

# Spreading Best Wishes



What starts on greeting cards does not have to stay on cards as an increasing number of publishers are finding out, with licensing agreements with other companies resulting in their designs being translated onto a host of other products.

As the healthy number of greeting card brands and concepts that will be showcased at the Brand Licensing Europe exhibition (October 16-18, London's Olympia) testify, publishers are now keener to realise the potential of their own Intellectual Property (IP) way beyond their 'first life' on cards more than ever before.

PG gets a bit 'intellectual' about greeting card IP.

Business is changing. No one stays in their own 'little box' any more. Historic practices are being challenged; certain perceptions confronted and new paths are being carved. And the practice of licensing - whereby one company gives permission (most often through a financially remunerative agreement) for another company to use their designs or brand names on other products - is very much playing a part in all of this.

While the licensing activity involving major entertainment properties (such as children's TV programme Peppa Pig and Ben 10), major sporting brands (eg London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games) and heritage brands (such as National Trust and V&A) is still very prominent, eyes are being turned in the direction of the UK greeting card industry, recognising it as a fertile source of world leading design.

The mega greeting card cute brands of Hallmark's Forever Friends and Carte Blanche's Me to You of course, have many years of licensing experience under their belt - and UKG's Boofle is also off to a decent start which will no doubt accelerate now that the 'exclusive' constraints with Clintons have been loosened since the change in ownership. These licensing agreements with licensees have not only fed back directly into the coffers of their brand owners, through royalty agreements, but hugely spread awareness of the brand, giving it prominence in product sectors way beyond the card publisher's expertise. The sales of Forever Friends cakes through licensee Greencore, for example, are incredible, while a Me to You jigsaw is sold by licensee Ravensberger every two minutes somewhere in the world. And these are just two examples.



However, it is not just the major greeting card publishers that have scored success on the licensing front. And, going by the packed attendance at the recent seminar organised by the GCA on behalf of its publisher members (at which Lucy Heavens explained Juicy Lucy's licensing success - see News), there are plenty of others keen to explore and mine this potentially rich source of revenue and brand leverage.

It has seemingly only been in the last few years that the large gift companies have been



*Top: Boofle may have first come to life on greeting cards with UKG in Clintons, but David Blake's creation has outstretched its paws onto other products, including pyjamas in Marks & Spencer. Above right: Licensing activity has developed for Rachel Ellen Designs over recent years with partners such as Lesser & Pavey on gifts and Octavius Hunt on partyware. Left: Lesser & Pavey discovered GD Publishing at PG Live in May and has since licensed 24 greeting card illustrations to create its Fine Art Gallery Collection of mugs.*

enlightened as to the design resource, which lies in their allied trade of greeting cards, but this inter-relationship is now in full swing.

On its stand at the recent Autumn Fair, major giftware company Widdop Bingham was showing ranges of gift items based on licensing agreements with Tracey Russell, Laura Darrington and Talking Pictures, with others to follow at the start of next year. Likewise Lesser & Pavey, on its stand at the same show was displaying its latest licensing



tie-ups with Rachel Ellen Designs, Cavana and GD Publishing (a company it discovered at PG Live whose designs it has licensed for its Fine Art Gallery collection of mugs).

Junction 18, another mainstay in general giftware, was showing a new collection of glassware based on Berni Parker Designs' Ladies Who Lunch card range, while also in the homeware sector, Royal Worcester has recently launched a fine china collection based on Caroline Gardner's highly successful card designs.

And while link ups with giftware companies seem fairly close to greeting cards, licensing arrangements with giftwrap companies, being paper based, are closer still. While it is perceived that card publishers could easily diversify themselves into giftwrap and bags, in actual fact it can prove more financially and strategically beneficial to sign a licensing agreement with a specialist in that field.

Paper Salad, for example, has found much greater success through a licensing agreement with Glick on giftwrappings than doing it themselves (and a Henries award to show for the collaboration!) and Glick has recently extended its greeting card tie-ups to an agreement with Juicy Lucy.

Meanwhile, sitting alongside well-known designer brands such as Orla Kiely, Emma Bridgewater and Nina Campbell, in the Penny Kennedy portfolio are collections based on several leading design-led



## The BLE Lowdown

Brand Licensing Europe (BLE) takes place from **October 16-18 at The Grand Hall Olympia in London**, with retailers,

licensees, manufacturers and sales promotion professionals coming together from across Europe to forge partnerships and discover the latest brands, characters and images available for licence. This year, there will be over 2,200 licensed properties represented, ranging from top heritage brands, design-led properties, entertainment properties and art and design concepts (including those which started life on greeting cards!). While plenty of publishers visit with a view to taking on licences, others are going a stage further and will be exhibiting their designs with a view to licensing them out to third parties. Among these showing in their own right (as opposed to being on an agents stand) at this year's show are Paper Rose, Paperlink, Cavana, Holy Mackerel, Loveday Designs, Belly Button Design, Jowish, Carte Blanche, Hallmark, Santoro and Cinnamon Aitch.

Sharing her licensing learnings gleaned over the years, Perlina Pierre-Davis, Paper Rose's licensing and international sales director commented: "Greeting card designs that are licensed are usually the best sellers in their greeting card format so a licensee knows they are getting the best of the best. These proven 'sellers' give confidence to the licensee and credibility to the licensor." While she loves all the positives about licensing Paper Rose's card designs, Perlina strikes words of caution for those hoping for a 'quick

buck'. "It's definitely not an overnight process and can take some time before you receive any royalties, but it does create another stream of income, raises brand awareness and shows off the potential of the designs."

