

## ***Toronto: Lower Costs Transform Market for Kiddie Films***



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Although the Toronto Intl. Film Festival gets most of its attention from award-contender premieres and headlining bidding wars, live action isn't the only format looking to make a splash this year. Both traditional and computer-generated animated features, which have often been cost-prohibitive for independent [producers \(<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/producers/>\)](http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/producers/), are screening at this year's festival and looking for distribution.

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Through a combination of better technology and creative financing, the price point for making high-quality animated features has come down significantly in the past decade, enabling independent producers to carve out a new niche. And Blockade Entertainment's Brad Foxhoven says this means more independently-financed animation hitting the market.

"Now you don't need that half a billion dollars at the box office to show that it's a good business," says Foxhoven, who has produced three recent animated features, including Sony PlayStation's "[Ratchet & Clank](http://variety.com/t/ratchet-clank/)" (<http://variety.com/t/ratchet-clank/>)." The story about two unlikely friends who work together to save the galaxy from the villain Chairman Drek will screen at Toronto. "You can have a film that does \$50 million or \$100 million worldwide, and it's successful."

Foxhoven secured the film rights to "Ratchet & Clank," which has sold more than 27 million units worldwide since 2002, and approached Canada's Rainmaker Studios to take care of the [3D](http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/high-def-3d-digital-cinema/) (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/high-def-3d-digital-cinema/>) CGI animation. Through Film Financial Services, Canadian tax credits and foreign-territory sales from Cinema Management Group's Edward Noeltner, "Ratchet & Clank" will arrive at Toronto complete and ready for distribution.

"The technology allows for a much more level playing field than it did five and 10 years ago, where with the bigger studios and the bigger budgets you could see a huge difference in quality," Foxhoven says. "Now it's just going to come down to story."

Noeltner, who has secured deals throughout Latin America, Europe and Australia for "Ratchet," agrees that being able to keep budgets low is fueling animation right now.

"I think \$20 million or under is a good price point," he says. "You can make a terrific movie for that amount of money. And that level, you know distributors can afford it. The private equity that's needed is not that significant. We can do pre-sales; we can bring in other partners. That's how these deals are getting put together and why they're finding their place in the market."

Though Foxhoven and Noeltner are specifically targeting family-friendly fare, for which international territories are asking, the market has also opened up to a wider variety of genres. For instance, Salma Hayek's Ventanarosa Prods. is screening a completed version of Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet," which is based on the author's 1923 philosophical book of poems. The animated film covers eight of Gibran's poems, with each chapter helmed by a different director. Roger Allers ("The Lion King") wrote the screenplay, and serves as overall director.

"It took us a full year to get financing, and it's a real international effort," says Ventanarosa's Jose Tamez. "A lot of the money came from Lebanon from people who don't make movies. Some of the money came from France, Qatar, and some from the U.S. and Russia. Our goal was always to make an international movie."

To say the \$12 million picture doesn't fit into any pre-existing animated categories is an understatement and that makes Toronto an attractive place to debut.

"(Toronto) has a willingness to discover something new, and a willingness to experience different types of movies," Tamez says. "It's a very unique film."

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