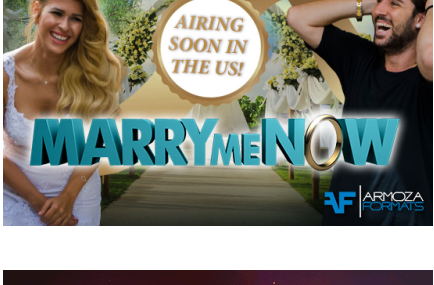
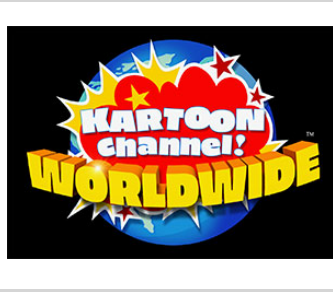




## Kartoon Channel

Visit [Kartoon Channel website](#)



**Kartoon Channel! – International**  
(Updated 31/05/2022)

*Kartoon Channel!’s kids- and family-friendly “content with a purpose” strategy is set for major international growth with new content opportunities on the cards. Gün Akyuz reports.*



Paul Robinson

### Overview

North America’s kid-friendly digital streamer **Kartoon Channel!** is enjoying a major international growth spurt on the back of accelerated domestic growth in 2021 and the first quarter of 2022.

The Genius Brands International (GBI)-owned AVoD service launched in 2015 on a ticket of kids- and family-friendly “content with a purpose.” This mission spans original in-house Genius animated brands such as **Rainbow Rangers**, STEM-inspired **Thomas Edison’s Secret Lab** and last year’s launch of **Stan Lee’s Superhero Kindergarten**, starring **Arnold Schwarzenegger**.

It includes a range of third-party acquisitions like **Peppa Pig**, **PJ Masks** and **My Little Pony**. Its North American footprint includes 100 million-plus US households and a presence on virtually all major distribution platforms.

Kartoon Channel! international expansion is being directed by veteran kids’ programming exec **Paul Robinson**, who joined in December as managing director of **Kartoon Channel! Worldwide**. Alongside branded **Kartoon Genius** programming blocks, which launched in March, a roll-out of **Kartoon Channel!** branded linear and AVoD networks is now underway.

GBI’s portfolio of production entities, content libraries and related IP brands for licensing and merchandising grew significantly in 2021, with the acquisition of several key businesses, giving it an inventory of 20,000-plus episodes and movies, and helping it to record revenues, up 217% year on year. Revenues have continued to climb, up 35% for Q1 2022 over the same period in 2021.

Kartoon Channel!’s in-house inventory expanded following GBI acquiring a 28.6% stake in **Your Family Entertainment (YFE)** last December. The move has given it control over Europe’s largest independent children’s content owner and broadcaster, including a library of 3,500 animated episodes and feature films and its international network of **Fix & Foxi** kids’ pay TV channels.



Jon Ollwerther

Last year’s acquisition spree also included Canadian independent kids’ SVoD service **Ameba TV** and its 13,000-episode library of licensed content and its proprietary platform technology, which now powers GBI’s newly soft-launched SVoD service **Kartoon Channel Kidaverse**.

This April, GBI completed its acquisition of Canada’s **WOW!**, which includes animation production giant **Mainframe Animation** and multichannel network **Federator Channel**, home to more than 2,500 channels and creator of animated shortform content.

Kartoon Channel!’s president, **Jon Ollwerther**, says its content with a purpose positioning gives kids and family audiences access to a “productive, interesting, safe and fun environment to consume content and to build good habits for years to come,” he says. “We think there’s a definite hole in the market and need for that. What parents are clamouring for is something that safely fosters growth of kids’ minds and imaginations, and

behaviours.”

Acknowledging the wide range of services available to kids out there, from legacy pay TV offerings to streamers and social media platforms, Ollwerther says that with content tending towards the edgy and kids growing up faster, many parents “want to keep their kids as kids and instill those positive values in them, and that’s where content with a purpose comes in, and where **Genius Brands** and our ethos comes in.”

Launching an AVoD service was going against the grain at a time when SVoD was the market trend, observes Ollwerther. “We saw an opportunity to launch something that was providing free quality content for kids and families,” he explains.

2021 saw **Kartoon Channel!** in the US grow its unique users by 51%, video plays by 90%, unique advertisers by 130% and revenues by 282%. Ollwerther puts this success down to “really responding to what the market is looking for right now.”



Stan Lee’s **Superhero Kindergarten**

supervision,” Ollwerther says.

The service will be developed iteratively over time, “because the market isn’t quite ready for a full metaverse product just now,” he notes. Features to be added over the next months and quarters include kid-friendly immersive content, gaming, non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and digital collectibles.

“Kids are massive collectors and have a voracious appetite for collection, and for today’s kids it’s going to be NFTs,” he explains. This will tie into **Genius** properties such as the upcoming **Shaq’s Garage**, which will have “technology woven through its DNA,” says Ollwerther.

Internationally, **Kartoon Channel!** has so far launched in **Asia Pacific**. In March, it launched in **Australia** as an AVoD service on **Samsung TV Plus** and on May 25 it arrived in **New Zealand**. Robinson says the group plans more AVoD services and FAST channels in both Europe and Asia. “They will work in selected markets where there are the right partners,” he says, citing the likes of **LG**, **Samsung** and **Roku**.

