



SCREENING NOW: Lucas etc.

12-year-old Lucas learns that he and his mum are going to live with his new step-father and his three children

Boom time for Toonz

India's Toonz Media Group is celebrating its 20th anniversary and has recently acquired Ireland's Telegael as it focuses on global expansion and recalibrating its business to meet growing demand. Karolina Kaminska reports.



Toonz Animation's output includes Sherazade: The Untold Stories

Toonz Animation is one of the oldest animation studios in India. With titles such as Marvel's 2009 cartoon series Wolverine & the X-Men under its belt, the Kerala-based company has come a long way since its formation in 1999 as part of Comcraft Group's kids-and-family-focused Toonz Media Group (TMG).

TMG CEO P Jayakumar describes the past two or three years in India as a "golden time" for animation, as commissioning of local content by broadcasters including Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, has "exponentially grown." This, he says, has created huge levels of production activity in the country.

"When we started the company 20 years back, there was no domestic animation business," says Jayakumar. "Today, domestic animation is a significant business as broadcasters look for more local content. As a result, domestic content has significantly grown."



P Jayakumar

Toonz Animation produces over 10,000 minutes of 2D and 3D animated content every year and aside from Wolverine & the X-Men, its titles include The Adventures of Tenali Rama, Speed Racer: The Next Generation and Sherazade: The Untold Stories.

In late May, TMG revealed it had bought a majority stake in Irish production house Telegael, which makes both animated and live-action kids' content for global names including The Walt Disney Co, Netflix, NBCUniversal, the BBC, Discovery, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, ARD and ZDF.

Behind projects such as the 2017 remake of animated series Blinky Bill, Telegael is currently working on Netflix original action series Kulipari 2: Dreamwalker, as well as a range of other programmes.

Jayakumar says the acquisition of the Irish prodco has been the biggest story for Toonz in the past year, in that it has extended the Indian group's global entertainment footprint while adding important pre- and post-production facilities.

The "strategic synergies" will increase Toonz Animation's in-house development and IP creation business, which is expected to amount to a significant increase in European production.

"The addition of proven pre-production and post-production facilities, together with existing

distribution capabilities and our production expertise delivers synergistic and customer benefits that exceed the sum of the parts,” says Jayakumar.

“This new acquisition will enable Toonz to deliver world-class end-to-end services to existing and future customers across the globe.”

Before the acquisition, Telegael and Toonz Animation last year agreed on a coproduction with Spain’s Imira Entertainment, which is also owned by Toonz Media Group.



Marvel’s 2009 toon series Wolverine & the X-Men

Mondo Yan is a 52×11’ series, due to be released in 2020, which follows the comic adventures of three teenage ‘guardians’ who have been chosen to protect the mystical land of Mondo Yan.

Away from Telegael, Toonz Animation is also currently coproducing with content creator Gummybear International on the second season of Gummibär & Friends: The Gummy Bear Show. Gummibär is an animated gummy bear that went viral on YouTube after its first appearance on the platform in 2006.

In line with its global expansion and copro plans, TMG recently hired Spanish animation veteran Carlos Biern as president of animation productions and coproductions. His appointment coincided with Paul Robinson resigning as Imira’s CEO in order to take on a strategic role as an advisor to TMG.

Biern is president of the Spanish Federation of Animation & Visual Effects Producers and former CEO of BRB International. In his new role at TMG he will oversee all the company’s international productions and copros.

The changes come at an interesting juncture, as Robinson highlighted in the announcement of his departure: “The global market is changing rapidly, and there is an imperative for us to continue to develop new routes to market and strategically serve our customers better whilst developing new business opportunities,” he said.



Mondo Yan is a copro involving Telegael, Toonz and Imira Entertainment

While demand for animation may be booming, this presents both opportunities and challenges. “Really, the challenge as of now is getting the right kind of talent,” says Jayakumar. “The work is there, so the real challenge is getting the right talent and keeping up with the demand.”

In order to achieve this, Jayakumar says Toonz aims to develop talent through its animation school Toonz Animation Academy in Kerala, training students interested in a career in the industry. It is also working on developing “creative units” and strategic alliances with other studios, both in India and elsewhere across the globe.

On top of this, TMG is extending its reach through its presence on YouTube, where it operates around 30 channels globally. According to Jayakumar, the platform is beneficial to the animation industry for two reasons. Firstly, YouTube provides an additional revenue stream for producers, the exec says, noting that TMG’s channels have generated a “significant” amount of revenue. Secondly, YouTube allows creators to showcase their content through the platform, which can help smaller companies or individuals get their IP out into the world.

“YouTube has actually created a level playing field for all the creators of the world,” Jayakumar says. “I believe significant businesses and brands can be launched through YouTube. It’s very positive for creators and animation and it creates big opportunities.”

Regarding digital content, Jayakumar also sees streamers like Netflix and the upcoming services from Apple and Disney as a means for companies in India to produce content of a higher standard.



Netflix’s upcoming original action series Kulipari 2: Dreamwalker

“In India, the budgets are very small,” Jayakumar says. “The larger OTT platforms, like Amazon and Netflix, are not hesitant to put a larger focus on domestic content, so that basically gives us an opportunity to produce content at a higher level – at an international-quality level.”

Like YouTube, producing for global streamers also provides an extra revenue stream, he adds, which makes for a “very good economic scenario” for the industry.

Jayakumar also sees competition from the further proliferation of streaming platforms as healthy, as demand for content in India shows no signs of slowing down and the different services cater to different audience bases.

Unlike some other markets around the world, which have recently expressed dissatisfaction with a lack of support for the industry from traditional broadcasters, Jayakumar claims support from broadcasters in India remains strong.

“The market demand for animation is very high. Every broadcaster is now focusing on local content and wants local content to drive their channels in India. The local broadcasters are therefore helping the animation industry in a big way right now,” he says.



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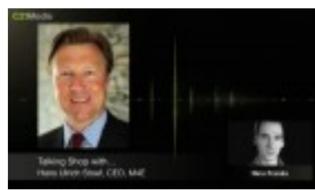
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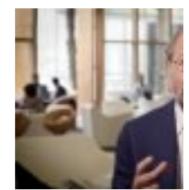
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