

October 2007 | Vol. VI - No. 10

How to Create a Licensed Character

What It Takes to Become Ubiquitous

By [Lewis Helfand](#)
 October 2007

It's tough to create a character that connects with fans and successfully draws them to theaters, bookstores and Sunday comics. By understanding your audience and making smart choices, experts and manufacturers told **TDmonthly Magazine**, you can strengthen your connection to fans and lengthen your shelf life.

"We look for evergreen properties with a proven track record." — *Tim Thompson, Imperial Toy*



Unpainted Tigerlily Bust

Start With Quality. "Quality...that is paramount," said Frank Cho, creator of "Liberty Meadows" comic strips. "I really don't care what company it is. As long as it puts out a quality product, it could be a guy in a garage."

David Mack, creator of "Kabuki" comics, noted that one must ask: "What does this person bring to the table that I don't really have on my own?"

Hit the Road. If you have a viable property, the opportunities will come, but only if you are as visible as your characters.

"All the deals that I've made, I was approached," admitted Cho.

Know Your Fans. Even if manufacturers approach you, the goal is to create an easy sell, not a toy that will have fans scratching their heads. Research your fan base.

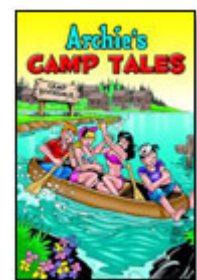
"We have to examine our audience," **Archie Comic Publications** Chairman Michael Silberkleit told **TDmonthly**. Since Archie fans are traditionally 60 percent female and between the ages of 7 and 14, toys are usually targeted to that demographic.

Dora the Explorer is the top-selling preschool toy license, so focusing on manufacturers specializing in preschool toys makes sense, according to Joan Grasso, senior director of toys for Nickelodeon & Viacom Consumer Products. **SpongeBob** carries a broader fan base, so "our strategy ... is to put him in new and unexpected places," she said.

Be Flexible. Translating a two-dimensional creation into three-dimensional mediums will require changes. Cho personally handles all the model sheets for his characters when working with a manufacturer, but recognizes that designs — and materials — may need to be altered.

Minimize Risk. "We look for evergreen properties with a proven track record," said Tim Thompson, vice president of marketing for Imperial Toy. So it's probably best to offer your most recognizable characters.

"According to LIMA (International Licensing Industry Merchandisers' Association), character licensing represents 44 percent of the [licensing] business," License! Magazine Publisher Steven Ekstract told **TDmonthly**. And most of that interest is in proven franchises. Grasso pointed out that if Nickelodeon is launching a new property, it might hold back on products at the start to first gauge interest.



Archie Comics

Promote on Time. "There's not a long lifespan for licensed characters," pointed out President Jay Kamhi of **Kamhi World**. Films go to DVD more quickly than they once did, and with a new summer blockbuster almost every week, spotlight moments don't last long.

Utilize your website to let fans know what's available and drive them to the stores, Silberkleit added. And if the opportunity presents itself, tie the toy into the story. "There have been moments when I've used things that [Clayburn Moore] sculpted in the comic book," Mack noted.

Ultimately, see which characters have emotional significance with the target consumer, and carefully scout your opportunities. Curious to know what else is out there? Check out these classic characters and a few new favorites. And if you don't want to start from scratch, and prefer licensing extant material, read [Find and Develop a License](#).

Tigerlily Bust by THE CS MOORE STUDIO LTD

Continuing its "Noh Assassin" series of mini-busts based on the popular and highly acclaimed comic book, "Kabuki," CS Moore Studio is releasing a 1:6 scale version of Tigerlily. Standing more than 5" tall, the piece is designed by Kabuki creator, David Mack, and sculpted by Clayburn Moore. Tigerlily continues a long collaboration between CS Moore and Mack, who recently told **TDmonthly** that when translating the quirks of an existing character to another medium, "the most important thing is the sculpting." Launch date: July 2007. 8/2/2007 (MSRP: \$49.95)



Sparkle and Twirl Mermaid Dora by FISHER-PRICE INC.



Based on the episode "Dora Saves the Mermaids," Dora transforms into Magical Mermaid Dora when she's placed into her shell base. When her transformation is complete (including tail), she plays her very own mermaid song and dances. The shell works with other dolls in the collection and each one tells its own undersea adventure. Dora comes with a dolphin comb, starfish barrette and base. Dora appeals to kids because she takes them on an adventure and "we incorporate all of those elements that have made Dora so successful," Joan Grasso, senior director of toys for Nickelodeon & Viacom Consumer Products, told **TDmonthly**. Launch date: Fall 2007. 8/2/2007 (Age: 3 and Up)

Operation SpongeBob SquarePants Edition by MILTON BRADLEY

Featuring a BikiniBottom twist to this classic board game, players try to perform undersea surgery on SpongeBob's Barnacle Brain, Clammy Hands and Patty Pleasure Center without setting off the buzzer. The game comes with tweezers, 12 plastic "funatomy" parts, 22 cards and play money. Joan Grasso, senior director of toys for Nickelodeon & Viacom Consumer Products, told **TDmonthly** that even the packaging screams SpongeBob because "you always have to stay very true to the character." 8/2/2007 (MSRP: \$19.99; Age: 6 and Up)



