Netflix and Lego are once again sitting at the top of their respective categories this year. But there have been some shake-ups in Kidscreen’s third-annual Hot50 list. Amazon Studios unseated Cartoon Network Studios as the top company in the Production category. And YouTube Kids came from nowhere to become #1 in Digital Media—considering the fact that it launched in February 2015, that’s a pretty meteoric rise!

It is no small achievement to be recognized by your peers as an industry mover and shaker. Kidscreen’s Hot50 is unique in its recognition of excellence across five key sectors in the business—Broadcasting, Production, Distribution, Licensing and Digital Media. And don’t forget, it’s entirely decided by you—Kidscreen’s community of 16,500+ subscribers. Stay tuned for the Class of 2017!
The 50/50 plan

Netflix intends to maintain momentum by upping originals output to equal acquisitions

Of all the moves made by Netflix in the past year, one thing has remained the same: The SVOD giant has retained its number-one spot in the Hot50 broadcasting category for the third year running. It’s a feat that Netflix’s global kids content director Andy Yeatman attributes to the SVOD’s robust kids catalog and the level of creative freedom it offers to producers. “We are working with a number of broadcasters on co-productions, including CBBC, CBeebies, ABC Australia and Family Channel in Canada, with the goal of making the best programming possible,” says Yeatman.

With more than 85 million members hailing from 190 countries, Netflix’s year has been marked by rapid growth on all fronts. The SVOD launched 20 new original kids shows covering preschool, animation and live action in 2016, including Word Party, Beat Bugs and Skylanders Academy. Aiming to have a 50/50 original to licensed content ratio, more originals in the pipeline include big-name productions like Julie’s Greenroom with The Jim Henson Company—a new 13 x half-hour preschool show co-created by and starring Oscar-winner Julie Andrews and a cast of original puppet kids that launches in March.

“Production has changed dramatically, and it’s hard to find a time when more kids shows were in development both in animation and live action, thanks to platforms like Netflix,” contends Yeatman. “We have helped up the game in terms of content, and we’re letting broadcasters up their own games in a competitive environment.”

In terms of the competition, he says Netflix is staying focused on building a kids slate with an international bent. Currently, children’s shows are dubbed into 20 languages on the service, and moves are being made to expand production into new territories. For example, the first kids original from Latin America, Animas Estudios’ Las Leyendas, is slated for a 2017 debut. “We only started doing originals in 2014, so things are ramping up quickly,” says Yeatman. “The next six months will be our biggest in terms of children’s series launching.”
Cartoon Network makes global gains

Retaining the number-two spot for the second year in a row is Cartoon Network US, which capped off 2015 as television’s top ad-supported network with kids ages six to 11. And as the number-one cable network on VOD, CN has seen its video-on-demand orders increase by 14% in 2016.

According to Cartoon Network president Christina Miller, the net’s VOD achievements stem from the fact that kids want to actively participate in content consumption. “Kids are choosing to watch their favorite shows and episodes with Cartoon Network at a rate that’s higher than anywhere else on TV—and it’s because we have fans, not just audience members,” Miller says. “We see that in the growth curve.”

What’s also growing is CN’s global presence, from the international launch of The Powerpuff Girls, to the worldwide rollout of boy-skewing series Ben 10, which makes its US debut next year. (The network currently reaches 368 million people worldwide on linear TV.) “We have talked about acting globally, and this year, you can really start to see the fruits of our labor,” Miller says. “We had four Emmy Awards across content, and the same number of BAFTAs. And what’s really special is they came for different reasons: The BAFTAs were for The Amazing World of Gumball and We Bare Bears, and the Emmys honored our Cartoon Network App, so the awards speak to our breadth and range.” In terms of variety, Cartoon Network’s first original digital series Mighty Magiswords launched as a long-form show and interactive app this past fall, showing this multiplatform mindset swinging into motion.

From sea to space, PBS KIDS goes wide

A trio of new original programs have helped move PBS KIDS up a notch to crack the Hot50’s top three in broadcasting. Nature Cat (which bowed in late 2015), 3D-animated Ready Jet Go! and Splash and Bubbles have reinforced the pubcaster’s originals mandate, as well as its multiplatform plans.

