



HiT entertainment



**For Immediate Release**

## **FULL SPEED AHEAD FOR *THOMAS & FRIENDS*<sup>™</sup> AS #1 PRESCHOOL PROPERTY PULLS INTO LICENSING SHOW**

**Las Vegas, NV – June 9, 2010** – Thomas & Friends<sup>™</sup> pulls into this year's Licensing Show with a cargo load of accolades that include several awards, new toy deals and an exciting new CG animated TV series that's already a hit overseas. The #1 engine is enjoying a banner 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary year worldwide as the *Thomas & Friends* series prepares to launch in the US for the first time in CG-animation on PBS KIDS®. Everyone's favorite blue engine, can be found at HIT Entertainment booth #5426 at Licensing International Expo at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center June 8-10 in Las Vegas.

*Thomas & Friends*' many recent accomplishments include:

- For the 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, *Thomas & Friends*<sup>™</sup> is the number-one license in the preschool toys category in the United States, according to The NPD Group, Inc. In addition, *Thomas & Friends* ranks as the number-one preschool toy property in the UK for the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row.
- In March, *Thomas & Friends* secured two prestigious wins at the 2010 Australian Toy Association's (ATA) annual Product of the Year awards: Licensed Product of the Year and Licensed Product – Pre-School. Thomas & Friends also received the 2009 GFK OzToys Award for Top Selling Toy License (value) in Australia. *Thomas & Friends* is the number one pre-school license in the UK and Australia, according to NPD.
- The new *Thomas & Friends* series is a huge hit in Australia! Since its debut in February, the show – the first ever Thomas the Tank Engine series produced in full CGI-animation – has risen to the top of the ratings chart on ABC2 with 47% more viewers in its timeslot (?) and 43.8% of the 0-4 year-old audience share across all timeslots.
- In the UK, the new *Thomas & Friends* series made its debut in January 2010 on Five's 'Milkshake' and has received a 25% uplift in viewers overall, and a 75% increase in viewers 4-9 years old.
- The new Thomas & Friends series makes its US debut in September. It is the first Thomas & Friends series to be produced in full CG animation, and provides the Island of Sodor and its inhabitants a fresh, modern look. Fans will hear the individualized engines speak as they now have a voice in telling their own stories.



- [ThomasandFriends.com](http://www.ThomasandFriends.com) was selected as an Official Honoree in the Best Home/Welcome Page category from the prestigious Webby Awards by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. The Webby Awards recognize "sites and teams that demonstrate a standard of excellence" and is the equivalent of an Academy Award or Emmy Award in the digital world. To complement the new CG-animated television series launching in 2010 and provide a richer online experience for Thomas fans, [www.ThomasandFriends.com](http://www.ThomasandFriends.com), has undergone a redesign to provide the most comprehensive Thomas digital experience, including personalization options and a "My Station" customizable area for each visitor, an all-new Engine Depot, interactive navigation narrated by Sir Topham Hatt, and new activities and videos in the CG art style.
- HIT Entertainment has secured Fisher-Price as the new global master toy partner with new products that will include a new portable Take 'n Play line, an array of preschool items and motorized TrackMaster™ sets. Fisher-Price joins global *Thomas & Friends* toy licensees MEGA Brands (construction toys) and Learning Curve (wooden railway toys).
- There are six all-new CG-animated *Thomas & Friends* DVD titles from Lionsgate, including the DVD movie, *Misty Island Rescue*, that will be available in September. Lionsgate also released a 2-disc "Thomas & Friends: The Greatest Stories" anniversary edition this month, featuring 20 classic episodes and an array of bonus features. In the UK, Thomas & Friends first CG animated home entertainment release, *Splish, Splash, Splosh*, was the best-selling Thomas & Friends episodic home entertainment title in the past 6 years.
- In publishing, long time publishing partner Random House in North America will publish special Thomas & Friends titles, including a re-release of the classic "Happy Birthday Thomas" (US and Canada) for Thomas & Friends' 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. In addition, a full line of new releases are set for *Misty Island Rescue* in Fall '10. In the UK, a special, limited anniversary edition of *Thomas The Tank Engine*, published by Egmont will feature a raft of early and rarely-seen artwork from the estate of Thomas the Tank Engine's creator Rev. W Awdry
- *Thomas & Friends* live events and attractions will expand throughout 2010. June sees the opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> and biggest Thomas Town in the US at Six Flags America. The 15<sup>th</sup> consecutive Day out With Thomas™ Tour, celebrating with children at heritage railroads across the country continues to excite kids and their families through December. In September, AEG/Themestar will launch a live, touring stage show in the UK following the very successful worldwide run of *Thomas & Friends Live! On Stage: A Circus Comes To Town*. A Thomas & Friends Live! touring stage show returns to the US in Spring 2011 from AEG/Themestar.

"The *Thomas & Friends* brand is stronger than ever, as evidenced by its number one standing with preschoolers all over the world," said Pam Westman, Executive Vice President, The Americas, HIT Entertainment, Thomas & Friends Division. "Thomas the Tank Engine is positioned for incredible growth in all lines of business and advanced forms of media," she said.

#### **About HIT Entertainment**

HIT Entertainment is one of the world's leading independent children's entertainment producers and rights-owners. HIT's portfolio includes properties, such as *Barney™*, *Bob the Builder™*, *Thomas & Friends™*, *Pingu™*, *Fireman Sam™*, *Angelina Ballerina™* and *Rainbow Magic™*. HIT represents Chapman Entertainment's *Fifi and the Flowertots™* and *Roary the Racing Car™* in North America, as well as *Wallace & Gromit™*, *Shaun the Sheep™*, *Timmy Time™* and Aardman Classics from Aardman Animations. HIT also acts as representative for *The Wiggles®* in the UK. Launched in 1989, HIT's lines of business span television and video production, content distribution, publishing, consumer products licensing and live events and has operations in the UK, US, Canada, Hong Kong and Japan. HIT is a part-owner of US-based preschool channel, PBS KIDS Sprout<sup>SM</sup>, and international preschool channel JimJam, (outside of the US, UK and China). For more information, visit [www.hitentertainment.com](http://www.hitentertainment.com).

To download artwork, please visit [www.hitnewsonline.com](http://www.hitnewsonline.com).

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