



BRAND LICENSING EUROPE

RETAIL MENTORING PROGRAMME

Good for retail, good for licensing and good for business.

By **Sam Phillips**

Brand Licensing Europe's Retail Mentoring Programme is the only one of its kind. Established in 2010 to promote a wider understanding of the licensing industry among retail buyers, the Retail Mentoring Programme increases retailers' understanding of the licensing industry by providing mentoring, industry placements and bespoke seminars to participants.

The participants (or mentees) are junior or assistant buyers nominated by their seniors from major global and U.K. retailers such as Mothercare and Sainsbury's. The 2011 program saw a 20 percent increase from last year's participation.

After attending a LIMA introduction course and networking event in May 2011, the mentees set a series of licensing-related objectives to research, which are then formally presented just following Brand Licensing Europe. During that six months, the mentees spend one day with a licensor, attend a bespoke seminar created by the Brand Licensing Europe team and have unlimited access to mentoring, advice and information. Attending Brand Licensing Europe for meetings and to look for new properties is also a key part of the programme—this year the show recorded a

22 percent increase in retail visitors. The programme is open to all retailers

"We have now seen the value of the Retail Mentoring Programme to all parties, most of all the retailers," says Jessica Blue, Brand Licensing Europe show director. "After another successful year we are working to attract more retailers to the programme for 2012."

Historically, it has been easy for a buyer to take a supplier's word when purchasing product. However over the past several years, the number of available properties has swelled, shifting licensing from the fringes to become a core strategy for categories like children's apparel where a hot licence can make all the difference to the range. As a result buyers are more deeply involved in the licensing process. The Retail Mentoring Programme helps buyers gain stronger licensing knowledge, giving them more control and allowing them to make more informed choices.

The benefits to all parties are becoming clear. Sainsbury's head of children's wear John Carolan says that the hardest thing for a junior buyer is to choose the right license simply because there are so many.



“To help make those decisions, it’s important to know how a property comes to market, how it is put in front of parents, how a customer gets to learn about it and what gives it longevity,” says Carolan. “The Retail Mentoring Programme has helped create more informed decisions about which licences to buy into.”

On an individual level the licensing knowledge and confidence gained by mentees has helped them to decide which properties to support.

“The Retail Mentoring Programme has given me the confidence to lead a good licensing meeting and ask the right questions,” says Hannah Aldred, Mothercare assistant buyer. “I saw some new properties at Brand Licensing Europe and now have the confidence to give them a go with the knowledge to be able to back them up internally.”

Buyers’ ability to promote licensing with authority internally has also enabled more cross-promotional activity in stores.

A better knowledge of deal structures and licensing contracts means buyers can understand their effect on factors such as pricing or brand management decisions.

“Understanding how a licensor controls a property and why they make certain decisions about it helps us understand the full story,” says Gemma Parlow, Sainsbury’s assistant buyer.

The Retail Mentoring Programme facilitates increased access between retailer and licensor which has been very beneficial all around.

“The licensor often has a different perspective from the licensee and can explain the full story behind the property, the statistics, the history, the way it has come to market and how it will be supported. Hearing this from the horse’s mouth helps you make the ultimate decision about it,” says Emma Johnson, Sainsbury’s buyer’s assistant.

Mentees attended day placements with licensors including Entertainment One, Turner CN Enterprises and BBC Worldwide to gain a fuller understanding of the creativity, planning and investment that goes into launching and maintaining a new property.

“It was good to show the buyers what goes into creating a TV series and the lengths we go to ensure longevity,” says Graham Saltmarsh, U.K. licensing director, TCNE. “I think they were surprised to find out we will have done two years work on a brand before it reaches the licensees and them.”

Hannah Mungo, head of U.K. licensing at eOne agreed.

“The day helped buyers to understand why we do things the way

we do, including the work and investment that goes into making something a success,” she says.

The last event in the programme is Brand Licensing Europe itself, an important opportunity for mentees to test their licensing knowledge and to meet a property’s decision makers face-to-face.

“Buying a character is different from buying a brand,” says Parlow. “You need all the background information and support that is available. At Brand Licensing Europe, we were able to get that information and to give feedback to the licensors and to get a feeling for how the property is being supported. We also approached licensors about things that are completely new for us, and were able to brainstorm how they might work at Sainsbury’s.”

Style guides came under particular scrutiny in 2011 as mentees pondered their purpose and challenged some of the restrictions in relation to buyer’s product categories. With the ability to access the right decision makers, some mentees have been able to overcome this by brainstorming creative solutions with the brand managers, despite apparent limitations within the style guide.

Increasing knowledge about the licensing business is having an impact on the day-to-day business but also on the wider retail strategy.

“There is a wider recognition that everyone has to be informed about licensing and the Retail Mentoring Programme has raised awareness of licensing within Mothercare,” says Barbara Robinson, category manager for Mothercare. “I fully endorse the programme. The retailer holds an important place within the licensing equation and being better informed, having the knowledge to allow succession planning, and taking licensing more seriously helps us to be ready for the next thing.”

If you would like to know more about the Retail Mentoring Programme, contact Keith Pashley, facilitator, at keith@thekeithpashleyproject.co.uk or Brand Licensing Europe event director Jessica Blue at jblue@advanstar.com. ©

