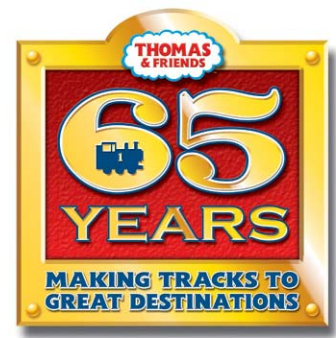




HIT entertainment

**For Immediate Release**



## PEEP PEEP!

### **THOMAS & FRIENDS™ CELEBRATES 65 YEARS WITH FULLY INTEGRATED PRODUCT, MARKETING & PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY AROUND THE WORLD**

***New partners, new products, new content and new events for the world's number 1 pre-school brand***

**LONDON, 26 January, 2010** - HIT Entertainment, a leading provider of quality children's entertainment and owner of the world's number 1 pre-school brand - *Thomas & Friends™* - is sending everyone's favourite true blue engine on an exciting global journey in 2010 to celebrate 65 years of making tracks to great destinations.

Starting in January, new partners will come aboard to unveil new *Thomas & Friends* products; long term licensees will debut anniversary items; new content will launch on TV, DVD and online; themed live events will take place on four continents and top tier partners across retail and marketing will mark the exciting milestone with special celebratory activities.

#### **Consumer Products**

HIT Entertainment continues to have strong partner relationships, and this year both long term and new licensees are set to unveil a wealth of products across key categories.

Starting in January 2010 **Fisher-Price**, the new global master toy partner for *Thomas & Friends*, will unveil and begin to roll-out its Take-n-Play line of portable playsets in the US, UK, EMEA and Latin America along with an array of preschool items, including puzzles, games, bath toys, plush, push 'n go and pullback vehicles and talking preschool vehicles. **Fisher-Price** will also launch new TrackMaster sets in the US and South America, while in the UK and EMEA **Tomy** will continue with new TrackMaster products and pre-school items until **Fisher-Price** takes over the TrackMaster brand in the Fall.

In Asia, **Fisher-Price** will launch Take-n-Play across all territories and will take over the TrackMaster rights from **Funtastic** (Australia/NZ) as of the Fall. In Japan, *Thomas & Friends* consumer products will mark the anniversary with the debut of the first local character – Japanese engine Hiro. New toys for this market will come from **TakaraTomy**, **Pilot**, **TakaraTomy Arts** and apparel from **World Inc.**

Long term partner, **Learning Curve**, will continue to manufacture and market the Thomas Wooden Railway, and will launch a new "Early Engineers" line, designed specifically for children as young as 18-months old. The Early Engineers



Line features larger engines that are perfect for small hands, tracktiles that provide secure layouts and simple to use destinations. This line is compatible with the rest of the Thomas Wooden Railway.

Additional new partners for 2010 include global licensor **MEGA Brands** who will launch an all-new line of *Thomas & Friends* construction toys; **Flair** and **Sambro** will introduce new ranges of Thomas Arts and Crafts products for Spring 2010 in the UK; **American Greetings** (North America) will introduce a full array of *Thomas & Friends* party supplies and decorations, greeting cards, invitations, stickers, gift packaging and seasonal items, such as Valentine's Day cards and Christmas ornaments; **Global Designs** (US) will bring *Thomas & Friends* backpacks and accessories to the mass and mid-tier market; **Jay Franco** (US) will unveil new *Thomas & Friends* bedding designs and **Upper Deck** (US) will introduce new Thomas & Friends trading cards.

### **Publishing**

In the UK, five new characters join the Thomas Story Library in May, taking the collection to 65 books in the 65<sup>th</sup> year. A special anniversary edition of the original Thomas the Tank Engine book by the Rev. W Awdry will follow in June containing an introduction featuring rare photographs and sketches. All titles are published by **Egmont** for the international markets.

*'Thomas to the Rescue'* story book was selected for World Book Day in the UK and Ireland this year and on Thursday, 4 March, a film of Sir Topham Hatt (The Fat Controller) reading the book will be screened to children in schools around the country.

In North America, long time publishing partners **Random House** will also publish special *Thomas & Friends* titles, including a re-release of the classic *'Happy Birthday Thomas.'*

### **Apparel**

In the apparel category, key partners and retailers including **Topsville** in the US and **Next** and **Marks and Spencer** in the UK, will be unveiling ranges with a vintage theme featuring original illustrations of Thomas. Special 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary swingtags will also be present on select items.

### **Broadcast**

Kicking off the anniversary year, in Q1 2010 *Thomas & Friends* will premiere a new series on **FIVE** in the UK, **Treehouse TV** in Canada, **TV Tokyo** in Japan and in Q4 in the US. Now produced in full CG animation, *Thomas & Friends* is more vibrant, detailed and engaging than ever. For the first time, Thomas and his engine friends speak in their own voices, allowing them to tell their own stories of teamwork, determination and friendship. New characters to join the adventures on the Island of Sodor include Japanese engine Hiro, Victor and Kevin from the Sodor Steamworks, and Charlie, a new steam engine with a reputation for fun and mischief!

### **Home Entertainment**

Several new Thomas DVD titles will be released in 2010. A special 'Best of Thomas' anniversary edition will hit shelves in the UK in April and in the US in June, and a box set of the classic series' 1-11 will be released in the UK in the Fall.

