

Napster is coming

The 'bad' kitty of the download world looks for 3-D life

By Jason White

Napster is one of the innovators of online music sharing as far as just about anyone is concerned. Now it is breaking even more ground by moving into the collectibles and toy categories with a little help from Art Asylum, New York. The Napster Kitty isn't just going to be a company logo for much longer.

Building on an icon
The collectibles line will be hitting stores this summer. The items will be available mainly to specialty retailers. But keep in mind that Napster has relationships with the mass and big box retailers who support Napster branded products.

The items range from \$3.99 for keychains and phone charms, \$6.99 for beanies, \$19.99 for the pillows and up to \$40 for the vinyl figure. There are also three-inch PVC figures and a 48-inch deluxe beanbag chair for the ultimate in home furnishings.

"We feel the Napster Kitty is a great mascot for the music revolution," Adam Unger, vice president, Art Asylum, tells PLAYTHINGS. "Mickey, Bugs, Kermit, the Pink Panther are all trying to be designed and re-branded by the stu-

dios to matter to kids again.

The Napster Kitty represents a look everyone is trying to get to; simple, cool, meaningful to kids and a great logo that works across all kinds of product," he adds.

Wait, there's more

Of course there are more to these items than just being "hip" toys and collectibles. Included with the various items will be free downloads and free weeks on the new "Napster to go" initiative, which has been already launched.

Art Asylum is working on these downloadable extras with Napster right now and will have it all ironed out by the time the products are released.

So while the consumer gets cool extras to pick up, the toy the retailer will also get some help from Art Asylum.

The beanies will come in a CDU bin similar to the ones the popular Minimates are packaged in. Retailers will also be able to get the smaller, impulse items packed onto a counter top spinner rack.

Looking for some legs

To be sure this isn't just going to be a fad-style item, Art Asylum is hard at work for items in 2006.



■ Depicted top left: Napster Phone Charm, top right; 8-inch "Urban" vinyl figure and bottom left; 7-inch plush beanie, Art Asylum, New York.

"We're working on some amazing concepts now for '06 including downloadable toys for kids," Unger comments.

Napster already has a large userbase that is familiar with Napster and its mascot, as well as other connections that might make this a safer bet for the independent retailers.

A built-in buyer

Retailers worried about how the products will sell should remember that Napster has extensive content agreements with the five major record labels, as well as hundreds of independents.

It also has several agreements with colleges and universities such as Penn State, University of Miami, George Washington University, Wright State University, University of Southern California, and Cornell, to name a few. Napster provides a fast, safe and legal solution to downloading of music on campus.

Most of these "kids" already know and use the brand. Taking in a few of these products could generate the store traffic many independent retailers are looking for from the tween and teen markets.



Close to the 'reel' deal

Giving 'props' to the props

Master Replicas, Walnut Creek, Calif., has been in business just over four years but has managed to nab some of the biggest licenses out there. Big name franchises such as Star Trek, The Lord of the Rings, Aliens, Predator, Disney and Star Wars have allowed it to create exact studio replicas of items used in the films.

The range of product
Most of the items recreated by Master Replicas tend to be for the specialty market and retail from \$200 to \$500.

"The specialty markets have fed the interest in the years between the Star Wars films and will continue to enjoy strong support from our company," says Barry Jones, manager of the Star Wars division, Master Replicas.

The Star Wars line begins hitting the stores on April 2 and will continue to roll out monthly. The prices range from \$35 for a .45 scaled lightsaber replica, through \$119 for a Force

FX saber, all the way to \$369 for an exact movie copy.



■ Above: Mini .45 lightsabers; Below: Cinderella's glass slipper.



For Disney's Cinderella it has created a leaded crystal glass slipper (SRP \$299) that is displayed on a satin pillow and comes with a custom-designed display case.

There is the Evil Queen's Heart Box from Snow White (\$249), the Cursed Aztec Gold Coin Set (\$35), and Cursed Aztec Gold Coin Necklace (\$35) from Pirates of the Caribbean.

"We have in-store POP displays for the Force FX lightsabers. We offer many incentives to retailers from pricing to exclusive products created especially for them," adds Jones.