



Ratcheting up sales

Cinema Management Group's Ed Noeltner tells Jeremy Kay about the company's evolution and its success with independent animations

The contours of the film business may shift as companies come and go, but Edward Noeltner's Cinema Management Group is a survivor. A little over a decade since its inception, the Beverly Hills-based full-service sales company is thriving.

"We just had our most successful first quarter in 10 years," says Noeltner, who drummed up plenty of excitement in Berlin with the upcoming Rainmaker Films animation duo *Sly Cooper* and *Ratchet & Clank*.

These two films mark the latest in a line of notable independent animated features handled by CMG. Noeltner's catholic taste informs reliably varied slates, however, animation is a form he holds close to his heart.

After fine-tuning his craft as president of Senator International in Berlin and more recently as senior vice-president of international sales and distribution at Miramax in New York and senior vice-president of Svensk, based in Paris and Stockholm, Noeltner knew it was time to branch out.

"Ten years ago, I was in Berlin and didn't find anything that got me excited to start the company with," he says. "Then I saw a rough



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cut of [the animation] *Hoodwinked*. That's how it all started."

He signed a deal to represent international sales and The Weinstein Company distributed *Hoodwinked* in the US. The film grossed \$110m worldwide, of which \$58m came from international, establishing CMG as a home for commercially viable titles.

In the ensuing years, Noeltner has handled hit genre titles such as *The Collector* and *The Collection*, family films and drama, as well as documentaries including *Good Hair*

and the *Simon Wisenthal Collection*. But animation is never far from his thoughts. "My goal is to find properties that have IP value. One of the challenges with *Adventures In Zambesia* and *Khumba* is they were original IPs from a studio with a track record, although the properties themselves were not known."

Those films hailed from South Africa's Triggerfish Animation and grossed more than \$39m at the global box office combined. *Khumba* has taken more than \$7m with most territories still to come.

New investment

When Noeltner sold a stake in his company to The Cleveland Family in 2009 it paved the way for a timely capital injection in the form of the CMG Film Fund, Dallas.

The acquisitions fund enabled Noeltner to make successful bids for Rainmaker Entertainment and Blockade Entertainment's *Sly Cooper*, as well as *Brotherhood*, *The Perfect Host* and *Still Mine*. *Ratchet & Clank* followed.

"What makes *Ratchet & Clank* and *Sly Cooper* so exciting is that both are recognised franchises that have been hugely successful PlayStation games," says Noeltner. "There's a whole PlayStation network of 100 million users that we can access."

"Rainmaker has done *Escape From Planet Earth*. RGH [the animation studio behind CMG's in-production title *The Santa Story*] has *Postman Pat*, which is going to do very well for Icon in the UK."

In Cannes, part of the focus will be on building on the solid foundations established by the sales team in Berlin, where vice-president of sales Daniel Bort closed an all-rights deal with Imagem in Latin America for *Sly Cooper*, among others.

"I couldn't be happier," says Noeltner, adding that his Paris-based Venezuelan colleague's language skills "give buyers [in Latin America and Spain] that comfort level that they are speaking the same language."

Vice-president of sales and operations Dene Anderberg has been blazing her own trail. "Dene has been doing so well over the past four years and been really instrumental in opening up our Asian client list," says Noeltner. "She goes to Filmart and Busan every year. We have a great sales team."

Regardless of the type of film at hand, Noeltner is always on the look-out for something different and wants to ensure his work adds value to his distributors' businesses.

"You try to find the psychology of the deal — one that makes sense for both parties. It's how we've been selling movies recently, particularly the *Ratchet & Clank* and *Sly Cooper* films, where we have a base MG and performance bumpers."

Being able to cashflow advances as a result of the fund is part of CMG's growing arsenal. Noeltner is betting that a productive Cannes will pave the way for the next step in his company's ongoing evolution. **E**