“From a programming point of view, it’s all about our new shows,” says Linda Simensky, VP of children’s programming at PBS. As far as metrics go, Nature Cat has attracted 36 million viewers in the past year for PBS, whose stations reach more kids ages two to five, and moms with kids under six, than any other US network. In order to better access this tech-savvy demo, all three shows were conceived from the start to appear on multiple platforms. For example, Splash and Bubbles launched on PBS KIDS’ digital platforms ahead of its November 2016 TV premiere. “It’s no longer TV-first, it’s ‘wherever makes most sense first,’ and then everything after.”

PBS KIDS is also making strides to meet its audience’s needs through the impending launch of its 24/7 channel and live stream. Beginning in January, PBS KIDS’ free multiplatform children’s programming service will expand access to educational shows through participating stations, which will stream content. “This will fill a gap, as we know people have cut the cord,” Simensky says. “Station participation is much higher than anticipated.”
CBeebies

Just like the preschool demographic it serves, UK pubcaster CBeebies’ 2016 has been lively. For one thing, shows like Topsy and Tim have seen the channel bolster its live-action drama fare for preschoolers. Meanwhile, under its five-year co-pro partnership with FremantleMedia Kids & Family, CBeebies Productions has been engineering more interest in STEAM-based content through original series like Bitz & Bob. In terms of building up its global presence, BBC Worldwide expanded the reach of the 24-hour preschool channel in April, with launches in the Middle East and North Africa to subscribers of multi-genre network beIN.

Amazon

Amazon has been steadily ramping up its educational content library through a multi-year agreement with PBS Distribution that makes Amazon Prime Video the exclusive premium streaming service for a raft of popular PBS KIDS shows, including Odd Squad, Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood and Peg + Cat. Meanwhile, a new series from Domo creator Tsuneo Goda, and a marshmallow-themed show from Stoopid Buddy Stoodios, were among the children’s pilots that launched on Amazon Video as part of the SVOD’s ongoing kids pilot season. Skewing older, Amazon’s FreeTime Unlimited service bolstered its offerings to feature more than 13,000 videos, educational apps, games and books, plus more than 40,000 YouTube videos and websites.

NBCU Sprout

This past summer saw the US preschool net take an app-first approach with the premiere of its new original live-action series Terrific Trucks on the Sprout Playground app. And things moved full steam ahead from there, with the Get Truckin’ mobile game fueling a four-fold increase in downloads for the app, and 7.6 million Terrific Trucks YouTube impressions driving double-digit tune-in gains. Sprout’s original content push—helmed by new programming head Amy Friedman—was also supported by the launch of alien-themed series Floogals. The toon is produced by Zodiak Kids, which also has Kody Kapow in the pipeline at Sprout for a 2017 debut. In fact, now that original series are on track to comprise more than 30% of its schedule, Sprout’s new tagline, “Free to Grow,” is clearly springing into action.
Nickelodeon

Nickelodeon returns to the Hot50 broadcasting list after a one-year hiatus. As part of a multi-year strategy, the net has doubled its preschool programming output over the last five years. This past summer, Nick announced four new series—Butterbean’s Café, Top Wing, Abby Hatcher and Nella the Princess Knight—along with three specials and new digital and consumer products initiatives. China has also been on the map for the US kidsnet, with new exclusive streaming deals in place with Chinese SVOD service LETV Membership that cover nearly 800 animated TV episodes.

Corus Kids

With YTV, Teletoon and Treehouse ranking as the top three kidsnets in Canada among children ages two to 11, Corus hasn’t been missing any beats. YTV commission L.M. Montgomery’s Anne of Green Gables has gained global momentum, recently being picked up in the UK by ITV3 and in Germany by ARD. The MOW was also acquired by PBS in an all-rights broadcast deal for the US, and was picked up for a theatrical release in Australia and New Zealand. Meanwhile, a newly refreshed Treehouse iOS app bowed with more than 1,500 episodes of preschool series. The app joins Corus’s full suite of growing TV Everywhere offerings, which include TreehouseGO and YTVGO.

DHX Media

The DHX family has been growing—literally. DHX Television extended the Family brand across its kids and preschool channels, introducing Family Jr., Family CHRGD and Télémagino, and launching a new programming slate that includes 11 original productions. And the newly launched Family Channel app saw 60,000-plus downloads in its first four months. Off-screen, Family Channel took The Next Step live stage tour to more than 200,000 fans internationally, visiting the UK, Europe and soon, Australia. In September, 36 DHX kids shows became available to Amazon Prime subscribers in the UK and Germany in a deal that underscored continued efforts to ramp up SVOD distribution on the part of the Canadian company, which reported strong annual growth in 2016 from new digital and linear distribution deals.

