



## ZDF Studios' Oliver Grundel

4 days ago [Mansha Daswani](#)

An established co-production ecosystem and a relatively healthy coterie of public broadcasters are helping those in the European kids' media sector mitigate the seismic shifts in the business. ZDF Studios is banking on its robust lineup of established brands and compelling new concepts as it serves the needs of platforms entertaining and educating kids across the globe. Oliver Grundel, Director Junior, shares his views on trends in the European animation business today with *TV Kids Weekly*.

**TV KIDS:** How have you seen the demand for animation from Europe shift over the last year?

**GRUNDEL:** The landscape remains challenging across all sectors, marked by economic and political uncertainties. TV channels and streaming providers are relying on proven hits, franchises, long-standing brands and reboots. This trend benefits established IPs like our remake *Grisù*, which has existing relevance in the market and strong market anchoring. However, maintaining a balanced portfolio requires nurturing new IPs that have the potential to become future classics. We continue to invest in captivating stories with international appeal, often based on well-known brands or books. High-quality animation remains in demand, exemplified by

our real-time animated 3D series *Sam & Julia*, produced in a stop-motion style to match the unique, real-doll atmosphere of Karina Schaapman's best-selling book series. European animation is gaining recognition for its unique storytelling and artistic quality, resonating with children and family audiences worldwide. There's a noticeable trend toward more inclusive and culturally rich content, along with a growing interest in educational and environmentally themed animation, like, for example, our beautiful show *Tobie Lolness*, based on Timothée de Fombelle's best-selling novels, which have been translated into more than 30 languages and received numerous literary awards.

**TV KIDS:** Have co-pros within Europe, especially among PSBs, become more prevalent? How are you tapping into those opportunities?

**GRUNDEL:** As full commissions become fewer and farther between, funding models have grown more complex. To manage the costs of premium content production, there's a noticeable trend toward increased collaborations and co-productions. Fortunately, we have a long history of co-productions and understand how they work. We are very happy to have such a great and experienced team of editors at ZDF, which enables us to get projects off the ground. Our strong collaborations with partners like BBC, Rai and France Télévisions demonstrate our commitment to co-productions. Notable animation projects we recently brought to market include *Grisù* (produced by Mondo TV with the participation of Rai Kids, ZDF and ZDF Studios), *Tobie Lolness* (produced by Tant Mieux Prod in co-production with France Télévisions, ZDF and ZDF Studios) and *Klincus* (in collaboration with ZDF, Rai Kids, Fabrique d'Images, Showlab and Telegael). Co-productions will remain key to our business, allowing us to combine resources, expertise and creative talent for more ambitious projects.

**TV KIDS:** How important has the government funding ecosystem been in helping European animation companies mitigate some of the market's challenges?

**GRUNDEL:** The government funding ecosystem has been crucial. Various funds and grants from national and regional governments and initiatives like Creative Europe provide essential financial support that helps studios mitigate risks and maintain production levels. This funding is particularly important in the face of economic uncertainties and the increasing costs of

high-quality animation production. Government support has allowed our partners and us on several projects to continue innovating and producing content that might otherwise be infeasible due to financial constraints.

**TV KIDS:** Are you seeing more countries deploy animation tax incentives to attract co-pro opportunities?

**GRUNDEL:** These incentives make it more financially viable to produce animation in certain regions by reducing the overall production costs. Countries like France, Ireland and Spain have been particularly proactive in offering attractive tax credits and rebates. These incentives attract foreign investments and encourage local talent development and employment. As a result, we are more inclined to consider these locations for our projects, benefiting from both the financial incentives and the burgeoning local animation ecosystems.

**TV KIDS:** Amid budget pressures on public and commercial broadcasters, how is the commissioning landscape?

**GRUNDEL:** The commissioning landscape has become more challenging due to budget pressures on both public and commercial broadcasters. Less money ultimately means fewer commissions and less willingness to take risks. So, there was a slowdown in new content. These budget constraints have led broadcasters to become more selective in their commissioning choices. Collaborations and co-productions have also become key strategies to secure commissions and share the financial burden. It has been more challenging and has perhaps taken longer than usual, but it hasn't been impossible, so we are happy to say that we were able to maintain our number of project developments in the challenging past years.

**TV KIDS:** With commissions on the wane, are you seeing a pickup in acquisitions?

**GRUNDEL:** With a decline in new commissions, there has been a noticeable increase in the acquisition of existing animation content. Broadcasters and streaming platforms are looking to fill their programming schedules without bearing the high costs of new productions. If cost-cutting becomes necessary, series reruns could also be an alternative. This trend has led us to prioritize offering renewals on expiring licenses to our partners and pointing out our robust library of high-quality, marketable localized content that can be easily acquired and distributed. Acquisitions offer a more immediate and cost-effective solution for content providers, allowing

them to quickly meet audience demand while maintaining a diverse and engaging programming slate.