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Children's TV Series Hits the Road, on Stage and in the Cereal Aisle

By **STUART ELLIOTT**
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Not familiar with characters named Alpha Pig, Princess Presto, Super Why, Woofster and Wonder Red? Advertising and promotional campaigns worth several million dollars may soon be filling you in.



The characters are the stars of an animated series for children, "Super Why," that has appeared [since 2007](#) on PBS Kids and PBS Kids Sprout. The series is intended to help youngsters ages 3 to 6 learn to read.

"Super Why" already has [a presence away](#) from the TV set, online, in apps for the [iPhone](#) and [iPad](#) and in stores that sell merchandise inspired by the series, which includes books, games, toys,

Plans call for "Super Why Live" to make stops in the fall in cities in other parts of the country and for the release of a soundtrack album by Razor & Tie, the label also known as the parent of Kidz Bop. The soundtrack is to feature music by Jack Antonoff, who when not writing songs for children is a member of the [rock band](#) Fun.

And the "Super Why" TV series is beginning a partnership with the [Post Alpha-Bits](#) cereal sold by Post Foods. The "Super Why" characters, known as the Super Readers, will be displayed on the front and back of boxes of Alpha-Bits, as part of efforts by Post Foods to reinvigorate the brand, which also include reformulating it to add whole grain — and decrease sugar — as ingredients.

Estimates are that Post Foods will spend more than \$1 million on consumer and trade campaigns to support Alpha-Bits during the "Super Why" tie-in. And the company that is producing "Super Why Live," S2BN Entertainment, will spend about \$2 million on consumer and trade campaigns if the show spends a year touring the country.


The initiatives for "Super Why" and "Super Why Live" are emblematic of how important children — and their parents — are to marketers as a demographic audience. That continues to be true even though aiming pitches at youngsters and their families can be fraught with pitfalls.

That was demonstrated again last week, when two organizations, Public Citizen and the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Children, used the intensifying dispute about [Chick-fil-A](#) and gay marriage to reiterate a call for PBS to end a [marketing agreement](#) with Chick-fil-A for the PBS children's series "Martha Speaks."

"We feel good about what we're doing for kids," says Samantha Freeman, a co-founder and executive producer at Out of the Blue Enterprises, a children's television company in New York. She and Angela C. Santomero, the other co-founder and executive producer, developed "Super Why," which is produced by Out of the Blue and the Decode Entertainment division of DHX Media in Toronto.

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Ms. Santomero and Ms. Freeman previously worked together on children's television at Nickelodeon, a unit of Viacom. "There's a lot of programming coming out for kids now," Ms. Freeman says, including a series that Out of the Blue Enterprises is creating for PBS for a fall debut, "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood," which will be a spin-off of the long-running children's series "Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood."

"Five years is a long period of time to be on air," Ms. Freeman says, referring to the run so far for "Super Why."

The initiatives like "Super Why Live" and the Post Foods partnership "give us a platform to elevate the brand and do more things," she adds, in response to "the parents watching us" who "are looking for ways to connect with the brand."

Out of the Blue Enterprises tries to be careful to approve only those efforts that "fit the brand," Ms. Freeman says, and reflect how parents "feel good about 'Super Why' because it's getting kids excited about reading."

"Super Why Live" is "an exciting opportunity to extend the show into a different medium," she adds. "We worked with S2BN to offer something in the live show that you couldn't get on TV."

For instance, during "Super Why Live" audience members "get to learn what each character's dream is," Ms. Freeman says.

"And it's an interactive experience," she adds. "The kids yell at the stage and the characters to help move the story forward."

S2BN Entertainment, based in New York, specializes in live touring shows and theatrical presentations. It has experience in bringing animated children's TV series to the stage in the form of "Yo Gabba Gabba Live," based on the "Yo Gabba Gabba" show now on the Nick Jr. cable channel.

"One of the challenges of taking an animated show and making it into a live show is that you're creating the first 3-D manifestations of the characters," says John Harper, vice president for family entertainment at S2BN Entertainment.

That was brought home before a phone interview with a reporter when "the characters'

"Pieces of the show are reviewed by Out of the Blue to make sure what we put on is consistent with the TV show," he adds, "and consistent with what those people know about teaching kids to read."

The tour of "Super Why Live" in the South began on July 18 in Monroe, La., and ended on Sunday in Miami Beach. Mr. Harper describes it as a "tester tour," likening it to previews for a Broadway show.

"We're really happy with the launch," he says, and are planning a 20-city tour in the fall that would include markets in California, the Midwest, the Northeast and Texas. He listed Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, New York and San Diego as among the cities being considered.

The boxes of Post Alpha-Bits featuring the "Super Why" characters are to make it to the cereal aisles of stores in August, timed to coincide with the back-to-school shopping season.

The agreement between Post Foods and Out of the Blue Enterprises is to run five years, says Sharon Pupel, the marketing director at Post Foods in Parsippany, N.J., who manages the company's brands for children, which in addition to Alpha-Bits include Honeycomb and Pebbles.

The agreement is intended to be part of a "revitalization" of the Alpha-Bits brand, Ms. Pupel says, that includes a reformulation to reduce the amount of sugar and increase the amount of whole grains.

"We're looking at improving all our cereals' nutritional profiles," she adds.

Alpha-Bits was introduced by Post in 1958, when it was still a division of General Foods. "Everyone has a lot of nostalgia for Alpha-Bits," Ms. Pupel says.

"We're looking at how we can grow this business," she adds, and "Super Why" offers "a natural fit."

After all, "Super Why" is "the one with one letter," Ms. Pupel says, referring with a wink to how "Why" and "Y" sound alike, and "we have 26 letters."

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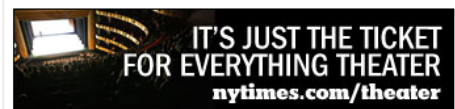
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