demand and extend the Sanrio family."

The Hello Kitty brand has been very much sold as a fashion brand in the UK with 50% of product falling under the 'fashion' banner. Fluid World's strategy has been to position the brand as aspirational, targeted at an older demographic and this, Libby believes, has been the key to its success to date.

With toy products set to launch and the fervour around the brand reaching fever pitch, can the momentum really be maintained? "People are always nervous when a brand is successful and they start talking about drop off," smiled Libby. "The truth is that the brand has been around for 35 years and compared with lots of other territories, the UK is quite far behind in the brand's development so there's still lots of potential and longevity. As with any brand there is always a life cycle and there will be ups and downs in that cycle, but it is our challenge to make sure that the brand and the products are kept fresh and exciting."

Where the new characters are concerned, Libby describes the 50th anniversary as a fortuitous "excuse" to launch the other brands.

Not wasting any time, Ty UK is launching a collection of beanies based on five of the new characters in October with a full roll out planned for 2011.

Left: My Melody and Chococat, two of the characters from the Sanrio stable.

Right: Sanrio celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Bot left: Snuggle down with this Hello Kitty bedding from Zap.

Second left: Saddle up Hello Kitty style with this bicycle from HTL.



With Hello Kitty as its strongest licence in its armoury, Stephen Gomez, business development director of Ty UK said that he "jumped at the opportunity to develop and produce Beanies for the other Sanrio brands and we're certain that just like Hello Kitty, these Sanrio characters will triumph at retail!"

Fluid World's strategy will be to position the new characters under a Sanrio umbrella brand so that consumers

Sanrio Snippets

Sanrio's signature brand Hello Kitty celebrated 35 years of fun and friendship in 2009.

Sanrio develops, distributes and licenses a collection of gift, stationery and fashion accessory items for consumers of all ages.

Sanrio was founded in 1960, and this year celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Today, over 50,000 Sanrio-branded items are sold in over 70 countries around the world. In the Western Hemisphere, Sanrio character-branded products are sold in upwards of 12,000.

make the connection between them, Hello Kitty and Sanrio as a corporate entity thereby fully maximising brand awareness and equity. "It's a no-brainer really to have an over-arching Sanrio brand," Libby added. "We will have a swing tag on each product which will enable consumers to make the connection with Hello Kitty and which will hopefully send a subliminal message to consumers to encourage collectability."

With Claire's Accessories set to take some of the characters, including Chococat, across Europe this year as

Awards Acclaim

Fluid World ensured that Sanrio characters had a high profile at the recent Licensing Awards with a major sponsorship of the after awards bar, through a specially branded Sanrio installation. The deal included sponsorship of the casino, which offered Hello Kitty prizes for the first, second and third winners and a super cool branded lounge area where guests relaxed over drinks after the awards ceremony.

Table service was provided by waitresses dressed in Hello Kitty clothing and bar staff in the Westbourne Suite wore t-shirts featuring the six additional Sanrio characters that are now available for licensing. New character images and Sanrio's 50th anniversary celebration artwork were projected within the area with free product samples up for grabs.

Hello Kitty was nominated for seven awards at this year's event including Best Schoolers, Tween or Teen Licensed Property for the second year running.

well as a DTR deal in place with Marks & Spencer, the brands are set to hit the ground running. "The current launches are very exciting, but there are over 400 characters for us to tap into from Sanrio, so this is really just the tip of the iceberg," Libby promised.

Below: Travel light with this Hello Kitty bag from The Conair Group.

Right: A Hello Kitty hairdryer from licensee The Conair Group.

