

## Cinema Management Group founder Edward Noeltner on the sales outfit's 20-year journey

BY **JEREMY KAY** | 2 NOVEMBER 2023



**SOURCE: CINEMA MANAGEMENT GROUP  
'KAYARA'**

Los Angeles-based international sales company Cinema Management Group (CMG) celebrates its 20th anniversary at AFM this week, although, true to form, founder Edward Noeltner is not resting on his laurels. The longtime sales veteran is engaging with buyers on his latest English-language feature animations *Noah's Ark*, *Charlie The Wonderdog*, *Buffalo Kids*, *Panda Bear In Africa* and *Kayara*.



Over the years, Noeltner has built an impressive stable of animation, live-action drama, horror and documentaries, although these days animation is his main focus. In the early part of his career, the US-born executive worked around Europe — in Paris as senior vice president of international distribution for Svensk Filmindustri and Berlin as head of television with Pandora Cinema and president of Senator International — before doing a two-year stint as senior vice president of international distribution and sales for Miramax in New York.

In August 2003, Noeltner relocated his family to Los Angeles and launched CMG in October 2003. One of the early titles on his slate was *Hoodwinked*, a revisionist take on the *Little Red Riding Hood* children's story, which Noeltner signed on to represent and started successful sales at Cannes and AFM in 2004. Harvey and Bob Weinstein held US rights and subsequently acquired international sales rights; however, by then Noeltner had caught the animation bug.

## Market fresh

In the early days of CMG, Noeltner scoured the international festival and market circuit for documentaries and boarded Sundance selections such as *The Trials Of Darryl Hunt* (2006), Chris Rock's *Good Hair* (2009) and *GasLand* (2010), and SXSW audience winners *Brotherhood* (2010) and *Eden* (2012). "We were pretty good in documentaries," says Noeltner. "We did one with Cirque du Soleil and the Beatles about the *Love* show in Las Vegas [*All Together Now*]. That was one of the best parties I threw for CMG."



**SOURCE: CINEMA MANAGEMENT GROUP  
EDWARD NOELTNER**

The executive dipped into the horror realm in 2009 when the late Freestyle Releasing founder Susan Jackson introduced him to Mickey Liddell of LD Entertainment, who needed a sales agent for horror thriller *The Collector* in time for that year's AFM. Noeltner also sold Marcus Dunstan's 2012 follow-up *The Collection*.

By then, the CMG head was mapping out his animation sales business. In summer 2008 he struck a deal with South Africa's Triggerfish to represent *Zambezia*, a high-quality independent international family animation that would set the bar for his future endeavours. The film sold well and grossed more than \$34m worldwide. CMG and Triggerfish reunited on *Khumba*, which earned more than \$27m worldwide. A third collaboration came after CMG shareholders the Cleveland family hatched the idea

for *Seal Team*, which boasts a voice cast of JK Simmons and Dolph Lundgren and sold to Netflix for most territories.

Noeltner, who owns 55% of his company, has never looked back. (The Clevelands own 40% and a 5% stake is held by Karen Frederickson, the widow of Oscar-winning producer Gray Frederickson who was Noeltner's mentor.)

In February 2015, he met veteran UK producer David Parfitt while on a tour of animation studios in London. "David showed me the Kickstarter campaign they were doing for *Loving Vincent*," he says. "I made him a \$500,000 offer on a napkin subject to reading the script."



**SOURCE: BREAKTHRU PRODUCTIONS  
'LOVING VINCENT'**

The script duly arrived the following day, and Noeltner signed on to handle sales and arrange financing. Silver Reel ultimately came on board to complete financing on the hand-painted animation about the life of Vincent van Gogh, which was co-directed by Polish filmmaker Dorota Kobiela and BreakThru Productions' Hugh Welchman. "I had buyers calling me at three in the morning to get this film," recalls Noeltner. It premiered at Annecy in 2017 and grossed \$42m worldwide.

CMG has forged strong animation ties all over the world including Europe, Canada, Latin America, India and South Africa. Peruvian animators Tunche Films made *Ainbo — Spirit Of The Amazon*, which generated \$13m during the pandemic, and a second collaboration on Andes-set *Kayara* is in production with 21 pre-sales in the bag.

*The Canterville Ghost* from the UK's Space Age Films and India's Toonz Animation is currently opening around the world, while *Noah's Ark* from Brazilian partners including Gullane will screen at AFM and is set to deliver this December. In production is *Buffalo Kids*, which hails from Spain's 4 Cats Pictures, and *Panda Bear In Africa*, produced by regular collaborator Richard Claus, is on track to screen at February's European Film Market in Berlin. *Charlie The Wonderdog* from Canada's ICON Creative Studio is scheduled for delivery in the second quarter of 2025.

Noeltner prides himself on maintaining close ties with buyers like Jean Labadie at Le Pacte and Kelly Rogers at Rialto, among many others, and wants CMG to stick around for many more years to come. "We want to continue to make good movies, that's our focus," he says.

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