Disney Channels Worldwide

Disney Channel EMEA’s plan to boost its localized production output continues ramp up in terms of viewership numbers, with serialized drama The Lodge, shot on location in Northern Ireland, bowing in September as the highest rated series premiere on the UK channel in the last four years—and the biggest telecast of 2016 with tween girls across all UK children’s channels. During the same month, Disney Channel US launched animated spin-off Descendants Wicked World. A sequel to the 2015 hit has officially been greenlit by the House of Mouse, with Descendants 2 slated for a 2017 premiere.
Taking the lead

Three years since launching its first-ever original kids shows, Amazon Studios reaches the Hot50 Production summit

After ninth and seventh place finishes, respectively, in the first two Hot50 Production rankings, Amazon Studios has dethroned Cartoon Network for the top spot, a position CN had held for the last two years.

This year, one of Amazon’s first three original kids productions, Tumble Leaf, continued its winning ways at the Emmys, nabbing awards for outstanding preschool animated program, directing in an animated program, and supervising animator. The studio’s newly launched adventure series Niko and the Sword of Light (greenlit last December), meanwhile, also won an Emmy for outstanding children’s animated program. Amazon Studios also introduced six new kids pilots in June, including Toasty Tales with animation from California-based Stoopid Buddy Stoodios, and The Curious Kitty and Friends from Domo creator Tsuneo Goda. Additionally, new family live-actioners including Gortimer Gibbons, Just Add Magic and The Kicks have resonated well with Amazon’s customers.

“Our approach has been to think about shows in different, more innovative ways. And because we don’t have a brand that has long been established, we’ve been able to experiment,” says Tara Sorensen, Amazon Studios head of children’s programming.

As for what the Hot50 industry recognition means for Amazon, Sorensen says taking the top spot is a big honor. “There is a lot of great content in the world created by production companies that are known for their solid track records,” she notes. “So to be the new kid on the block and get this type of recognition is really humbling. We are honored.”

Sorensen also credits a lot of Amazon Studios’ success to its partnerships with the likes of Mattel (American Girl) and PBS, as well as its book adaptations, including If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, which will launch as a Christmas special next month.
DHX Media holds strong

Jumping back into the top three on the strength of 70% production growth, and wider distribution that helped boost the company’s revenue by 15% for fiscal 2016, is Canada’s DHX Media.

The production growth comes as DHX has consolidated its animation and live-action operations under the newly rebranded content creation arm DHX Studios. With its brand-new 75,000-square-foot, Vancouver-based animation studio set to open its doors up in December, DHX Studios forged a number of revenue-sharing co-development and co-production partnerships with companies like Mattel, DreamWorks Animation, Sony Pictures Animation, Iconix and Dentsu in the past year.

“We’ve continued our focus on increasing, at every possible turn, the quality of the things we’re making. We’re very proud of the breadth of our work, whether it’s Teletubbies and My Little Pony, or Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs and Degrassi,” says the Steven DeNure, president of DHX Media.

He notes that one of the biggest challenges for a studio of this much depth is execution and partnering with the best talent for co-productions.

“Aside from just the footprint in Canada, we’ve been doing a massive amount of work in the UK with some truly talented people representing Darrell Macqueen, Kindle, Squint Opera and Ragdoll, to name a few,” he says.

2016 has also been a very good year for new broadcast and VOD deals spanning DHX Media’s full kids portfolio, including Degrassi: Next Class, Make it Pop, Supernoobs, Looped, The Deep, Inspector Gadget and The Other Kingdom.

Sinking Ship branches out with move to the big screen

This year saw Toronto’s Sinking Ship Entertainment sail into the top three in the production category for the first time. Its achievements in 2016 include nabbing 20 Daytime Emmy nominations—the most by any kids production company this year—and four wins.

It was also a memorable year for Sinking Ship because the company launched its first film division and premiered the hit movie, Odd Squad: The Movie.

In spring 2017, the arm will launch another new kids film, Dino Dana, based on the existing TV series.

“The thing we’ve been trying to do ever since the company was created is bring as much in-house as we can. We started by bringing in post, then interactive and animation. And it really culminated last year with having a full-fledged distribution team,” says JJ Johnson, founding partner of Sinking Ship.

