



ONE BEAR & HIS 40 MILLION FANS

BY WADE BUSH

The business of children's entertainment is a sharply focused roadmap that's been heavily trodden, more so in recent times, in which little people's fun has turned into big people's profit. The so-called formula to success behind some of the biggest children's entertainment hits is a meticulous mixture that caters to the wide-ranging needs of both kids and parents whilst offering all the latest 'bells and whistles' that captures the imagination. And it seems parents don't just want education, but a high level of engagement for their kids too.

According to market estimates, children aged between 8-12 years alone spent US \$1.18 trillion worldwide last year...so, can you imagine what the 0-7 year market spent? Keep in mind this was all in the lead up to the current economic crisis too. John Maynard Keynes, the trendiest dead economist of these apocalyptic times, was the godfather of government stimulus. Keynes had the radical idea that throwing money at recessions through aggressive deficit spending would resuscitate flat-lined economies — and he wasn't too particular about where the money was thrown. But if we're expecting children to spring for another trillion in entertainment in the year ahead as their contribution to stimulating the local economy back into shape, we need to deliver on their high demands and offer a real return on their investment.

Locally, the *Cockroaches* worked the club scene, pumping out humdrum rock melodies to reasonable success in Australia — though as soon as they traded in their 80s pop wardrobe (think Rick Astley) for incandescent skivvies and redirected their tunes to a much younger audience, their success was (and still is) nothing short of a phenomenon. I am of course talking about the *Wiggles*, whose popularity is so freakishly extraordinary they're part of an exclusive children's entertainment club that have even packed out Madison Square Garden. The *Wiggles* are a noteworthy point that lends weight to the popularity of this entertainment sector. Others too have followed in their footsteps including *Hi-Five* and the *Hooley Dooleys*. And, with the advent of new media offerings including the internet and mobile phones paving the way for other endeavours to explore, graphical characters have also risen to fame, none more so than that memorable (or irritating depending how you look at it) *Crazy Frog*. But move over Kermit...there's a new personality in town that's the latest craze in children's entertainment to sweep the country (and the world) — *Gummi Bear*.

Gummi Bear is cute, cuddly, and crowd-pleasingly popular, and is tipped for big things Down Under, being brought to the local market by *Sole Entertainment*. "*Gummi Bear* actually started out as a ring tone," reveals Jason Sole, director of *Sole Entertainment*. "The ring tone's huge success led to his first single — *I'm a Gummi Bear* — which eventually led to a solo album, and then his live stage shows which have exploded internationally in popularity."

With his origins in Germany, *Gummi Bear's* entire outfit of tunes have been translated into countless languages, giving them an international flavour for his Australian shows. And it promises to be nothing less than an all singing and dancing trip around the world accompanied by two co-hosts from his favourite radio station, *Fairy Floss* and *DJ Rocky Road*. What's more, each show is interactive, ticking that crucial 'engagement' box today's kids and parents are demanding, and giving children the opportunity to be part of the spectacle. But wait...there's more: "Every show incorporates a lot of modern technology too," further explains Sole. "We have plasma screens interacting with what is happening on stage along with heaps of amazing visuals."

Children are a very honest bunch who will tell you when something doesn't meet their standards. Most kids are today across a wide range of technologies long before their parents catch up which just goes to prove they're getting smarter and can easily sniff out a sub-standard product. But with *Gummi Bear*, his cheerful and clever routines are anything but dull. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding — and you can't argue with his online fan base, which has clocked in at over 40 million viewers to date.

Gummi Bear is an ambitious character, and there seems to be no limit to his talents. That said, he's a busy bear too with a new album in the works, loads of merchandise being launched, a television show being produced, and word has it he'll even have his own mobile phone game. "Sound and vision are playing a bigger part in the future in children's entertainment and is a vital component of any show's success these days. It's all about engagement," adds Sole.

If your club is looking to tap into the big business of children's entertainment and benefit from all its flow-on effects at your venue, it's time you secured *Gummi Bear* as part of your entertainment mix, which is perfect for the 2-10-year-old demographic. For bookings and further information, contact Jason Sole at *Sole Entertainment* on 02 9029 4790 or email jason@sole-entertainment.com ■