The Cow by MINDSTYLES



Ripped from the pages of "Liberty Meadows" comes a 2'-tall version of that psychotic favorite, The Cow. Wielding his udders and ready to strike, the statue will be limited to 1,000 pieces with two additional colors available after the initial release at San Diego's 2007 Comic-Con. "I've seen the prototype photos," Creator Frank Cho told **TDmonthly**, and "the sculptor did a beautiful job of capturing the likeness." Launch date: July 2007. 8/2/2007 (MSRP: \$200.00)

The Backyardigans Action Wind Ups by [IMPERIAL TOY LLC](#)

From the popular Nickelodeon cartoon "The Backyardigans" come these new collectible wind-up toys. Based on characters from the show, the collection includes Pablo, Tyrone, Uniqua, Austin and Tasha. Kids can wind them up and watch them go. These toys are part of a new Nickelodeon collection that



Imperial Toys notes will include more than 50 different collectibles. Launch date: Fall 2007. 8/2/2007 (MSRP: \$2.99; Age: 3 and Up)

Diego Rescue View Finder by **IMPERIAL TOY LLC**



From the popular Nickelodeon cartoon "Diego" comes the Diego Rescue View Finder. Kids just insert an animal fact card into the top of the screen and scroll through the different environments to find the right match. The view finder comes with five animal fact cards. It is part of a new Nickelodeon collection that Imperial Toys promises will also feature Dora the Explorer, SpongeBob SquarePants and The Backyardigans. 8/2/2007 (MSRP: \$3.99; Age: 3 and Up)

Spider-Man 3 Action Command Spider-Man by **THINKWAY**

The wireless, infrared remote control has two joy sticks and 10 buttons for different programmed actions. Spider-Man moves in any direction with preprogrammed actions including 360-degree spins, "S"-shaped turns, web-slinging action with sound effects and character voice. The remote control is also programmable and easy to use, with over 1,000 possible program-action combos. It's available in red and black. Launch date: May 2007. ([Watch Video](#)) 6/29/2007 (MSRP: \$39.99; Age: 6 and Up)



Transformers Head of the Class Activity Station by **KIDdesigns**



The Transformers Head of the Class Activity Station brings on the learning with 48 action-packed activities contained in eight different modes. By completing activities, players find and capture different Decepticons, ultimately leading to a showdown with Megatron. The toy transforms from a collectible, detailed display bust of Optimus Prime into a super-cool activity center. Personalize the experience by adding the child's name, spelling lists and math problems. The Activity Station also features real-time English-to-Spanish translation of select words and instructions. Launch date: June 19, 2007. 6/29/2007 (MSRP: \$59.99; Age: 5 and Up)

Spider-Man 3™ Chopper Patrol by **JASMAN TOYS**

This Spider-Man 3 licensed micro-version chopper toy set features a helicopter tethered to a control base equipped with dual flight controls for throttle and pitch. Carefully maneuver Spiderman's stylish chopper 360° to pick up pieces of rescue cargo and carry them back to the landing platform. This chopper patrol is also available in a full-size version. 6/28/2007 (MSRP: \$14.99; Age: 6 and Up)



Captain Jack Sparrow by **TONNER DOLL COMPANY**



The doll's hand-painted face and partially sculpted, partially painted beard with hand-applied braids strongly capture the likeness of Johnny Depp as Jack Sparrow in Disney's "Pirates of the Caribbean 3." The doll is crafted of fine quality vinyl and hard plastic and features 14 points of articulated movement. Standing 17" tall, the doll comes equipped with a pistol, sword and display stand. Launch date: May 31, 2007. 6/18/2007 (MSRP: \$179.99; Age: 9 and Up)

Dora the Explorer Mug and Marker Set by **KOVAC ENTERPRISES**

With this mug and marker set, kids can create their very own Dora mug by following three simple steps. The first is to polish the mug with tissue paper;



the second is to color the image on the mug with the marker; and the third is to polish the mug again after waiting one minute. A SpongeBob SquarePants version is also available. 6/18/2007 (MSRP: \$4.99; Age: 3 and Up)

Transformers Watches by SEIKO WATCH CORPORATION



Seiko's jumping on the Transformers bandwagon with cool, kid-friendly timepieces. Some have magnetic lenticular dials and pop out from the back (Optimus changes to a semi; Bubblebee to a Camero, etc.). Tiffany Carr, product developer at Seiko, explained: "They have great toy value. And my favorite has a twist strap with a red digital display that can turn into four different displays!" If you're gonna show your support for Optimus Prime, or wave Barricade in someone's face, this is a cool way to do it. Suggested retail prices range from \$7 to \$55, depending on the model. 5/25/2007 (Age: 6 and Up)

Shrek Clip-ons – Puss 'n Boots by **KAMHI WORLD**

This clip-on is 3" tall and says lines from "Shrek the Third." It can be clipped to backpacks, key chains, belt loops, handbags and more. "It not only has audio in Antonio Banderas' actual voice, but it is also his most famous line from 'Shrek the Third,' which was featured on American Idol," President Jay Kamhi of Kamhi World told **TDmonthly**. Launch date: April 2007.

[Watch Video](#) 1/9/2007 (MSRP: \$5.99; Age: 8 and Up)



Classic Archie Women's Watches by ARCHIE COMIC PUBLICATIONS INC.



This watch features the classic image of Archie, Betty and Veronica in "Three on a Straw." Each watch comes individually gift boxed and carries a limited lifetime warranty from the manufacturer. Men's styles are also available. 8/2/2007 (MSRP: \$21.95)

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