“For us, always looking to the next hurdle has served us well,” he says. “We are currently in production on Dino Dana season one, which will air next spring. We are negotiating season two, which will include the feature, so we’re hoping to have the movie in theaters by summer 2018.”
Cartoon Network Studios

After wearing the production crown for the last two years, Cartoon Network Studios falls back to fourth place. It may just be stiffer competition, as CN didn’t exactly slack off this year. For example, the premiere of its Powerpuff Girls reboot was the network’s biggest international event ever, drawing more than 81 million viewers across platforms. Viewer engagement also increased with the launch of CN’s first original digital series, Mighty Magiswords. In addition, a third season of We Bare Bears was announced, as well as new seasons for original series Steven Universe and Uncle Grandpa.

Mattel

It was only a matter of time before Mattel cracked the Hot50 Production list. At number five, the toy giant makes its first-ever appearance in the Production category. With its new centralized content division Mattel Creations up and running, the company introduced a number of key properties in 2016 including a Bob the Builder reboot, a more gender-neutral and multicultural Thomas & Friends film (The Great Race), plus three direct-to-consumer Barbie movies. The Barbie universe will grow even larger next year with the addition of two new animated series, Dreamtopia and Dreamhouse Adventures.

Brown Bag Films

Aside from moving into a brand-new 30,000-square-foot Dublin studio, the 9 Story-owned Irish animation producer had a memorable year in many ways. The season four premiere of Brown Bag-animat-ed Doc McStuffins and its encores combined to reach more than 11 million total viewers, becoming Disney Junior’s top series telecast of 2016. The Mouse House also tapped Brown Bag to co-produce its new preschool series Vampirina. On the awards front, the studio garnered an International Emmy in the preschool category for its hit Acamar co-production Bing. Meanwhile, an adaptation of the classic novel Watership Down is in the works with 42 and Biscuit Filmworks for Netflix and BBC.
9 Story Media Group

Toronto, Canada’s 9 Story Media Group holds seventh place this year, thanks to achievements including a global deal with Nickelodeon for its all-new CGI- animated preschool series Top Wing, a partnership with Netflix and Scholastic to reboot ’90s toon The Magic School Bus, and the successful launch of PBS KIDS series Nature Cat (created by Spiffy Pictures). Among other accolades, hit preschool co-pro Peg + Cat won two Emmys, Daniel Tiger snapped up a Critic’s Choice Award, and Wild Kratts went into production on a fifth season.

The Lego Group

On the strength of its popular Cartoon Network TV collaborations Lego Ninjago (now in its fifth season) and the newly launched action-adventure series Lego Nexo Knights, The Lego Group makes its first Hot50 appearance in Production. Additional 2016 achievements include the launch of direct-to-video films Justice League: Cosmic Clash and Gotham City Breakout from the toyco’s Lego DC Comics Super Heroes brand, as well as the debut of Lego Star Wars: The Freemaker Adventures on Disney XD, marking the first time the boy-skewing channel has aired a series from the Lego Star Wars franchise. Lego also recently announced its latest Netflix original, Elves, and is priming a Ninjago theatrical release for 2017.

Entertainment One

Jumping into the Hot50 list of leading production companies for the first time is Toronto, Canada’s Entertainment One (eOne). Over the last year, its success has been primarily driven by the hit original preschool superhero show PJ Masks. Co-produced by Frog Box, Disney EMEA and France 5, in collaboration with French toon studio TeamTO, the series continues to resonate around the world and was greenlit for a second season in June. eOne also has 52 new eps of Peppa Pig in production with more growth expected after taking a 70% majority stake in London-based studio Astley Baker Davies, the creator of the billion-dollar IP. Other recent sales include 2D-animated series Winston Steinburger and Sir Dudley Ding Dong to broadcasters in the UK, Poland, the Middle East and North Africa.

Zag America/Zagtoon

Joining Mattel, eOne and Lego as the final new entry to the Hot50 Production category is the combined force of US studio Zag America and Paris-headquartered Zag subsidiariy, Zagtoon. Together, the companies are flying high with their top-rated CGI-animated action-comedy series Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir. Co-produced with Method Animation, the series currently airs in more than 80 countries on major networks including Disney Channel (EMEA, LATAM, Korea), Nickelodeon (US), TF1 (France) and Gloob (Brazil). Amid production on seasons two and three, Zag also just launched a Miraculous YouTube channel and web series.
DHX Media takes third-party series to the top

A number of third-party pacts with partners like Iconix (Strawberry Shortcake) and Mattel (Bob the Builder, Fireman Sam, Polly Pocket) propelled Canada’s DHX Media to the top spot in Distribution for the second year running. “Those were really exciting opportunities that helped us to further our reputation in the international market,” says SVP of distribution Josh Scherba. The company saw success in China, in particular, with significant expansion in the territory’s SVOD market.