First time BLE exhibitor, Sarah Danby, director of Cinnamon Aitch, explains the rationale behind its BLE debut: "The time now feels right for us at Cinnamon Aitch to branch out into licensing. We know that many of the designs we have will lend themselves perfectly to other products yet we don't actually want to manufacture and market these products ourselves and would rather leave it to those companies who already are experts in these areas.

Both myself and my co-director Sara Burford are trained as textile designers, but in essence are surface designers. Many of our greeting card designs can be adapted to decorate other products with a few little tweaks and a bit of imagination.

We believe many of the cute and quirky characters in our designs would sit happily on other products with just a few changes to scale and positioning, after all, colour, form and attention to detail are as important on a mug, lampshade and duvet cover, for example, as they are on a greeting card."

*Above: Card publisher Cinnamon Aitch will be exhibiting at Brand Licensing Europe for the first time this year showing samples of how its card designs could be translated onto other products.*

[www.brandlicensing.eu](http://www.brandlicensing.eu)

card publishers including Belly Buttons Designs, Caroline Gardner, Tracey Russell and Laura Darrington Design.

The UK greeting card industry leads the world on design, so while finding the right licensing partners is not easy and not appropriate for all card publishers' designs, the signs are that the two way traffic between card publishers and licensees is set to hot up considerably.

*Left and right: In tandem with broadening its own homegrown product portfolio beyond cards and into stationery and fragranced items, Caroline Gardner has signed several key licensing agreements, such as boxed mugs from Royal Worcester.*







### The Gift Of Good Design

Given the success of Widdop Bingham's first three gift ranges based on licensing agreements with card publishers (Talking Pictures, Tracey Russell and Laura Darrington), the gift company has revealed there is every good reason that it will continue along this vein.

"By licensing successful greeting card designs, we have attracted new customers to us and new sales opportunities have opened up. Licensing proven designs removes some of the risk for retailers. There are benefits to the retailer too who is already successfully selling the card range – a captive audience of consumers purchasing the card already exists with a greater likelihood of an add-on gift purchase," explained Sue Grant, marketing manager of Widdop Bingham.

Pointing out another advantage, Sue says that the fact that the greeting card range is already in the market place means "there are learnings that the publisher can share with us. This has been critical in the choice of design style and type of occasion. However, that said, there are some popular greeting card captions, such as 'Thank You,' 'Get Well Soon' or 'Welcome to your New Home' that just don't translate to a gift."

*Above: Card publisher Paper Salad's licensing agreement for giftwrappings with Glick may seem 'close to home,' but it has reaped benefits for both parties.*

*Right: In addition to having clinched several calendar awards for a licensing tie-up with Carousel Calendars at the start of the year, Tracey Russell has continued to expand on the relationship with major giftware company Widdop Bingham for a range of products. Below left: Laura Darrington has enjoyed seeing her greeting card designs lend themselves so well to translation onto gifts with Widdop Bingham.*

### Changing Perceptions

For years Tracey-Russell Greeting Cards was pigeon-holed as a leading handmade greeting card company. While still enjoying its reputation in the card trade, the last couple of years have seen the brand in 'hand' in all manner of sectors through licensing. It has won two Calendar Awards in January for its tie-up with Carousel Calendars, has Advents with Caltime, a range of 50 skus with Widdop Bingham (and with more in 2013) and wrappings with Penny Kennedy.

Commenting on her licensing journey, Tracey Russell told PG: "Licensing has made me feel proud of what I have achieved and not be so paranoid about my designs and ability as an illustrator. Also, the sense of satisfaction when you see products in shops that have originated from your brand is fantastic. I have only really stepped a little bit into the world of licensing, but it has already had a positive effect on the card company as the demand for the cards has grown as a direct result of licensing."



### Parker's Pointers

Artist Berni Parker had been licensing her designs for many years before setting up Berni Parker Designs as a card publisher a few years ago. Now, with a strong roster of gift, home and craft products on the market, or soon to come to launch, based on her Whispers On Wings, Ladies Who Love Life and Men Who Love Life card ranges (with companies such as Clairefontaine, Junction 18, Royal Worcester, Bothy Threads, National Trust, Kurt Adler, Artko, Karto and Buckingham Fine Arts), Berni shares some of the upsides and downsides of licensing designs.

#### On The Upside

"For the licensor [you the card publisher/artist] there is very little risk, either financial or from a brand exposure perspective as long as your contract with the licensee allows you to have the final say on product design and quality before launch. If the licensee has the right market and believes in the product and the design, then the financial risk for them is also not as great."

#### On The Downside

"As a licensor you must be patient. Many licences do not mature quickly, there can be a long and difficult journey getting to the final product, so there may be one or two years before you see any financial return. You will have expended time, effort and energy over this period, the licensee will also have incurred costs and sometimes for a variety of reasons the license agreement may not be completed, nothing transpires and there is no financial return at all for either party."

*Above right: Berni Parker continues to have great success with her designs making their way onto all manner of products, such as glassware from Junction 18, based on her Ladies Who Love Life card designs. Right: Also exhibiting at BLE, Paper Rose is continuing to 'reshape' its Marzipan designs through licensing to third parties, such as to Shreds for a range of children's tabards and aprons.*