Its recently launched **Kartoon Genius** branded programming blocks have been up and running on YFE’s kids’ pay TV channel **Fix & Foxi** in Europe, MENA and Latin America since March.

“By acquiring YFE, we’ve acquired a series of very well distributed services,” says Robinson, of the deal that propelled **Kartoon Genius** into 67-plus countries and more than 50 million households. It now runs an English- and Arabic-language service in the MENA region; one for Germany, Austria and Switzerland; another for Bulgaria, plus the Balkans; and a service for Spanish-speaking Central and South America, excluding Brazil.



**Genius** properties include the upcoming **Shaq’s Garage**

places where it wouldn’t shine,” he says. “The great kids’ shows are the ones that somehow tap into the things that all kids and parents care about, and that’s what we try to do with our shows.”

Internationally, **Kartoon Channel!** doesn’t see itself competing head-on with the likes of **Netflix**, **Amazon Prime** or **Disney+**, but is positioning itself as an additive, spontaneous purchase for kids. And by offering a range of free and paid entry options the service is making itself widely available to kids and parents, says Ollwerther.

An SVoD option is also in the offing internationally in 2022, in at least one English-language market, says Robinson. After that he anticipates 2023 will be a “busy year” for the SVoD version in other markets.

The plan is to make **Kartoon Channel!** available as a linear pay TV, AVoD/FAST or SVoD product, in any combination that makes sense for each market, says Robinson. “There’s no doubt we need all three of those models to properly serve kids. We want to be where kids are, and they’re not all in the same place because of the different levels of broadband, the different levels of digital conversion, the different price points. All of those things mean that markets are not made equally.”

“We’re talking about global expansion of our existing brand and product, expansion of our digital product into new and exciting avenues and expansion of new content,” adds Ollwerther.

### Current programming, original production, acquisitions

**Kartoon Channel!** runs a dual content strategy, driven by exclusive GBI in-house content and third-party licensed fare, now boosted by YFE and Ameba TV’s content catalogues.

“We’ve been able to pull the best of the best, use real-world performance data and assemble collections and shows that super-resonate with viewers,” says Ollwerther, citing **Kartoon Channel!**’s top trending show and core IP **Stan Lee’s Superhero Kindergarten** and season three of **Rainbow Rangers**, as well as “older, more nostalgic content” that would appeal to millennial parents.

Kartoon Channel!’s next new original will be animated series **Shaq’s Garage**, starring basketball legend **Shaquille O’Neal**, who is also exec producer and coproducer. **Genius Brands**’ chief creative officer, **David Neuman**, is overseeing the project, which is currently in production and expected to launch in Q1 2023.



GBI original animated series **Rainbow Rangers**

“By producing our own originals, we’ve got content that genuinely no one else has got: brands, great big stars, great storytelling,” agrees Robinson. But he also reckons there could be opportunities to coproduce locally as **Kartoon Channel!** establishes itself in non-US markets. “The goal is to make sure the values of **Kartoon Channel!** are common everywhere, but the execution of those values may be somewhat different.

“As we move into South-east Asia, for example, a show that’s got some storytelling rooted in that region, maybe as a coproduction or a shared voice, might be the right thing to do. Lots of shows work globally but I think people want to see a little bit of local representation, in terms of faces, shapes, local storytelling, so you’ve got an authenticity for that region whilst maintaining a global hub of similar content.” Robinson adds.

Acquired third-party content is also a cornerstone of for **Kartoon Channel!**’s content mix, with the likes of **Peppa Pig** and **PJ Masks**. “You need to have big brands on there. They’re must-have because people expect those brands to be there as well as other acquired content,” says Robinson, who goes further, arguing that the mix puts **Kartoon Channel!** in a very strong position.

“We believe our content offering is not only a rich one, it’s also a diverse one, and has this underlying sense of serving all of good values, but is really entertaining kids. That’s what we do, and they’re really focusing on that. If you like, we’re super-serving all we do. We don’t go off anywhere else, we’re focusing on that place. And we think, therefore, we can and will own that space.”

Kartoon Channel!’s rich seam of exclusive, first-runs and new characters are all supported by GBI’s merchandising and licensing business.



**Thomas Edison’s Secret Lab**

at markets. “I would love to see some fresh stuff. I think shorts are a very good way of getting a gear change. They are useful mechanics to get from one show to another, a way of exposing new talent.”

He is also eyeing content that involves kids locally with participatory, interactive programming, including hosting.

“We want to be creative and open to the opportunities as they come along,” says Robinson. “We are a cartoon channel, so we’re always going to be about cartoons, and around the periphery you can play with all sorts of things. And we’ll probably experiment with a few things.”

“We’re called **Genius Brands** for a reason,” says Robinson. “We’re about building a brand and a brand is about a holistic relationship with a family, which includes all of the opportunities where that could be theme parks, retail, merchandise, loved books, whatever it is. We know that really strong brands with a very good retail presence help the TV viewing as well. So it’s that symbiotic relationship.”

Despite GBI’s “fantastic inventory,” Robinson says **Kartoon Channel!** won’t be resting on its laurels and will continue seeking out new content for its mix of new originals and acquisitions. “You have to continually look for that next hit, next big thing, next trend and new content creators. You never stop,” he says.

Robinson flags up animated shorts as a good entry point for new talent and invites creators to pitch ideas by email or to **Kartoon Channel!**’s team