Moving into 2017, Scherba says DHX Media has more than 6,000 half hours of content dubbed and licensed in Mandarin. As the DHX distribution team looks forward to the new year, Scherba says the focus will be on further integrating development and distribution. “We certainly have an integrated approach at DHX between distribution and DHX Studios,” he notes. “It’s very important that one informs the other.”
CAKE finds a sweet spot with co-productions

In 2016, CAKE threw co-productions into the distribution mix with Bottersnikes & Gumbles. The series launched on CBBC this summer, and in 18 languages around the world on Netflix. The distributor didn’t stop there, however, and signed a number of digital platforms for the series. “We felt there was more of a need for us to engage in that space, especially YouTube,” says CAKE managing director and CCO Ed Galton. “That just adds an additional feather to our cap that we can say with great confidence now that we know how to navigate the YouTube space with a level of expertise that we didn’t have before.” CAKE also doubled down on its work with partners like Rovio (Angry Birds) and TeamTO/Thuristar (My Knight and Me).

eOne grows with PJ Masks

The animated series PJ Masks was a real hero for Entertainment One’s (eOne) distribution team this year. The series premiered in the US in 2015 and went global in 2016, launching in territories including the UK, France and Australia through a global deal with Disney Channel. “In terms of distribution, we’re extremely focused in our approach,” says Olivier Dumont, managing director at eOne Family and eOne Licensing. “We take very few properties, very few shows, which means every property we develop ourselves or co-develop or co-produce with partners is worked on in a lot of depth.” Moving forward, Dumont says eOne plans to carefully cultivate a select few properties that complement their current brands. “Our priority right now is to develop and produce brands for the six to nine age group.”
9 Story Media Group

A landmark deal with Televisa/BLIM in Latin America and sales for multiple seasons of Peg + Cat, Daniel Tiger and Wild Kratts in China were only a few of the big moves made by 9 Story in 2016. The Toronto-based producer and distributor also expanded further into the evergreen territory by acquiring distribution rights to major children’s brands—including Barney, Angelina Ballerina and Garfield & Friends—to grow its catalog to more than 2,100 half hours.

Sesame Workshop

A strong year in distribution for Sesame Workshop was marked by its partnership with HBO. The next five seasons of Sesame Street will be available on HBO and its multiplex channels, HBO GO, HBO On Demand and HBO Now. The non-profit is also making moves in the world of apps with Sesame Street serving as a featured brand in the launch of Amazon’s Underground app platform. Sesame Street Underground apps saw increased year-over-year downloads of more than 3,000%.

The Jim Henson Company

Up two spots from last year’s Hot50, The Jim Henson Company’s distribution arm spent 2016 focused on preschool. Henson distributed 10 preschool series, including Splash and Bubbles, Dinosaur Train, Pajanimals, Doozer, Word Party and Dot. In addition to these new series, the company’s classic Fraggle Rock was digitally remastered and converted to HD for a new audience. In fact, it is returning to HBO, where the fuzzy radish-eating creatures made their US debut in 1983.
**Sinking Ship Entertainment**

In addition to acquiring Picture Box Distribution to expand its sales capabilities, Sinking Ship Entertainment also launched a theatrical distribution division. The Toronto-based prodco’s *Odd Squad: The Movie* was released in 90 theaters throughout Canada and 30 in the US. On the TV side, *Odd Squad* also made major moves, with the live-actioner selling into 150 territories worldwide.

**The Pokémon Company International**

*Pokémon GO* was all anyone could talk about this summer and The Pokémon Company International also saw major success in distribution this year. The 19th season of *Pokémon the Series: XYZ* was launched and *Pokémon* animation has been licensed for broadcast in more than 160 countries and 30 languages. The buzz isn’t likely to die down anytime soon, as the company has announced production on the first-ever live-action *Pokémon* movie—*Detective Pikachu*—with Legendary Pictures, will begin in 2017.

**PBS Distribution**

New to the Hot50 in the Distribution category, PBS Distribution made a multi-year agreement with Amazon that will see Amazon Prime Video serve as the exclusive premium subscription streaming home for PBS KIDS series. In addition to landing this deal, PBS Distribution acquired the DVD and digital rights to smash hit shows *Nature Cat* and *Ready Jet Go!* and launched both series on EST and SVOD platforms.