'Misty Island Rescue', a brand new 60-minute CG animated special is currently planned for release around the world, in countries including the UK, US, Australia, Germany, Benelux and Spain this Fall. It will be launched with cinematic premieres in all major markets.

In Asia Pacific, 'Hero of the Rails', which enjoyed much success in other markets during 2009, will be at the forefront of the Thomas DVD offering. It will launch in Q2 in Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan and later in the year in other Asia Pacific markets.

### **Film**

In Los Angeles, work has commenced on a theatrical feature for *Thomas & Friends*. Scriptwriter Josh Klausner ("Shrek the Third") is signed on to develop the script to bring Thomas to the big screen.

## **Live Events**

'Day Out With Thomas' which enables families to enter the magical world of Thomas & Friends will mark the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary with special celebratory events. In the UK, 7 heritage railways will stage themed parties, while in the US and Canada a "Celebration Tour" will visit heritage railroads in more than 45 cities. These unique 'Day Out With Thomas' events will offer children the opportunity to ride on a nearly 20-ton replica of Thomas the Tank Engine, meet Sir Topham Hatt (The Fat Controller) and engage in a variety of other anniversary-themed crafts and activities.

In the US, **Six Flags America**, based outside of Washington DC, will open the 5<sup>th</sup> and largest Thomas Town on Memorial Day weekend 2010. Featuring 10 rides, the new Thomas Town is more than double the size of any existing Thomas Town. Kids and parents will celebrate Thomas' anniversary with special parties at all Six Flags locations on 6/5 (5<sup>th</sup> June). And in the UK, **Drayton Manor Park**, home of Europe's Thomas Land, will round off the year with the ultimate 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary extravaganza event on Saturday, 4 December. Similar celebrations are planned in **Thomas Land Japan** at Fujikyū Highland near Tokyo.

2010 also sees the launch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thomas theatrical tour entitled "A Circus Comes to Town". It will open on Friday, 10 September and tour across the UK and Ireland until Sunday, 8 May 2011. **Premier Stage Productions** will be producing and promoting "A Circus Comes to Town" in conjunction with **AEG Themestar**.

## **Digital**

The brand's main website, [www.thomasandfriends.com](http://www.thomasandfriends.com), is getting a CGI makeover timed to the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary with new navigation, functionality and content. In the UK, US, Australia and Canada completely redesigned homepages have launched featuring an all-new Engine Depot, a 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary section, and more than 60 new activities. All major markets will follow suit in 2010. Localised versions of the website also exist in a number of countries, including China, Japan and Korea. In the UK, a 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary landing page has been especially created, providing a hub for fans to access all the exciting events and activities slated for 2010. A similar one will also launch in the US in March.

Additionally, HIT launched the first *Thomas & Friends* iPhone app and official Facebook Fan page. The app, selling for \$1.99, contains *Thomas & Friends* matching games, puzzles and mazes designed especially for children aged 2-5 years old. The official Facebook fan page includes the latest news, videos and photos from *Thomas & Friends*.

## **Marketing Support**

In the UK, a special guide "The Little Blue Book" has been distributed through retailers, VUE cinemas, Thomas DVD cases and nurseries, providing a complete overview of activities taking place throughout the celebratory year. One highlight is a Thomas themed month in March at **Hamleys**, featuring an interactive branded window display, alongside engaging activities such as an attempt to make the longest Thomas train out of cake (on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March).

In Asia Pacific, individual countries will launch the anniversary year in their own unique ways. For example, in Taiwan Thomas the Tank Engine will appear for the first time ever as a festive giant lantern in Taipei city as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations (February 20 – March 7). Additional marketing activity in the region will be pegged to the theme of parent-child quality time. Competitions will run offering families the opportunity to visit one of the Thomas Lands around the globe.

"This global celebration is unprecedented in the brand's 65 year history and befitting a character so loved around the world," said Rick Glankler, SVP, Global Brand Management, HIT Entertainment. "Everyone's favourite number 1 engine is paired with a wide array of top-tier partners, all united in their support and excitement for this powerhouse brand. 2010 is going to be an exciting year for Thomas on his journey to another 65 years of great destinations!"

Peter Byrne, EVP Consumer Products International, HIT Entertainment added, "Thomas' 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary really represents a unique sales opportunity for all of our partners around the world. There is incredible momentum building across product, marketing and promotions, which is guaranteed to drive the Thomas brand to whole new level.

Activity throughout 2010 really cements Thomas & Friends' status as the undisputed number 1 global pre-school brand."

#### **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*<sup>™</sup>, *Bob the Builder*<sup>™</sup>, *Thomas & Friends*<sup>™</sup>, *Pingu*<sup>™</sup>, *Fireman Sam*<sup>™</sup>, *Angelina Ballerina*<sup>™</sup> and *Rainbow Magic*<sup>™</sup>. HIT represents Chapman Entertainment's *Fifi and the Flowertots*<sup>™</sup> and *Roary the Racing Car*<sup>™</sup> in North America as well as *Wallace & Gromit*<sup>™</sup>, *Shaun the Sheep*<sup>™</sup>, *Timmy Time*<sup>™</sup> and Aardman Classics from Aardman Animations. HIT also acts as representative for *The Wiggles*<sup>®</sup> 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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