

FUNWORLD

February 2003 • Volume XIX No. 2

A Book Deal? They Must Be Mad

With clients like Six Flags, Paramount, Kennedy Space Center, and LEGOLAND Windsor, The Mad Science Group is certainly making a name for itself within the amusement industry. The 17-year-old creative force behind more than 2,000 interactive science-based activities and presentations entertains and sparks education for children in 20 countries. The company has branched out over the past several years to focus on three areas of its business: The Mad Science commercial franchise; Mad Science Productions; and strategy and development of the Mad Science brand, according to Leonard Lipes, managing director of Mad Science Productions. "Everything that we're doing now is aimed at connecting the brand with all our areas of business," Lipes says. "We need to make sure that each area of business helps the others out."

One of the company's most all-around profitable franchise ventures kicked off two years ago by signing a

licensing deal with Scholastic, the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books. Scholastic is well-known in classrooms and children's bookstores for launching such successful series as *The Magic School Bus*, *Goosebumps*, *Harry Potter*, and *I Spy*. Under the agreement, Scholastic marketed a series of Mad Science fiction books through its monthly book club, which circulates catalogs through elementary and middle school classrooms predominantly for teachers and student consumers ages three to 12. In December 2002, Mad Science and Scholastic reported that more than 1 million copies of the Mad Science book series had been sold to date. Based on that success, Scholastic has released the first three titles from the series to retail bookstores nationwide. "The objective was to build a brand and drive awareness of Mad Science so when productions [come] to fairs and theme parks, more kids [will] be driven to the shows," says Ariel Shlien, president and CEO of The Mad Science Group.

"Whether it's at Six Flags or Paramount or whoever hires us on a reg-

ular basis," adds Lipes, "they're using Mad Science as a draw for kids and parents so that in the middle of July or August a kid can say, 'I want to go see [a live Mad Science show] because I read the books.'"

The 12-book adventure series presents an ordinary group of high school kids solving problems and foiling plots to save the day. "We wanted those books to inspire and excite the kids the same way that Mad Science Productions inspires and excites the kids when they see the live shows." Shlien says that book expansion efforts are aggressive, and the remaining nine books in the series will be released into the retail book market strategically over the course of the next year.

The Mad Science Group is rapidly developing plans to expand its brand into merchandise, apparel, toys, television, CD-Roms, and video games. Mad Science Productions plans to develop its custom productions unit to better serve large entertainment properties. In addition, individual touring shows at parks and venues will be explored in the near future, Lipes says.