**Boat Rocker Rights**

A number of acquisitions buoyed Toronto-based Boat Rocker Rights’ 2016. The distribution team acquired a significant minority stake in Industrial Brothers—which includes a first-look deal on all future IP for co-production, distribution and licensing—as well as all of prodco Radical Sheep, including existing kids content like *Ollie: The Boy Who Became What He Ate*. In addition to acquisitions, key appointments were made this year, with Jon Rutherford being named president of the division, and Gia DeLaney taking the role of VP of global sales and licensing.
Using the Force

Strong Star Wars sales propel Lego’s return to the top spot

The Lego Group continues to build on its success, taking the top spot for the third year in a row in the Licensing category. LEGO Star Wars—the company’s first and longest-standing licensed line—saw more than 30 new products and new original content hit the market in 2016. And with the upcoming feature Rogue One: A Star Wars Story in theaters in December, the brand is only expected to grow.

“We try to have a really close collaboration and develop a strong partnership with the IP owners,” says Jill Wilfert, VP of global licensing and entertainment for Lego Group. “I think we’ve been able to leverage that and really make a relationship with Lego quite unique.” The company is also flexing this muscle with the upcoming Lego Batman Movie, which will hit theaters in February, accompanied by what Wilfert calls a “big” licensed product offering.

“There is no try” for the LEGO Star Wars line, as the products continue to fly off shelves
Shaun the Sheep wins big for Aardman Animations

2016 was a big year on the big screen for Aardman Animations. Shaun the Sheep Movie premiered with a strong box-office performance and critical acclaim, and Aardman worked to develop key activities across licensing, promotion and live events globally. “We had some strong momentum following a successful movie year in 2015,” says Rob Goodchild, Aardman’s head of licensing. “We continue to innovate across all areas of our licensing program to develop programs that deliver commercially while enabling us to continue to build brand value.” Other highlights include a partnership with the British Council’s expertise in language teaching that saw Shaun and Timmy become the faces of a global network of early years English learning apps, and Goodchild promises there is more in the works with the upcoming 2019 sequel to Shaun the Sheep Movie.

Patience (and Peppa Pig) pay off for eOne

Entertainment One (eOne) is playing the long game in licensing, and it’s paying off for Peppa Pig. A full 25 new licensees joined the brand’s US consumer products program in 2016, resulting in an estimated sales lift of 275%. “We’re very patient in our brand-building,” says Olivier Dumont, managing director at eOne Family and eOne Licensing. “We believe that if you build it quite gradually and organically, the licensing and merchandising program will last that much longer.” While Peppa Pig has been a hit in the UK for more than a decade, the brand has only recently made inroads in territories like China. eOne is in no rush, says Dumont. “It’s all about discoverability. If people have found your content, as opposed to marketing messaging telling them they’ll like your content, it’s always a much stronger connection that you’re building with the audience.”
DHX Media
Preschool properties propelled DHX Media’s licensing team to one of the top spots in 2016. Teletubbies became the UK’s number-one preschool property, and 75 licensees around the world have signed onto the licensing program. London kept calling when DHX Media’s Twirlywoos toys launched in the UK last year, and several products have since made year-end lists for preschoolers. Live show In the Night Garden has also seen success in the UK, enjoying its seventh consecutive year of touring in the territory.

Cartoon Network
Cartoon Network Enterprises secured a number of licensing agreements for its rebooted The Powerpuff Girls, making the brand into a top property around the world. High-profile deals included signing Spin Master as global master toy partner and collaborations with Moschino and Hot Topic for apparel and accessories. CN’s licensing success was also bolstered by the retail performances of original series Adventure Time and Adult Swim’s Rick and Morty.

Nickelodeon Consumer Products
The past 12 months saw Viacom International Media Networks partnering with Karisma Hotels & Resorts to open Nickelodeon Hotels & Resorts in the Dominican Republic, the first five-star international Nick-branded hotel. Elsewhere this year, Nickelodeon Consumer Products extended its hospitality to the hit preschool franchise PAW Patrol. New international partnerships and licensing agreements have helped PAW Patrol become a top-10 consumer products property in the UK, Spain, Italy, Australia and Canada.
**Mattel**

2016 was a big one for Barbie. Mattel saw a significant rise in sales this year, thanks in large part to the forward-thinking Fashionistas doll line and Barbie-branded apparel. The toyco plans to continue featuring culturally relevant and aspirational products moving into next year. Animated preschool series *Fireman Sam* also generated some heat for Mattel in 2016. It has grown to become a top preschool property in Germany with more than 277,000 DVD units sold to date.

**Sesame Workshop**

Sesame Workshop spent the past year working to put monsters (of the Elmo and Cookie variety) back into consumers’ closets. The nonprofit partnered with Uniqlo, Bathing Ape, Crocs, PUMA and Quicksilver on a number of apparel collaborations. 2016 also saw Sesame taking a big bite out of food-centric licensing with the first-ever Elmo Café in Tokyo and a partnership with chef Pati Jinich and Avocados From Mexico to create a number of video spots focused on healthy eating.

**Hasbro**

Hasbro’s Transformers franchise continued to be a heavy-hitter this year. The toyco collaborated with Machinima on a *Transformers: Combiner Wars* series for Verizon Go90 and partnered with S2BN Entertainment on the brand’s first live-action show *Transformers Live*, which will tour globally in 2017. These live and immersive events were a significant part of Hasbro’s licensing program, with the company also launching interactive exhibit *The Transformers Experience* with Victory Hill.

**Rovio Entertainment**

Rovio’s licensing program for *The Angry Birds Movie* took flight with more than 300 agreements around the world made with high-profile partners like Lego, PEZ and Spin Master. Licensees supported the film’s theatrical release with retail programs at leading retailers like Walmart, H&M and Toys”R”Us. The licensing program reflected the film’s new 3D CGI look, and both globally and locally included physical-digital campaigns with McDonald’s, Lego and PEZ that featured augmented reality content.
For Malik Ducard, global head of family and learning at YouTube, 2016 can be best summed up by one word: expansion. From debuting on the Hot50 list and sweeping the top spot, to exceeding a cumulative 10 billion views in 26 markets, the YouTube Kids app has been on the rise since its February 2015 launch.

“We know families and parents want experiences that are kid-friendly, and in a localized way,” says Ducard. “We have stepped it up and attracted creators who resonate with kids.” In fact, Ducard’s team works with creators directly to help them succeed on the AVOD platform. (An ad-free version is available through YouTube Red.)

What’s also growing are the number of enhancements made to the app itself. YouTube Kids recently bolstered its parental controls by introducing the ability for adults to remove channels and videos that don’t meet their standards.

What’s not likely to be scrapped, though, are the throngs of literacy and holiday-themed videos that have launched in 2016 as part of YouTube Kids’ curated month-long promotions—one of which in June, dubbed #readalong, focused on kinetic typography.

Following recent launches in France and India, Ducard says the app’s potential is in the hands of content creators. “Real estate is about location, location, location. And what we do is about creative, creative, creative,” he says. “There’s strong content coming out every day, such as shows like Wonder Quest. We have an entire learning tab for educational content.” Despite having tens of millions of downloads, the number that stands out for Ducard happens to be the smallest. “We have a 4+ rating in the App Store…It has always been important for parents to be in the driver’s seat.”

YouTube Kids bolstered its parental controls and global pursuits in 2016.

YouTube Kids is changing the way children engage
**Toca Boca’s biggest play yet**

Even after surpassing 150 million downloads, Toca Boca CEO Björn Jeffery still had reason to be giddy this past fall. According to October App Annie metrics, the kids appmaker was the number-one paid mobile publisher in the world across all categories. The ranking capped off a year full of momentous changes for the Swedish firm, which was acquired by Canadian toymaker Spin Master in April.

“At Toca Boca, we treat our apps as digital toys, so ending up inside a toy company makes a lot of sense to us,” Jeffery says. “Spin Master has a strong presence in North America, which has been our focus for a long time. It will open a lot of doors for us going forward as we look to expand Toca Boca and move into other channels.” To Jeffery’s last point, the company has already made moves into the subscription-based video app space, with the soft launch of Toca TV in June, followed by a global rollout in 150 countries four months later. Aimed at kids ages five to nine, the app offers curated videos, original content and DIY recording tools reminiscent of Toca Boca’s playful digital games.

“So far, so good,” Jeffery says. “It’s all new for us, but this is a space we need to move to, in general. All kids apps are going towards subscription.” While Toca TV’s expansion remains a top priority, the company’s suite of 38 gaming apps show no signs of slowing down, with recent releases including Toca Life: Stable and Toca Life: Farm.

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**Streaming odds in PBS KIDS’ favor**

With more than 1.3 million downloads since its April launch, the PBS KIDS Games app has been an emblem of success for the US public broadcaster—which has grown accustomed to seeing big numbers. For example, the PBS KIDS Video app garners five billion streams per year, and the pubcaster has delivered more than 155 million streams for new series Nature Cat so far in 2016.

“The big thing we pride ourselves on is being where kids are. So paying attention to platforms, thinking about how they interact with them and how they want content streamed is all important,” says Sara DeWitt, VP of PBS KIDS Digital. “We are very focused on making sure we are on OTT platforms and that our video app is freshly updated and relevant. Kids want to play with our characters and feel like they are friends with them.” Extending PBS KIDS characters’ lives into the digital space involves serious collaboration with the broadcasting team—especially with the launch of the pubcaster’s latest interactive initiative, Odd Tube.

Launched in November, Odd Tube is a weekly digital short-form spin-off of math-based comedy Odd Squad. It marked the first time PBS KIDS had spun off an existing series as a short-form version made for streaming, and it debuted on PBS KIDS’ YouTube Channel, its website and on the pubcaster’s video app.

“It’s been so fun to experiment with a successful show and see characters talk to the audience in a short-form way, and have kids comment and interact,” DeWitt says. “Main character Olympia has direct calls with the audience to have them vote on things. And then she heads right back into the studio to respond.”
**Cartoon Network**

Cartoon Network’s adventures in VR intensified in 2016 with the launch of Adventure Time’s Magic Man’s Head Games—the first virtual game based on a television franchise. Also extending into the digital realm was CN series The Powerpuff Girls via the Powerpuff Yourself avatar-building initiative. More than 12 million avatars were created this year, with 3,000 custom personalized items sold at Comic-Con. In mobile, the Steven Universe: Soundtrack Attack app has garnered more than a million downloads since it launch in July.

**DHX Media**

DHX Media’s return to the Hot50 Digital Media ranking was buoyed by the launch of its WildBrain multiplatform kids network. The platform connects content owners and advertisers across 350 kids YouTube channels, and generated four billion minutes of monthly watch time and US$15 million in revenue in 2016. On top of launching a dozen mobile games, the company’s Slugterra: Slug It Out! app achieved three million downloads and continued to grow revenue by 12% in its third year. As for the iconic Degrassi franchise, the tween-skewing property’s 360-degree digital strategy saw its Facebook reach climb to 24 million, up a whopping 3,000%.

**The Pokémon Company**

Given the record-breaking summer launch of Pokémon GO, it’s hardly a surprise to find The Pokémon Company making its debut on the Hot50 list. Pokémon GO—the most downloaded app ever in its first week—added to the company’s library, joining Camp Pokémon and Pokémon Shuffle. TPC also launched Pokémon Sun and Pokémon Moon for the Nintendo 3DS, while refreshing and updating features of its popular Pokémon TV app, allowing fans to watch an array of Pokémon animated episodes.
**Sinking Ship Entertainment**

Based on the popular PBS KIDS series, Sinking Ship Interactive’s Odd Squad digital suite has garnered more than 50 million gameplays and more than 20 million unique visitors. The Canadian company also created an in-house virtual reality lab to support a new touring exhibit based on its latest series, Dino Dana. Meanwhile, the augmented reality suite based on Dino Dan lets users view dinosaurs prowling the modern world.

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**Rovio Entertainment**

Released last October as a stand-alone app, Rovio’s ToonsTV global video platform has landed more than 4.5 million downloads to date. The platform grew its reach in 2016 via new games, AppleTV and other OTTs, with more than six billion views globally. The company also boosted its content catalog with three original Angry Birds series and short-form comedy content from the likes of Aardman and Toonbox. Up next, a new series of shorts starring fan-favorite characters the Blues and Hatchlings is set to debut on ToonsTV in early 2017.

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**DreamWorksTV**

Launched by AwesomenessTV founder Brian Robbins, the family-friendly YouTube channel debuted in 2014 featuring original animated and live-action series from DreamWorks Animation. Now more than two million subscribers tune in to watch 100-plus original series such as Life Hacks and Fifi: Cat Therapist. Shrek isn’t exactly scaring any kids away—DreamWorks TV has scored more than one billion video views to date.

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**Hopster TV**

Hopster has been far from idle over the last year. With interactive learning games and TV series like LeVar Burton’s Reading Rainbow and DHX Media’s Monster Math Squad, the SVOD expanded to reach 100 countries, including the US, as well as to Apple TV. As of August, the subscription service had been used by more than one million families worldwide. In October, Sony Pictures Television Networks acquired a minority stake in Hopster, becoming a strategic equity investor and taking a seat on the company’s board.
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